

Stop Guessing:

Why 91% of Leadership Pipelines Fail Before They Begin

The Problem: Most Organizations Are Still Guessing

A recent AssessFirst study (via *Yahoo Finance*) found that **91% of HR professionals** and **88% of leaders** still rely primarily on **subjective performance ratings** to evaluate leadership readiness.

That means most organizations are still **making high-stakes talent decisions without objective evidence** and their leadership pipelines suffer for it. Subjectivity dominates because it feels comfortable. But relying on gut instinct leads to:

- Leadership promotions that don't align with real capability
- Training investments that don't address true development gaps
- Hidden risks when key leaders exit unexpectedly

The Risk: Instinct Isn't a Strategy

Without structure and data, organizations often:

- Mistake confidence for competence
- Overlook emerging talent that doesn't "fit the mold"
- Spend precious development dollars on the wrong priorities

This approach doesn't just slow growth. It damages trust, culture, and long-term performance.

The Fix: Build a Data-Driven Readiness Framework

A strong succession strategy connects **data, structure, and development**.
Here's what to measure and why it matters:

Metric	Why It Matters	How to Use It
Performance Trends	Shows consistency and growth over time, not one good year.	Identify who sustains high performance and adapts to new challenges.
Core Competencies	Defines what success looks like in each leadership role.	Use a shared competency model to evaluate readiness objectively.
Critical Skills	Highlights the technical and strategic skills needed for future roles.	Pinpoint development priorities and align training investments.
Potential Indicators	Assesses adaptability, learning agility, and strategic thinking.	Spot high-potential employees early and give them stretch opportunities.
Engagement & Retention Risk	Measures motivation, satisfaction, and risk of turnover.	Protect future leaders with meaningful development pathways.
Diversity & Succession Coverage	Ensures inclusive, balanced pipelines.	Monitor who's represented in the pipeline and who isn't.

How Data Strengthens Decision-Making

When organizations combine these data points, they move from guessing potential to proving readiness.

1. Diagnose Reality: Identify where leadership depth is strongest and where it's missing.
2. Prioritize Investment: Focus training and development budgets on measurable gaps.
3. Measure Progress: Track readiness over time and report ROI on talent programs.
4. Drive Accountability: Make succession planning an ongoing, data-backed discipline.

The Shift: From Opinion to Observation

Data doesn't replace human judgment, it sharpens it. When structure and insight become part of everyday leadership practices, organizations make better decisions, develop stronger leaders, and prepare for the future with confidence.

Because when it comes to leadership readiness, guessing isn't a plan - it's a risk.

Take the Next Step

Succession planning shouldn't be an annual exercise. It should be a daily discipline built on data, not intuition.

Discover how **SuccessionHR** helps organizations measure, track, and strengthen leadership pipelines through data-driven insight.