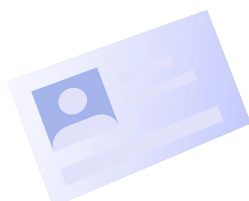


The Key Role Owner (KRO) Model



Why Succession Planning Often Fails

Succession planning frequently stalls or fails because accountability is **too centralized** and the initiative is viewed as an **infrequent HR task**, rather than a continuous business requirement.

- **Delegation Gap:** Responsibility often rests solely with a few HR executives or the top leadership team, leading to a shallow bench of talent that is **not calibrated** by the people who know the job best.
- **Perceived Burden:** Without distributed ownership, the ongoing work of **assessing, monitoring, and developing** candidates for dozens of roles becomes an unsustainable administrative burden.
- **Lack of Context:** HR develops succession charts, but these plans can often lack the **deep, technical insight** and immediate coaching that only the incumbent or departmental leader can provide.

The Solution: Delegated Accountability

The **Key Role Owner (KRO) model** solves these problems by **decentralizing accountability** and linking it directly to business results and operational stability.

Why It Works



Key Benefit	Explanation
Business Focus	For the KRO, this is about fixing a huge operational risk . They're incentivized to get rid of that single point of failure right now, before it causes major trouble.
Distributed Effort	By assigning accountability to dozens of KROs (incumbents, managers, or department heads), the workload is distributed, transforming a huge HR task into dozens of smaller, manageable business priorities .
Accuracy & Realism	The KRO possesses the deepest understanding of the role's requirements, allowing for more realistic candidate assessment, identifying the right gaps, and delivering highly targeted development .
Cultural Shift	It embeds talent development into the managerial DNA . Succession becomes a core performance metric for the KRO, signaling to the organization that developing people is just as critical as hitting financial targets.

The How: Implementing the KRO Model

The success of this model hinges on formalizing the KRO's responsibilities and empowering them with clear structure.



1 Identify the Key Role Owner (KRO)

The KRO is the person most accountable for the role's **future success**. The incumbent in a Key Role is a great fit for a Key Role Owner as they are uniquely suited to knowing the Key Role's requirements and the Candidates that meet them.

Other good options include the incumbent's manager or a department head.

- **Senior Roles:** For senior leadership, the most realistic KRO is the Incumbent's Manager or Department Head
- **Technical/Mid-Level Roles:** For specialized roles, the most realistic KRO is the Incumbent themselves or Incumbent's Manager (best for providing day-to-day coaching).

You may have multiple Key Role Owners for each Key Role, however **one is recommended**.

2 Define the KRO's Accountabilities

The KRO is formally accountable for the three essential phases of the succession cycle for their specific key role:

Phases	KRO Deliverable	HR Support
Assessment	Evaluate candidates on key competencies and identify specific knowledge and skill gaps relative to the role.	Provide the assessment tools and core competency framework.
Monitoring	Regularly track and report on the progress of any identified candidates.	Maintain the central dashboard and audit KRO compliance.
Development	Design and execute learning opportunities such as Stretch Assignments, Coaching, and Mentorship for the candidates and track completion of development tasks.	Offer understanding of development resources (courses, external mentors) to KRO to equip them with what they need to be successful.

3 Integrate KRO Accountability into Performance

To ensure execution, the KRO's success in talent development must be tied to their own performance review and compensation.

- **KPI Integration:** Include a **Talent Development KPI** in the KRO's objectives (e.g., "Maintain a minimum of one 'Ready Now' or 'Ready in 1-2 Years' candidates for key role X").
- **Resources:** Ensure KROs are trained in the principles of coaching and assessing candidates, confirming they have the necessary skills to do the job.

4 Reward and Recognize KRO Success

To reinforce the cultural shift, accountability for talent development must be treated like any other business-critical KPI.

- **Formal Performance Integration:** Include the quality and depth of the succession bench as a weighted objective in the KRO's **annual performance review**. They should be assessed not just on what they delivered, but who they developed to deliver it next.
- **Monetary & Non-Monetary Rewards:** Tie a portion of the KRO's **bonus or merit increase** to measurable succession results (e.g., successful promotion of a candidate from their bench). Non-monetary recognition could include a "Talent Builder Award" or public acknowledgment by senior leadership.
- **Career Advancement:** Make documented success as a KRO (i.e., successfully graduating a successor) a **prerequisite for their own career advancement**. This signals that leadership potential is measured by the ability to build and deploy talent, not just by individual output.