

Notes from The Leadership Academy Breakfast Club, 6 April

These notes were collated from several breakout groups who had separate conversations about 'succession planning'. The key points have been organised under some the themes that emerged.

Organisational culture

Creating space for conversations and dialogue around succession planning is related to an organisation's culture.

Cultures in which transparency and open communication are highly valued will likely see more success.

Keeping all staff in the loop from the very beginning can help to avoid disharmony.

If an organisation is resistant to discussing and implementing succession planning, there needs to be a shifting of focus back to the initial purpose/mission.

Challenges that can arise

Succession planning is a real challenge and particularly for volunteer-led organisations who have a leader and management committee but no paid staff.

Boards and volunteer leaders have to juggle this with their own day jobs and other commitments.

When founding members leave, oftentimes it is their strength and vision that is missed.

It can be hard when external people replace founding members as they feel they must live up to an "iconic" figure's legacy or reputation. One attendee dealt with this by talking less with staff about what happened in the good old days and focusing more on what will happen in the days to come.

Current recruitment challenges in the sector mean it is difficult to replace senior roles.

A notice period of one month is too short in senior roles in terms of handover.

Organisations in our sector are stretched and instability with people leaving can stretch people to breaking point.

Managing people's fears

A natural human instinct is to fear the unknown, especially when it comes to our careers, which are linked to our sense of value and worth.

Anything that appears to threaten our stability evokes reactivity. So, having empathy for the panic people will feel. People should be validated, which will make moving forward much easier.

Managing people's concerns around announcements of change within an organisation needs to be done with care and consideration for all staff members.

Leaders 'feel the fear and do it anyway'. Again, openness and admitting the fact that something will not be easy, but that it will be worth it, is an important sentiment to make as a leader in the process of implementing succession planning.

It is important to normalise the conversation around succession planning. Naming the issue and taking the fear out of talking about it.

Time & space

It is very important to make reflective space for succession planning but very difficult in a sector where competent people are stretched very thin. This is partly a result of the offloading of government of risk and responsibility on the sector.

There is a need to have time and space to start and progress the topic of succession planning - should be constantly on the agenda to manage for risk – but people mentioned being pressed for time and constantly under pressure to do day-to-day stuff, small staff, limited resources, etc.

Practical ideas

People were interested in exploring the idea of a co-CEO and finding funding to hire that role so the CEO can train them in.

There is huge value in going 'back-to-basics' and re-evaluating why we do what we do. De-cluttering our perspective is hugely valuable.

We need to take the ego out of dialogue and remove our vested interests as much as possible in these conversations.

To help with the arrival of new staff:

- Sort out offices.
- Arrange files/folders.
- Create Induction pack.
- Ensure a system is in place so that someone can come in and have access to whatever they need to do their job.

Would be great to have access to a list of mentors who could assist organisations in transition, and support incoming and outgoing staff in senior roles.

(Note – The Leadership Academy is currently working on a directory of coaches)

Self-Care

The need for leaders in our sector to rest. There are a lot of tired leaders and tired organisations in the sector.

We need to let go of the hardness and tiredness. Tiredness creates fear and reduces capacity to be creative.

Funding

We need greater support from the government in our sector.

The challenge is to prove you are doing something valuable to society to get funding. You need buy-in from funders and government. You need to help them understand why it is important to support you. The problem is it is time consuming to fill out grant applications.

We need paid jobs in organisations, as it is harder to ensure continuity with volunteers.