



WHITE PAPER

# Succession Planning:

How to Future-Proof Your Organization Through  
A Structured Employee Development Path

# Ensuring Continuity and Minimizing Leadership Gaps

Succession planning is critical to ensuring continuity as leadership gaps can majorly impact operations and service delivery. By providing a structured development path, your organization can retain top talent and foster leadership that aligns with the overall strategic goals.

When considering some of the many benefits of succession planning, such as retaining and developing top talent or aligning individual growth and organizational needs, leadership development is the key component.

**Succession planning provides your employees with clear visibility into career growth opportunities, prepares them for future roles, and ensures they develop the necessary skills at every stage of their career.**

**Having intentional and clearly defined benchmarks across different organizational levels offers several benefits, such as:**

- a transparent view of career advancement opportunities,
- preparation for future positions and continuous skills development at each stage of their professional journey,
- a feeling of having a place at the table, and
- confidence in a supportive learning environment where they're encouraged to grow.

*As you investigate implementing learning strategies, view the process as a multi-prong approach to developing talent.*

**To effectively implement learning strategies, you'll need:**

- regular assessments to track employment progress and give feedback,
- cross-functional training and exposure to broaden skill sets,
- access to an on-demand learning library for support, and
- strong mentorship programs to build leadership pipelines.

*These strategies will ensure that your employees are prepared not just for their current roles, but for future roles as well.*



# The Skills Gap

Currently, we're at a pivotal moment in the US labor market. We're experiencing a significant transition point—one that could have lasting effects on employment trends, hiring practices, workforce dynamics, or the economy overall.

**Projections estimate that 2.1 million jobs will be unfulfilled due to a widening skill gap by 2030. As baby boomers retire, the skills gap is getting wider and deeper. Across every industry, the skills gap remains a major challenge—a staggering 2.1 million jobs!**

And this isn't just about vacant positions. Succession planning is about losing knowledge that keeps your organization running smoothly. If we look at it based on numbers, it's a wake-up call. It urges us to rethink how we build and retain our talent.

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## 4 Obstacles We Are Facing

1

Recruiting qualified people is more challenging than ever before in a market where everyone is competing for top talent.

2

Preserving expertise from retiring colleagues requires careful coordination and planning.

3

Retaining talent is a constant battle when competitors offer new opportunities, higher pay, and cultures of continuous improvement.

4

Preparing employees for a rapidly changing world, driven by emerging technologies like AI and global shifts, is a challenge that demands adaptable, future-ready skills.

The good news is that pairing succession planning with strategic learning through cross-functional training, mentorship, and more creates a clear path for employee growth. Simply by investing in your people, you're building a workforce that's not just skilled, but resilient and ready to face future challenges.



# What Is Progression Planning?

So, to understand how we can pair succession planning with strategic learning, we need to understand what progression planning is. **Simply, it's charting a course for your organization's future—a purposeful strategy to develop employees for future roles, as well as ensuring you have a pipeline of capable, confident talent ready to step into higher positions.**

Instead of scrambling every time a key leader leaves or somebody quits or retires, progression planning prepares your team in advance, keeping your organization steady and strong. It's about looking ahead, knowing who's ready to step up, making those key observations about cultivating new leadership, and making sure they have the skills needed to succeed.

This approach is critical because it:

- minimizes disruption during leadership changes,
- preserves productivity and preserves organizations' morale, and
- develops internal talent, reducing reliance on a tightening external job market.

A *Harvard Business Review* survey shows that **thoughtful succession plans have 34% higher retention rates**. Companies that grow talent from within will face fewer challenges down the road as compared to those relying on external hiring.



Imagine an office clerk growing into a leadership role through the support of training and mentorship. That's the power of a clear, intentional plan.

**So, how do we make that kind of vision a real thing?**



# The Benefits of Progression Planning

A progression plan isn't just a strategy—it's a game changer, with tangible benefits for your organization and your people.

Progression planning shows your employees an avenue to career growth. When your team sees a clear path to advancement and knows what's expected, they're more motivated to grow. **No one wants a career that lacks motivation or enjoyment, but when employees are inspired to stay and contribute, it's a win for your company.**

LinkedIn's research backs this up—employees with clear career paths are ten times more likely to be engaged, thus transforming workplace energy and commitment.

Picture a workplace where employees feel empowered by clear opportunities, they're confident in their skills, they have the training to do what they want to do or need to do, and they're loyal to the vision of the company because there's a path, they know where they're going.



**Employee Retention:** Demonstrates commitment to career growth by reducing turnover

**Enhanced Engagement:** Motivates employees by providing clear advancement paths

**Skill Development:** Aligns training with future role requirements and fosters growth

**Organizational Resilience:** Builds a talent pipeline to address future challenges

# Structured Learning Paths

How do we proceed, and how does this all come together? Let's explore structured learning paths.

**Structured learning paths are essential to any effective training program, providing the foundational skills needed for everyone from entry-level employees to senior executives.**

All employees need to work as a team to support these learning goals. This creates clarity by helping employees see how today's training leads to tomorrow's opportunities, which is essential for keeping them engaged and committed.

**What sets these learning paths apart?** They're flexible, they're comprehensive, they offer resources like on-demand, learning libraries, self-paced growth, mentorship, and personal guidance that all ensure our employees have both the tools and the support they need to succeed.

Pairing the benefits we just explored with progression planning allows these learning paths to become a catalyst for complete transformation. We can turn potential into performance. The result? **A workforce ready and empowered to lead with confidence in the years ahead.**



# Career Progression Model

Each career stage has different learning needs, and your role is to ensure that your employees have the right tools and opportunities to develop within these stages.

Let's start by looking at a typical career progression model. We've all witnessed a new employee who's enthusiastic but they're unsure where their career might go. This is common.

## The Entry Level Professional's Journey: Where Succession Planning Begins

Succession planning begins at the entry level. These employees are the bedrock of future leadership, and investing in them early sets the stage for a thriving organization.

**It's about giving them the essential skills like self-awareness to harness their strengths, communication skills to build connections, and confidence so their professionalism can shine.** We want them to stand out.

HSI's emerging leaders' learning journey prepares your employees to successfully grow into the roles you'll need them to fill in the future. HSI's training lays the groundwork for current and future leadership. For example, our training nurtures emotional intelligence to develop skills like self-awareness, empathy, emotional management, and effective communication.

*So, the question is: Why start now?*  
**Because the impact is profound.**







Strong onboarding programs boost new employee productivity **by 70% in just 90 days.**

Organizations with structured onboarding programs **improve new-hire retention by up to 82%!**



According to SHRM, for instance, **strong onboarding programs boost new employee productivity by 70% in just 90 days.**

That's your team hitting the ground running, feeling valued, and choosing to stay. Retention problems can be a big issue. And by showing entry-level employees a clear path to growth within your organization you're fostering loyalty that's going to last. It's planting a seed today that's going to bloom into a strong tree years and years from now.

This early commitment builds a culture that nurtures talent and prepares your organization for anything, with greater resilience and stronger results, especially for entry-level employees.

The remarkable impact of training on retention and productivity is the heartbeat of succession planning, and the numbers tell a compelling story.

Let's start with onboarding. That's the critical first step for new hires. Glassdoor's research shows that **organizations with structured onboarding programs improve their new hire retention by up to 82%!** Imagine nearly all of your new team members feeling so supported that they want to stay. And that's not the only benefit.

As mentioned, **strong onboarding can increase productivity by 70% within the first 90 days.** So that's your team not just settling in, but contributing ideas, solving problems, and driving results from the start.

Then we can broaden our view towards progression planning. That's where training prepares employees for future roles.

LinkedIn research finds that employees who see clear career paths are ten times more likely to be engaged and far less likely to leave. With commitment multiplied like that, the impact on the organization is profound.

Even more striking, *Harvard Business Review* notes that **companies with thoughtful succession plans enjoy 34% higher retention rates. 34%!** That's a third more of your talent staying, growing, and stepping into leadership roles when the time comes. These numbers make a powerful point.

Every training session, every mentorship program, every conversation about growth is an investment in a workforce which is loyal and prepared.

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**70% within the first 90 days.**



Companies with thoughtful succession plans enjoy  
**34% higher retention rates.**

## The Middle Management Journey: Upskilling

Let's dive deeper into how these learning paths bleed into middle management leadership preparation. **Acquiring skills on the job that have long-lasting applicability in the employees' careers distinguishes them from their peers.** Middle management should seek ways to enhance their professionalism, build their influence, and develop a strong executive presence, among other traits, to emphasize the distinct qualities they offer.

At HSI, our prospects and customers tell us they need to focus on middle management training. Many people join an organization with technical skills and leadership potential. But when they are promoted to management, they often lack the training to effectively lead teams and earn the trust of their employees.

Sometimes you get a micromanager, other times a manager who tries too hard to be everyone's friend, and occasionally one who hasn't been trained in the legal responsibilities of management.

**Effective training is needed to help upskill these middle managers.** Not everyone wants to become an executive; likewise, not everyone wants to become a manager. Therefore, you offer training opportunities to those people who show initiative and have natural leadership tendencies.



As employees progress to middle management, the focus shifts to leading teams and making strategic decisions. Key training areas include people management, decision making, and strategic thinking. Leadership development programs and peer coaching can help middle managers build these skills, while simulations offer practical hands-on experience and complex decision-making.

**It's essential that team members feel empowered, understand that their decisions matter, and recognize that their people management skills make a meaningful impact.**



## The Executive Leadership Journey: Leading Other Leaders

As we move into executive leadership, where leaders manage other leaders, the population becomes smaller and more specialized. Often they've been in their careers a while, but that alone doesn't make them effective leaders.

**For executives, the learning focus is on leading other leaders.** We often emphasize the importance of empowering others and leading through relationships with people. This time is ideal to engage in a mentorship program within your organization. Individuals with tenure are very successful, but they still need learning and development engagement as well.

Leading other leaders and driving an organization forward requires competencies such as setting an organizational vision, managing stakeholders, and leading large-scale change. Executive coaching, strategic workshops, and cross-industry networking are highly effective learning solutions at this level.

**Organizations must be strategic about how leadership changes will drive improvement while avoiding skill gaps and unfilled roles that could impact the business.** It's also important to approach decisions with an executive mindset, focusing on how to move the organization forward and do what's best for the team.



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# Curating Emerging Leaders: The Leading Journey

Personalized learning plans ensure employees are developing the right skills at the right time, while using the data to identify skill gaps helps inform more targeted development strategies.

Leaders may have the foundational skills, **but becoming an effective communicator is often a significant challenge.**

Learning initiatives must align with each stage of role progression. For example, building self-awareness begins at the entry level. As employees grow in that awareness, emerging leaders can support them through peer coaching and development tools, helping them refine their professional development skills along the way.



During the career journey, employees are learning how to give and receive feedback and build a psychologically safe environment—both of which are essential starting at the entry level and continue to play a critical role as employees grow into middle management and, eventually, executive leadership.



Leaders may have the foundational skills, but becoming an effective communicator is often a significant challenge. That's why we begin with developing self-awareness—understanding yourself is essential before you can lead others, and it requires a commitment to emotional growth. With this foundational focus, learners build strong self-awareness while strengthening key workplace competencies and advancing their professional skills.

Effective communication and cross-platform information exchange are part of the learning journey. **Employees need to learn actionable strategies to create messages with deliberate purpose while considering the needs and preferences of their audience.** These are essential skills employees need to learn, and it's the organization's responsibility to provide the tools and support to make that possible.

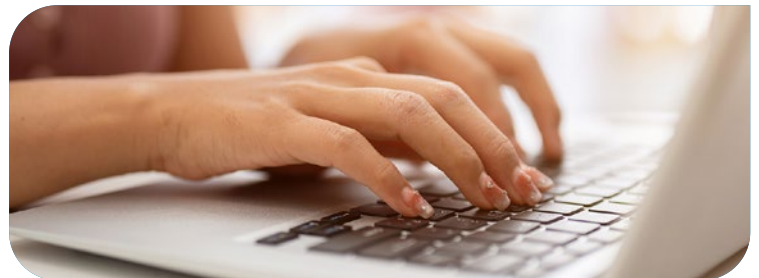
**Leaders must be effective communicators.** They know their words at work. This involves learning how to embrace uncomfortable conversations, how to act when put on the spot, answer tough questions, communicate like an expert, and be assertive without being disrespectful. And, how to make a point. These critical tools ultimately gain effective leaders' respect in the professional environment.

Leadership essentials are universally applicable, no matter your role within an organization. **Key abilities like active listening, skillful delegation, resolving conflict, and shifting out of the drama triangle are valuable in leadership growth.** While anyone can show leadership potential, not everyone has the strength to consistently do the right thing. True leaders set the example, and not everyone is ready to take on that role.

How do you effectively write an email?

How do you have coaching moments?

How do you effectively hire and onboard?



# HSI Can Help

HSI takes pride in providing succession planning solutions for all aspects of the career journey, from onboarding to developing emerging leaders. HSI's self-awareness lessons help lay the foundation for personal and professional growth.

Succession planning works best when learning is something employees look forward to—keep it fun and engaging. HSI offers, video-based learning and development solutions in a microlearning format. Supported by adaptive learning technology, our library provides new content regularly to support your learners' development journey. Our training helps your learners stay supported, productive, and connected to their career journey.

[Request a consultation today!](#)

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“It's like learning without being told to learn.”

– HSI Platform User

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## About HSI



HSI is your single-source partner for EHS, Compliance, and Professional Development solutions. HSI provides integrated e-learning content, training solutions, and cloud-based software designed to enable your business to improve safety, operations, and employee development. Across all industries, HSI helps safety managers, and technical employees, human resources, first responders, and operational leaders train and develop their workforce, keep workers safe, and meet regulatory and operational compliance requirements. HSI's focus is on training, software, and services for safety and compliance, workforce development, industrial skills, and emergency care. HSI is a unique partner that offers a suite of cloud-based software solutions including learning management, safety management, chemical SDS management, and more, integrated with content and training so businesses can not only monitor and manage multiple workflows in one system, but train employees via one partner.

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