

## PREPARE YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR UNEXPECTED LEADERSHIP GAPS

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The unexpected departure or notification of a departure by a C-Level executive can affect every level of the organization, from the receptionist, to the Neurosurgeon and from the executive team to the valet team. Some do not realize that the departure of one executive can resonate throughout the entire healthcare organization.

Imagine you are a patient or a patient's relative, and you show up to have a procedure done or to visit a family member and employees are "talking" about potential imminent "changes" in the C-Suite. More than likely they are worried about their jobs and careers as senior executive level changes affect individuals both personally and professionally.

Now let's say you are a Neurosurgeon who arrives at the hospital to perform your normal procedures. You walk into the prep room and hear of the departure of a key senior leader who has promised you so much in the next few months, such as equipment, personnel, or vacation coverage. Although the physician will continue to perform surgeries and care for his or her patients, there may be a heightened degree of personal angst created by the leadership change.

Next, consider the receptionists who walk are and are told as they begin their work day to "please contact XYZ in HR if someone calls for the COO." The people who answer the phones are the first ears of a hospital. Everything that happens in a hospital will funnel through them.

Lastly, we turn to the executive leadership team, as they are the eyes and ears of the whole hospital and are responsible for mission critical strategic, financial, and operational initiatives. The departure of a teammate can affect the success of one or more of those initiatives. They are usually known for keeping their confidences about what is going on in the C-Suite. However, turnover at the top calls for frank discussion throughout the organization.

Skillful communication style and appropriate tone are crucial in times of leadership turnover and are vital aspects of making the staff feel as secure as possible, armed with the knowledge that appropriate plans are in place and that necessary steps are being taken. If the staff already has some idea of what to expect when someone departs, they will manage more effectively the impact of that change in their areas of responsibility.

While hospitals may seem to prepare for everything (e.g., missing patient protocols, severe weather and catastrophe plans, code blue, code black, code red, etc.), many do not prepare adequately for an executive level turnover. Should a hospital wait until the storm is coming to prepare for the storm to come? Even though many may think, "My C-Suite will be in place forever," that viewpoint is unrealistic.

Many organizations' succession planning efforts are merely a replacement plan, which often ignores the four risks of a successful succession system that include:

- vacancy risk, the risk of critical leadership positions remaining vacant,
- readiness risk, the risk of underdeveloped successors,
- transition risk, the risk of poor assimilation of executive talent, and
- portfolio risk whereby the leadership pipeline is empty.

A hospital should always have a "code" available for the departure of a senior level executive up to and including the CEO.

A C-Suite leader's departure could be for many reasons, such as retirement, a progressive career move, personal or family matters, mergers and acquisitions, or a new CEO with a different leadership and communication style. The one constant is that change needs to be managed effectively and promptly. Human capital is an organization's largest asset and must be treated as such.

Succession Planning and Management is a process through which organizations try to ensure that when a position becomes available, the right person is in the right place, with the right skills, at the right time to fill a critical senior leadership vacancy.

Succession Planning is the internal process through which high-potential employees are identified, developed, progressed, and prepared for future openings. The process itself requires an ongoing commitment from the senior leadership team.

Things will always come up when people do not expect them. The plan is, to have a plan. Even when you are looking for that permanent fit, utilizing either an internal talent acquisition function or a search firm, regardless, there needs to be an immediate interim fix to fill the void. Many firms can assist with both the interim solution and the permanent placement making the transition as seamless as possible.

To learn more or discuss your current or, more importantly, your potential interim or permanent recruitment needs, please contact Kelley Dunn, MBA, FACHE, Vice President at [kdunn@cokergroup.com](mailto:kdunn@cokergroup.com) or by calling 678-832-2021.