

Succession Planning

Brief guide for clerks and governors
in further education colleges





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Introduction

In a climate of significant financial and demographic change, the learning and skills sector is facing challenging times and, with this, the need for excellent governance. Governors and senior management teams need to be prepared for the future by ensuring that the organisation has the best people to deliver the best results for all learners.

This brief guide explores a specialist and significant practice within the remit of the governing body – that of succession planning. It looks at what succession planning is; how it contributes to running an effective and successful organisation; where governors should be actively involved and where they should be seeking assurance. The guide has some practical steps that you can use within your own governing board. As a leader of your organisation, you need to be very clear about your strategy and goals and explore all possible avenues to identify those individuals who will provide the skills, knowledge, diversity and leadership necessary for your organisation.

This guide sets out to demystify succession planning and provide some clear suggestions on how to build on the strategic work that is already being carried out in your organisation. Its focus is on the governing board and the senior roles within your organisation. It serves as a timely reminder of the importance of linking your strategic planning to the development and recruitment of key individuals into the organisation.

What is succession planning?

The phrase ‘succession planning’ can create different responses.

- “Isn’t this what they do in hard-hitting organisations obsessed with performance and bottom-line profit?”
- “We don’t have too many problems hiring at senior levels.”
- “Our turnover of governors is pretty low so it’s not really a priority.”

So what is succession planning? The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) broadly defines it as ‘identifying future potential leaders to fill key positions’, so this guide is about identifying and understanding those critical leadership positions in your college and ensuring not only that you have the right people in those roles, but also that you have some idea who might take their place when they move on.

In many ways this could be perceived as straightforward. You have identified your critical roles according to your strategic plan. You understand whether or not you have the right people in these roles and you have a sense of who might fill those roles in the short-term (6-12 months), should that be necessary, and the long-term (3-5 years). However, these are not always easy discussions to have or straightforward decisions to make.

The summary overleaf provides an outline of what succession planning is and isn’t. Which of these describes your organisation?

Good succession planning - What it is; What it is not

What it is	What it is not
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Deep conviction, with observable and evidenced action, clear link between excellent individual performance and better organisational performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Vague notion that “people are our most important asset”.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ All those in a leadership role are accountable for strengthening the performance of individuals in the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ HR is responsible for people management and development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Succession planning is a regular topic for discussion in meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ A succession planning exercise is carried out once a year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Bold actions are taken to recruit and build talent within the organisation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ “We work with the people we can get.”

Having considered the features of good succession planning, we now turn to its importance in leading and managing an organisation.

“The leaders of great teams love talent and know where to find it. They revel in the talent of others.”

Warren Bennis and Patricia Biederman, *Organising Genius*, 1997

Why carry out succession planning?

Succession planning is often seen as part of the broader 'people' agenda, the next step on from annual appraisals and performance management processes. It may come up in discussions about recruitment. Linking succession planning to these types of activity is good, but tends to keep it in the area of Human Resources rather than in the area of strategic planning. This risks missing the valuable link that succession planning provides between these two areas.

Succession planning acts as a robust management tool to plan how to manage and develop your governing board and your organisation's senior management team; it adds a different perspective through which you can examine your plans and your resources. Succession planning does not require adding enormous amounts of time to your agenda but needs to be a regular part of discussion when you meet. Once you set up a structure that enables you to track the right data and ask the right questions, it will become efficient and useful. It will provide the governing board with a richer picture of the health of the leadership within the organisation and how robust it is to deliver the future strategy. It will also help to identify areas within your strategy that might prove difficult to deliver as a result of lack of relevant competency. This will give you the time and opportunity to plan mitigating action.

As far as your own role as a governor of the organisation, you will have a better sense of what future development opportunities exist for you within the governing board, and succession planning will contribute to having meaningful development conversations to the benefit of both you and your organisation.

When succession planning activity is focused on the organisation's senior management team, the board will have the opportunity to discuss potential successors and areas of development for key senior roles. It will also allow action-planning in the longer term, to find and recruit the right individuals from outside the organisation.

The Instrument and Articles of Government (2008) includes a list of responsibilities of the Corporation, the Principal and the Clerk. These give clear indications about where succession planning activity would contribute, as outlined in the table overleaf.

Table 1: The role of succession planning in relation to the Instrument and Articles

Responsibility	Succession planning intervention/contribution
<p>The determination and periodic review of the educational character and mission of the organisation and the oversight of its activities.</p>	<p>Ensure you identify the key skills, knowledge and behaviour necessary to ensure senior post holders and governors are being selected or identified and developed appropriately to support and deliver against the mission.</p> <p>Ensure you know what the organisation is doing systematically to bring forward a diverse and inclusive body of future leaders and managers.</p>
<p>Approving the quality strategy of the organisation.</p>	<p>Ensure you identify the key critical indicators to evaluate the quality strategy and that there is a pipeline of prospective individuals with the knowledge, skills and experience to oversee, evaluate and continue the delivery of quality improvement.</p>
<p>The effective and efficient use of resources, the solvency of the organisation and the Corporation and safeguarding their assets.</p>	<p>Understand the critical roles and key performance indicators within the whole organisation and gain assurance that not only are these being undertaken, and outcomes delivered, by the right people, but succession planning is in place should there be a need to fill these critical roles both short-term and long-term.</p>
<p>Approving annual estimates of income and expenditure.</p>	<p>Have a clear understanding of the skills and competencies required for key financial management roles. Ensure that there is money being spent on developing those people identified for succession.</p>
<p>The appointment.....of the holders of senior posts and the Clerk.</p>	<p>Have a clear understanding of the key skills, knowledge and competencies needed to fill senior roles. In addition to national advertising, develop a list of possible pipeline candidates for key roles, using all opportunities to develop real diversity at a senior level. Maintain awareness of the sector recruitment marketplace and areas where posts are identified as difficult to fill.</p>

By keeping your eye firmly on identifying future potential leaders, both for the governing board and for the organisation, you will be enabling your whole organisation to ensure broad representation, create a richness of diversity and critical skills and knowledge, and strengthen and build its capacity to deliver its strategy effectively.

Make sure that your succession plan includes systematic contact with and planned capacity-building for a variety of appropriate groups and organisations that will enhance the diversity and inclusive nature of the organisation.

So if succession planning provides a management tool to ensure efficient and successful delivery, and an additional way to measure and plan for a turbulent future, what can you do as a governing board to use its full potential?

"No organisation can depend on genius; the supply is always scarce and unreliable. It is the test of an organisation to make ordinary human beings perform better than they seem capable of, to bring out whatever strength there is in its members, and to use each one's strength to help all the others perform.

The purpose of an organisation is to enable common people to do uncommon things."

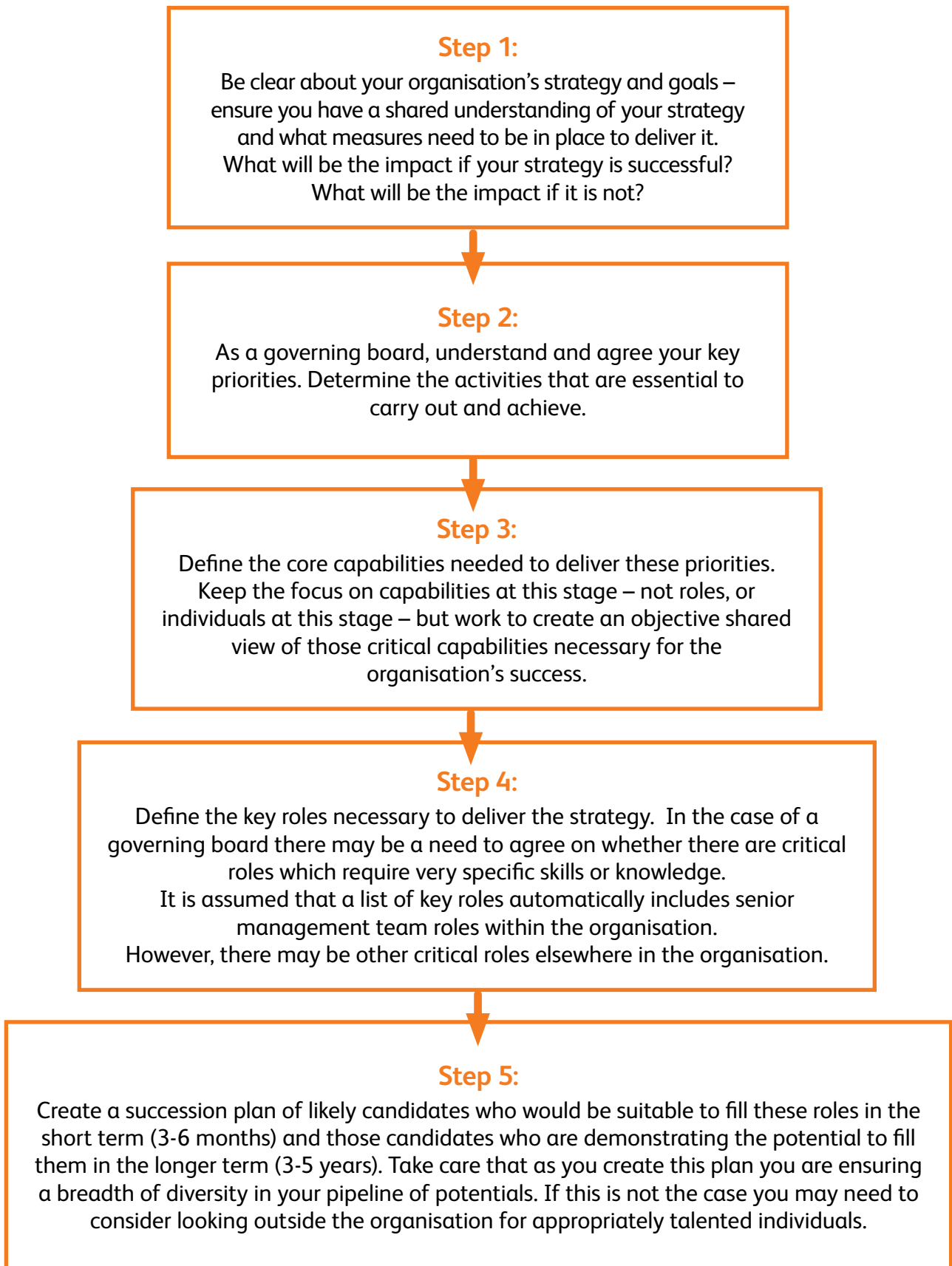
(Peter Drucker, management consultant)

What you can do as a governing board

This section focuses more practically on what the governing board can do and what you as an individual governor can contribute. All of the steps involved in succession planning are outlined. For those organisations who already engage in succession planning activity regularly, the steps outlined will provide a useful refresher and some questions to reflect upon.

Succession planning is about identifying the right people for critical roles and the steps outlined here will help you to determine what 'right' and 'critical' mean. Following these five steps will enable you to create a robust picture of what is needed to deliver and provide data for you to monitor progress. These steps are applicable for both governing board and senior management team succession planning.

Diagram 1: Succession planning pathway



When considering Step 5, you should be challenging yourselves to be innovative. This is your opportunity to consider broader considerations such as whether the make-up of the governing board or senior management team represents the demographic and diversity of your learners. If the answer is no, what can you do to change this? Are you playing safe and recruiting from the same ‘pool’ each time, or have you explored unusual and different areas from which you could attract new staff and governors? What assurances do you have that current staff and governors in the organisation are being developed to move into more senior roles?

As you carry out these five steps consider the following questions:

Table 2 – questions to support the succession planning pathway

Question	Not at all	To some extent	Yes – almost	Yes – definitely
Does the entire board understand the strategy and what the key priorities are?				
Are you developing and nurturing the capabilities and diversity that you need to support delivering the strategy?				
Are you being innovative in your approach to succession planning?				

This simple table can provide the structure for a discussion with the governing board about this topic.

Though the focus of this guide and the focus for the governing board is succession planning at board and senior management level, it is also important that the board has some base-level data to understand what is already happening in the organisation about succession planning. In addition it is useful to understand the broader picture of staff development, in order to create pipelines into those critical roles which are within the remit of the governing board. Some suggested measures to consider are outlined below. Many of these measures will already exist in your organisation but they may not have been considered by the governing board using the lens of succession planning.

- **Morale**

Look at the questions on any employee engagement or climate survey that ask people to consider their opportunities to develop and how well they understand their career options.

- **Promotions**

What is your ratio of internal promotions to external hires? How creative are your promotions, for instance where have people been moved from one curriculum area to another? Where have suitably stretching roles been identified and offered to known individuals?

- **Regretted losses**

How many employees who have left the organisation have you regretted losing? What were their reasons for leaving? What can you learn from this and what action can be taken to reduce this number?

- **Turnover**

Is the turnover of employees at a level that you consider healthy? Do you have areas in the organisation where it would be good if there were more turnover and therefore more opportunities for others to develop? What is being done to improve the opportunities for those rising up through the ranks?

- **Diversity**

Are you able to monitor the profile of turnover and losses by gender, race, disability, or other factors, to determine if there may be any challenges that require investigation and solution?

- **Retirement patterns**

In order to inform longer-term planning, who is going to be retiring in the next 3-5 years? What is your exposure? What knowledge-sharing needs to take place, both for the health of the organisation and the development of others? What development plans need to be put in place if you wish to fill these roles internally? In addition to this, how will you strategically reach out to younger people, many of whom may represent a breadth of diversity that will contribute significantly to your organisation?

Some of these topics may seem quite obvious and straightforward. However, managing the discussion and debate around them can sometimes be less so, and good facilitation is essential in order to get full participation from those present. If succession planning becomes a regular check for the governing board – at least quarterly – it becomes a habitual activity that follows on seamlessly from strategy and goal review.

What you can do as an individual governor

Most of this brief guide has covered the activities of the governing board. It is also useful to consider what each individual governor can contribute to succession planning. Each governor brings his or her own skills and knowledge to the table; this contribution should not be underestimated. Consider the particular skills and knowledge you bring that could contribute to succession planning for your organisation.

As a governor supporting your organisation's journey to success it is important that you are able to ask great questions and make great decisions. But what are the questions that you need to be asking of yourself?

- Who do you have in your own network who could be a potential candidate to broaden the diversity of the board?
- How can you get engaged in an organisation-focused project to gain a greater understanding of the challenges that face staff who are keen to learn and progress?
- How will you contribute to and challenge in discussions about governing board and senior management recruitment drives, promotions and development?
- Do you know how to define “good performance” in your organisation?

Conclusion

Linking succession planning to delivering strategy seems to be common sense. You are preparing yourselves for the future by setting out strategic action, creating goals and monitoring your progress. The natural assumption would be that you must have the best people possible in those critical roles in order to deliver this. However, many organisations approach this passively rather than proactively and therefore miss an enormous opportunity to create major shifts in the performance of their organisation.

Enabling succession planning to take place at board level provides a lens through which strategic delivery can be reviewed. It leads to a truly shared understanding of critical activities, critical roles and critical competencies. The articulation of what is critical also helps individual governors to identify potential candidates for either governing board or senior posts.

Most importantly, it gives you the time to think and plan to create a robust, skilled and diverse leadership team who can successfully lead your organisation into the future.

Links

Institute for Employment Studies, *Succession Planning Demystified*, Wendy Hirsh, report 372, October 2000 <http://www.eera.gov.uk/Documents/Meetings%20and%20Events/Events/Conferences/2005/Succession%20Planning/Wendy%20Hirsh%20-%20SP%20Demystified.pdf>

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD): Succession Planning <http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/hrpract/general/successplan.htm>

The Healthy NHS Board: Principles for Good Governance http://www.nhsleadership.org.uk/images/library/files/The_Healthy_NHS_Board_Principles_for_Good_Governance.pdf

LSIS Brief Guide: Equality, Diversity and Governance <http://www.lsis.org.uk/Documents/Publications/LSIS227GovernancePortfolio2010summerWEB.sflb.pdf>

LSIS Brief Guide: Governor Recruitment Strategies https://www.lsis.org.uk/Services/Publications/Documents/LSIS212_WEB_Governor%20Recruitment%20Strategies.pdf

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