

INSIGHTS REPORT

DONT LEAVE IT TO LUCK: BUILDING A SUCCESSION PIPELINE THAT MATTERS

*Insights from the People Business - NHRD Bangalore
Thought Leadership Meet on Succession Planning*

Prepared by



Introduction

Succession planning has long been acknowledged as critical to organizational stability and resilience. Yet despite 85% of companies recognizing its importance, fewer than one in five have a formalized succession plan in place. The result? Vulnerability during transitions, loss of business momentum, and shaken investor confidence.

At the recent NHRD Bangalore Thought Leadership Meet, senior HR leaders and practitioners came together to explore the state of succession planning and what it takes to future-proof leadership pipelines. The discussion, facilitated by People Business Consulting, featured perspectives from Infosys, Biocon Biologics, Amazon, Acer India, and People Business leaders.

The conversations revealed a simple but powerful truth: avoiding succession planning doesn't make a CEO or senior leader indispensable; it makes the organization fragile.

Key Takeaways at a Glance



Succession is a board-level agenda:

It cannot remain an HR ritual; it must be driven with governance and oversight at the top. Board involvement signals that succession planning is a strategic priority, directly linked to business continuity and shareholder confidence.



Leadership mindset is the real differentiator:

A culture of succession must be embedded across the leadership bench. Leaders must take ownership not only of their growth but also of preparing the next generation to step into critical roles.



Metrics ensure accountability:

Bench strength, diversity, readiness categories, and success rates must be tracked. Without measurable outcomes, succession planning risks becoming a paper exercise rather than a driver of tangible leadership outcomes.



Balance “Build vs. Buy”:

Internal pipelines build culture and continuity, while external talent injects fresh perspective. A balanced approach ensures agility—leveraging the strengths of homegrown leaders while refreshing the talent mix with external expertise.



Internal development builds stronger cultures:

Leaders groomed within the organization sustain values and performance over time. This creates leadership that is both contextually relevant and deeply aligned with the company’s long-term mission.

The Strategic Imperative of Succession

Succession is not merely about replacing a departing leader. It is about ensuring that organizations sustain performance, preserve culture, and inspire confidence in the long run.

- **Talent risk mitigation:** Reduces over-reliance on individuals.
- **Business continuity:** Safeguards momentum during leadership shifts.
- **Investor assurance:** Signals stability and preparedness to stakeholders.

Bhasker Bhandary, Senior Director- Human Resources at Acer, emphasized that succession should be treated as a long-term cultural investment, rather than a short-term contingency exercise.

Shaping the Pipeline: Metrics and Models

A recurring theme from the panel was the importance of metrics and accountability.

- **Bench strength and diversity** emerged as vital indicators.
- **Readiness categories** and **successor success rates** ensure progress can be tracked meaningfully.

Renu Singh, HR leader & DEI Partner (ICB) at Amazon pointed out that without measurable outcomes, succession efforts risk remaining theoretical.

Drawing from global benchmarks, Mervyn Raphael, Managing Partner at People Business, referenced **HUL's model**—one of the most studied succession practices. By combining early identification of talent, structured rotational assignments, and leadership as a board-level priority, HUL built one of the strongest leadership pipelines in Indian industry.

Infosys, too, offers a notable example. As Sushanth Tharappan, Executive Vice President & Head-HR, explained, the **Leadership Academy institutionalized by Infosys' founders** has not only supplied leaders for the IT giant but has also shaped leaders for the broader technology ecosystem.

From Process to Practice

While best practices are valuable, the panel underlined the need for structured, organization-specific approaches.

Dr. Sandeep Krishnan, Managing Partner at People Business, highlighted a process-driven roadmap:

- **Identification of critical roles**
- **Creation of success profiles**
- **Dashboards to track readiness**
- **Governance at the board level**
- **Customized development journeys for high-potential leaders**

This structured approach ensures that succession becomes a living practice, rather than a one-off exercise.

Build vs. Buy: The Eternal Debate

One of the liveliest discussions centered on whether organizations should develop leaders internally (“build”) or hire externally (“buy”).

- **Build:** Ensures cultural fit, preserves values, and develops loyalty—but requires long-term investment.
- **Buy:** Brings in fresh ideas, specialized skills, and accelerates capability—but risks cultural misalignment.

Chella Pandian, Global Head DEI at Biocon Biologics emphasized that gender diversity is now a critical enabler in succession planning, with organizations actively supporting women leaders to strengthen the leadership pipeline.

The consensus? A balanced approach is ideal. Internal talent must be systematically developed, but external leaders can inject new energy when needed.

Key Takeaways

The thought leadership meet concluded with five core messages that resonated strongly across industries:

1. Succession is a board-level agenda, not an HR ritual.
2. The leadership mindset is the ultimate differentiator.
3. Metrics create accountability and track real progress.
4. Balancing Build vs. Buy strengthens resilience.
5. Internal development fosters culture and long-term growth.

In a time of constant disruption, organizations that treat succession planning as an afterthought risk being blindsided by inevitable leadership transitions. The roundtable underscored that succession is not just about replacing leaders—it is about securing the future of the organization.

For boards, HR leaders, and CEOs alike, the message is clear: succession planning cannot be left to luck. It must be embedded into the very DNA of the organization, governed with discipline, and driven by a vision for the long term.

Panelists



Sushanth Tharappan
Executive Vice President & Head-HR,
Infosys Limited



Mervyn Raphael
Managing Partner,
People Business



Renu Singh
HR Leader & DEI Partner (ICB),
Amazon



Chella Pandian Pitchai
Global Head DEI, Cultures & Values,
Biocon Biologics



Dr. Sandeep Krishnan
CEO & Partner,
People Business



Bhasker Bhandary
Senior Director - Human Resources,
Acer



 **Moderator**

Vinish Soman
Principal Consultant,
People Business

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere gratitude to the distinguished panelists and thought leaders who contributed their time, insights, and perspectives at the NHRD Bangalore Thought Leadership Meet on Succession Planning. Their reflections on long-term orientation, leadership metrics, global best practices, structured processes, and the balance between building and buying talent have shaped the insights captured in this report.

We also acknowledge the **People Business Consulting** team, whose facilitation, research, and program management support made this this thought leadership meet possible.

Finally, we thank the **NHRD Bangalore Chapter** for hosting this platform to exchange ideas that will help organizations prepare for future-ready leadership. Naga Siddharth for thoughtfully bridging NHRD with People Business and facilitating this valuable collaboration, Kasturi Cotha for her steadfast oversight, timely approvals, and final validation that ensured excellence at every step, Mehak Kozgar for seamlessly driving central coordination, communication, and event execution, Omanshu Rathore for diligently managing group coordination, scheduling, and enabling smooth teamwork, Moumita for anchoring the event as emcee with warmth, energy, and professionalism.

We hope the insights captured here will serve as a valuable resource for organizations committed to building resilient leadership pipelines for the future

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People Business (PB) was established in 2003 with the purpose of transforming organizations and impacting individuals. PB specializes in empowering leaders and organizations to unlock their full potential by providing leadership development programs, executive coaching, and capability development programs that emphasize improving the end business results of their client organizations.

People Business specializes in tailor-designing leadership and manager development programs to support executives in reaching their full potential.



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