



SUSTAINABILITY AS STRATEGY:

Retention & Succession Pipelines



In an era defined by constant disruption, talent sustainability is no longer about filling vacancies as they arise. It is about intentionally building bench strength and ensuring leadership continuity. Organizations that will thrive beyond the next decade are those that integrate retention and succession as part of their core leadership strategy.

A question I am often asked is: *which comes first - retention or succession?* My personal view is clear: **effective succession planning drives retention**. When people see a future, they are more likely to stay. So why does succession planning often fail? From my observation, there are three common pitfalls. First, leaders talk about developing people but fail to invest meaningfully in development.

Second, many leaders focus heavily on present-day stability and short-term performance, while neglecting future readiness. Third and perhaps the hardest, leaders hesitate to make tough decisions. Even when a candidate may not be “perfect,” leaders avoid taking calculated risks, delaying appointments until it is too late. In doing so, momentum, confidence and talent are lost.

Identifying, Nurturing and Accelerating Talent Early

Future-ready organizations take a proactive approach to leadership development. They identify high-potential talent early, looking beyond tenure to performance, mindset, learning agility, values alignment and leadership behaviours. Development is intentional and visible across the workforce through stretch assignments, cross-functional/cross-regional exposure, coaching and meaningful accountability. Talent accelerates when leaders actively sponsor individuals, open doors to critical experiences and provide timely, constructive feedback. As a result, leadership pipelines remain strong and ready, supporting continuity, confidence, and long-term organizational resilience.



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Retention and Succession as Integrated Strategies

Today's workforce spans multiple generations, each with different expectations and definitions of meaning. People stay engaged when they can connect their work to what matters to them personally. This requires leaders to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach and engage in genuine conversations to understand individual drivers.

Strong succession planning includes proactively identifying critical roles requiring successors, clearly communicating high-potential status, investing in structured development and mentorship and offering transparent career pathways. *Retention*, on the other hand, is strengthened when people are involved in decisions and ideas, given opportunities to contribute to meaningful and exciting projects, receive regular feedback and feel that their wellbeing is genuinely cared for.

Beyond sustainability lies strategic leadership. When people leaders get retention and succession right, they are not filling positions, they are shaping the organization's future.