SuccessionHR

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Preparing for Critical Role Gaps

Succession Planning for Manufacturers

Manufacturers manage operational risk every day — from downtime and production delays to quality, inventory, and supply chain disruption.

But leadership continuity is often harder to see. When a critical role opens unexpectedly, **the impact can move quickly across decisions, teams, customers, and operations.**

Succession planning helps manufacturers understand where they are covered, where they are exposed, and what needs attention before a vacancy becomes urgent.

Why It Matters Now

Leadership gaps in manufacturing rarely stay isolated. When a critical role opens, the impact can reach production, quality, safety, customer communication, vendor management, and team decision-making.

- **Nearly 1 in 4 manufacturing workers** were age 55 or older in 2020.
- Manufacturers may need up to 3.8 million **new employees by 2033**, with as many as 1.9 million roles potentially going unfilled.
- **More than 65% of manufacturers** cited the inability to attract and retain employees as their top primary challenge.

Experienced leaders are moving closer to retirement while skilled manufacturing talent remains difficult to replace. Succession planning gives the business more options before a vacancy becomes urgent.

Where Succession Planning Should Start

Some of the most critical roles are closest to daily operations, customer commitments, quality standards, safety, and production flow.

Key roles usually include:

- Plant Manager
- Operations Leader
- Quality Manager
- Engineering Manager
- Maintenance Leader
- Supply Chain Leader
- Warehouse Manager
- Production Supervisor

These roles influence how work gets done, how decisions move, and how quickly issues are resolved. They may not always sit at the top of the org chart, but they carry significant operational risk.

Three Succession Risks Manufacturers Need to Watch

1. **Leadership Risk:** When a key role opens with no ready-now successor. Decisions slow down, teams escalate more issues, and senior leaders are often forced to cover the gap.
2. **Knowledge Risk:** When critical operational knowledge lives with one person. Supplier history, customer expectations, maintenance patterns, safety context, and day-to-day know-how can leave with a long-tenured leader.
3. **Future Capability Risk:** When the leadership pipeline is built for yesterday's business, not tomorrow's. As manufacturers invest in automation, digital tools, reshoring, and new operating models, future leaders may need different skills than current role holders.

What a Practical Manufacturing Succession Plan Should Include

A practical succession plan gives leaders a clearer view of where the business is prepared and where it is exposed.

- **Critical roles:** Which positions create the most operational risk?
- **Successor readiness:** Who is ready now, ready later, or not yet ready?
- **Bench strength:** Where does the organization have depth, and where is it exposed?
- **Development actions:** What needs to happen to prepare future leaders?
- **Knowledge transfer:** Where does critical expertise need to be documented or shared?
- **Future role needs:** What skills will matter as the business changes?

How SuccessionHR Helps

SuccessionHR helps manufacturing teams move succession planning out of scattered spreadsheets and into a clearer view of leadership continuity. With SuccessionHR, leaders can:

- See which critical roles are covered
- Track successor readiness and development gaps
- Identify where the business is exposed before a role opens
- Compare bench strength across teams, locations, and functions

Book a demo today to see how our software can mitigate succession risks.