

Succession Stories

A NEW ERA IN LEADERSHIP:
THE SUCCESSION-CENTRIC ERA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to the succession-centric era of leadership. Where leadership transitions take center stage as 3 powerful narratives converge:



CULTURAL STORYTELLING



INDUSTRY TRANSFORMATION



SCIENTIFIC INSIGHT

Entertainment juggernauts like *Succession* and *Shōgun* depict leadership transitions as deeply engaging human dramas, while \$56 trillion in mergers and acquisitions over the last 2 decades demonstrate the staggering real-world stakes.

The Center for Creative Leadership's comprehensive analysis of succession planning spans 161 Emmy and Golden Globe-nominated television shows, 190 case studies across 19 industries, and 1,000 peer-reviewed articles on succession planning. The evidence is unmistakable. As the number of

companies from the original *Fortune 500* list continues to shrink, organizations face record-high CEO turnover and hemorrhage \$1 trillion annually through poor transitions. Yet 70% still operate without formal succession plans, navigating tomorrow's challenges with yesterday's ad hoc tools.

Global forces drive this era. Leaders must navigate through societal polarization, adapt to shifting regulatory landscapes and demographics, and prepare for extreme weather events. They must harness artificial intelligence, leverage social media, and manage geopolitical tensions. Each new challenge reminds us that the old playbook for leadership transitions is closed.

We believe an important opportunity lies within these challenges. Organizations that understand the succession-centric era as a convergence of 3 narratives — cultural storytelling, industry transformation, and scientific insight — will write the next chapter of leadership. The future belongs to those who recognize that succession

planning is more than a process or a system. Succession planning is a mindset. One that understands and leverages the powers of culture, experience, and science to get it right, right now; keep getting it right; and reimagine what's right for the future. Those who don't get it right risk becoming cautionary tales.

In our research, we've connected the stories and data we've collected to megatrends and real-world outcomes. Our research is presented across 4 reports that provide the leadership pulse and lists of leaders to watch, along with playlists, frameworks, strategic recommendations, and scenarios designed to help leaders and their teams provide continuity for the entire business and develop the unique capabilities to anticipate what's coming next.

The succession-centric era is here. Leaders must transform succession planning from a reactive necessity into their greatest competitive advantage. The future of leadership begins now.

Succession planning is breaking news, driving the conversation on new processes, systems, and mindsets in leadership development.

- 1 WELCOME TO THE SUCCESSION-CENTRIC ERA OF LEADERSHIP**
Jamie Dimon, CEO of JP Morgan, says “we all want to get [succession planning] exactly right” and moves succession planning from a back-office process into the spotlight as an essential leadership development strategy.
- 2 THE TRILLION-DOLLAR TALENT CRISIS IS HERE**
CEO turnover skyrockets, with poor transitions costing organizations \$1 trillion annually in lost market value. Smart organizations shift to proactive succession strategies, treating every high-potential employee as a future leader.
- 3 UNEXPECTED TRANSITIONS ACCOUNT FOR UP TO 15% OF CEO SUCCESSIONS**
The December 2024 death of UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson is an example. Such unforeseen events underscore the critical need for robust succession planning to ensure organizational stability during sudden leadership changes.
- 4 FACT AND FICTION CONVERGE ON TV**
HBO’s *Succession* and its real-world influence on the legalities of the Murdoch family trust reveal the fragility of leadership transitions. A sharp rise in media depictions and research studies on succession planning expose the high stakes of leadership transitions across industries and leadership levels.
- 5 SUCCESSION PLANNING EMERGES AS A RISING ART AND SCIENCE**
Succession planning has become a critical focus in news and entertainment media, as well as academic research since 1970, with stories and studies highlighting its impact across industries, operational approaches, and leadership levels.

“We all want to get [succession planning] exactly right.”

— Jamie Dimon, CEO JP Morgan

Getting succession planning “exactly right” is not just a goal — it is a necessity. As organizations navigate increasing complexity, leaders recognize succession planning as critical to leadership development and essential to organizational stability. Succession planning at the executive level has evolved from a relational and cultural process of apprenticeship to a more informal, ad hoc process and again to a more structured set of initiatives (Berke, 2005; Fayol, 1918; Kesner & Sebora, 1994; Umans et al., 2024).

SUCCESSION PLANNING IS A(N)

ANTICIPATORY APPROACH

that maps out future talent needs, ensuring employees at all levels have the necessary skills and experiences ready when they are most essential (Tosh, 2024);

REGENERATIVE STRATEGY

to prevent talent gaps in key leadership positions, build resilience in the talent pool, and align current resources with the organization’s long-term vision (Tosh, 2024);

COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITY

that fosters transparency, engages employees in the organization’s future, and reaches external stakeholders with consistent messaging and visible commitments to shared goals.

As the demands of leadership evolve, organizations are recognizing the importance of a more robust approach: one that integrates succession planning with broader talent management and leadership development strategies, sustainability goals, and the reality and complexities of social life in an era dominated by personalized media narratives, loneliness, and social polarization (Pereira et al., 2023; Murthy, 2025).

KEY CULTURAL STORIES

A look at how the story of succession planning has been told over time and in various cultural contexts is a valuable starting point. Cultures across the globe have called attention to succession planning for centuries (Wallach, 2022).

Art of War

(475-221 BCE)

Lesson: Succession is war. Strategic planning, decisive action, and self-awareness are crucial.

Sapa Incas

(945-1493 AD)

Lesson: Combine military prowess, political alliances, and administrative control to expand empire.

The Prince

(1532 AD)

Lesson: Succession is a fact of life and often ruthless. Execute accordingly.

King Lear

(1605 AD)

Lesson: Don't let mistrust, lack of self-awareness or fear of change sabotage succession.

Bhagavad Gita

(400-200 BCE)

Lesson: Embrace formidable challenges because they bring out leaders' greatest strengths.

Buganda Kingdom

(1375-1894 AD)

Lesson: Create systems of matrilineal relationships and understand power dynamics.

Titus Andronicus

(1593 AD)

Lesson: Focus on the future. Avoid revenge and retaliation.

Modern Media Stories

"Everything, everywhere, is always moving.
Forever. Get used to it."

- Logan Roy, *"Succession"*

More modern interpretations of opportunities to seize and pitfalls to avoid in succession planning for family businesses and other organizations remain relevant with televised series. As a prominent medium, television mirrors society's values and shapes public perceptions regarding organizational life, making it a significant subject of analysis in media studies and organizational behavior research since the 1970s (Berg & Trujillo, 1989).

Highly rated shows like *Dallas* (1978–1991), *Dynasty* (1981–1989, 2012–2014), and *Ramayan* (1987–1988) focused specifically on succession planning as research on the topic emerged, showcasing how power struggles and emotional betrayals play roles in determining who would control the families' firms and fortunes. See Figures 1 and 2 below.

TREND TV SHOWS ABOUT SUCCESSION PLANNING (1970-2024)

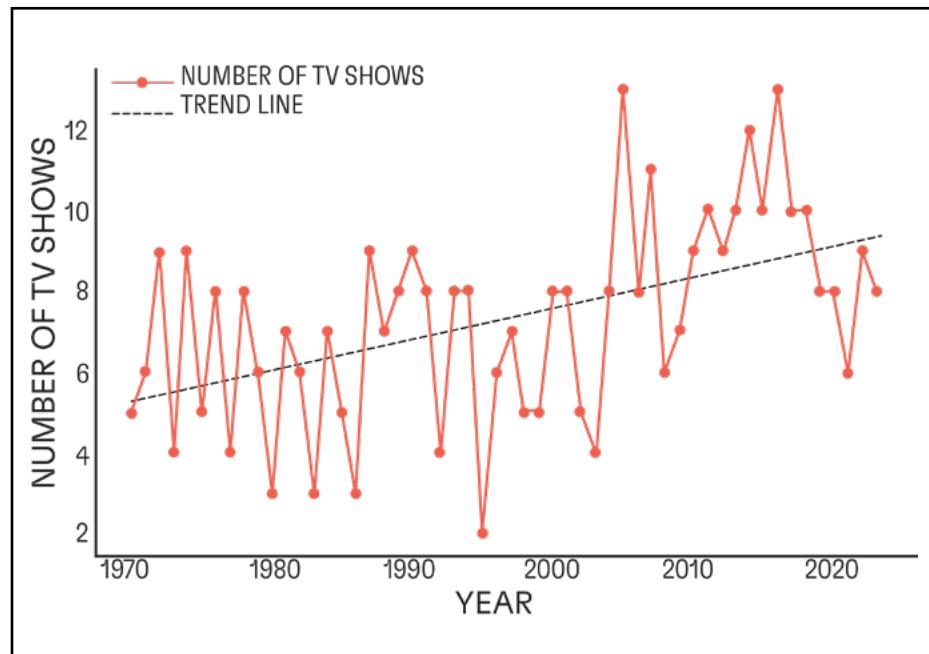


Figure 1. Trend of Emmy and Golden Globe Award-Nominated Television Shows about SP (1970–2024). Graph illustrates 161 distinct shows with a clear upward trend, especially pronounced in the last decade, indicating growing interest in and production of TV shows centered around succession planning and organizational power dynamics.

TREND OF PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS ABOUT SUCCESSION PLANNING (1970-2024)

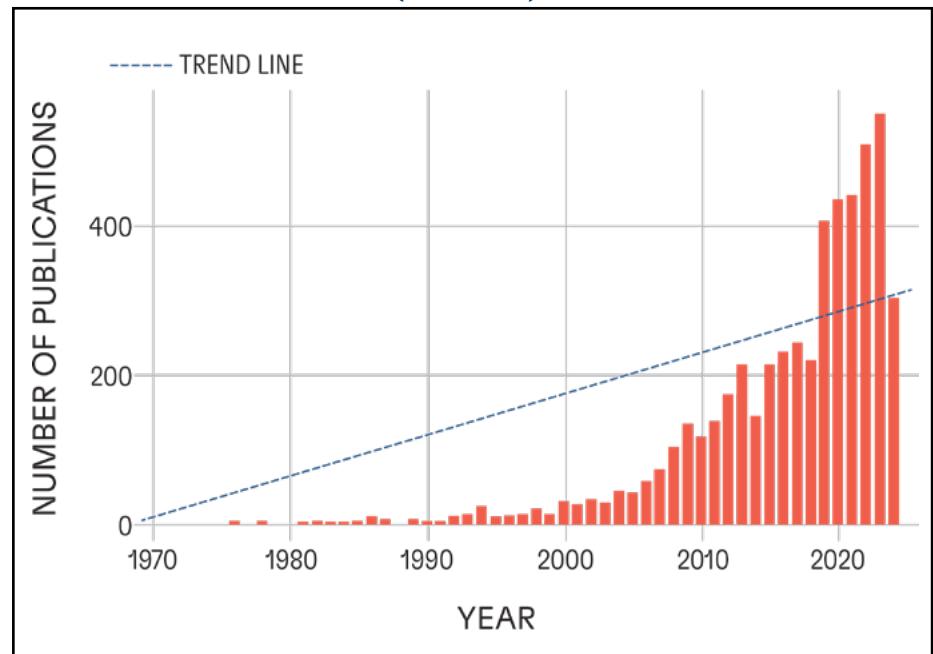


Figure 2. Trend of peer-reviewed publications about succession planning (1970–2024). Graph illustrates a clear upward trend, especially pronounced in the last decade, indicating growing interest in data-driven and theory-based insights and where succession planning is needed and how to achieve it.

Figure 3 (below) underscores the high stakes of succession planning. Only 52 of the original Fortune 500 companies from the inaugural 1955 list remain today (Xie, 2024). This sharp decline highlights a volatile market landscape where leadership transitions are inevitable and increasingly incentivized, shaping economic, social, and political dynamics across industries and culture (Gordon, 2025). The parallel rise in media and academic attention to succession planning, alongside shrinking corporate longevity and a declining median job tenure—now at 3.9 years, the lowest since 2002—signals a profound shift (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). We have entered the Succession-Centric Era, where leadership development and transitions are no longer backroom conversations but front-page imperatives.

SURVIVAL OF FORTUNE 500 COMPANIES (1970-2024)

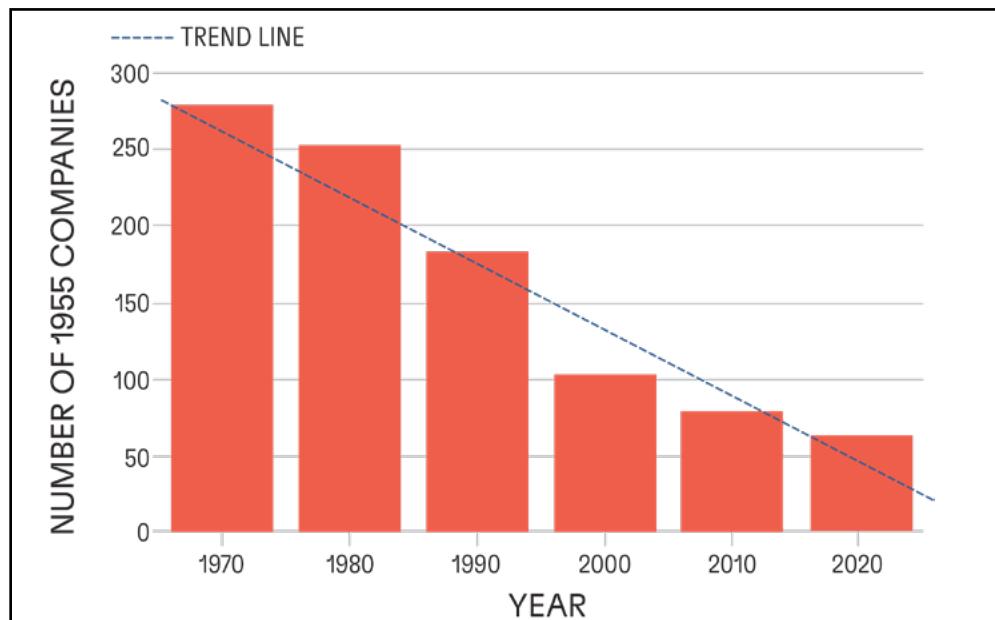


Figure 3. Survival of Fortune 500 Companies From 1970-2024. This figure illustrates the diminishing presence of companies from the original Fortune 500 list across 5 decades. The steady decline underscores the challenges of longevity in a dynamic business landscape, reinforcing the necessity of robust succession planning for sustained organizational success.

Art imitates life, imitates art. In February 2025 *The New York Times* documented how leadership transitions in media conglomerates can mirror the complexities of succession stories seen on screen. Accordingly, the Murdoch family's internal dynamics highlight the challenges of governance, legacy, and strategic continuity.



Our analysis of the 161 Emmy and Golden Globe-nominated TV shows from 1970 to 2024 noted a sharp rise in media storytelling around succession planning and that these stories reflect deeply held beliefs about power and control in leadership.

TELEVISION'S PORTRAYAL OF SUCCESSION PLANNING REVEALS 3 DOMINANT NORMS

SUCCESSION IS A NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE TO AVOID ...

unless you like trouble. While series like *Yellowstone* and *Star Trek* offer rare glimpses of constructive leadership transitions and multigenerational opportunities for collaboration, most shows favor portraying succession through a lens of personal betrayal and power struggles. Dramas like *Empire*, *The Crown*, and *Shōgun* explore varied contexts where power transitions are fraught with challenges from incarceration and divorce to catastrophe and colonization to media manipulation and strategic maneuvering.

SUCCESSION PLANNING IS A MASCULINE, C-SUITE CONCERN.

Shows like *Shōgun* and *The West Wing* focus narrowly on traditional power structures. *Ted Lasso* and *The Morning Show* stand out as notable exceptions, featuring successful leadership development for women, though even these more progressive narratives play into underdog tropes.

SUCCESSION PLANNING IS SEEN IN A VACUUM.

Genre-defining series like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* emphasize individual leadership drama while overlooking systemic challenges and macro level influences. This "romance of leadership" approach, while dramatically compelling, fails to reflect the complex interplay of factors that shape real-world organizational transitions.

Perhaps no televised series has elevated the process to Shakespearean heights as dramatically as HBO's Emmy and Golden Globe Award-winning *Succession*, which offered a suspenseful portrayal of executive succession focusing on the power struggles and risks involved in transitioning leadership within a family-owned media conglomerate.

Succession is a standout because it dramatizes 4 important 21st century realities about succession planning that are supported by research.



POORLY MANAGED CEO AND C-SUITE TRANSITIONS RESULT IN CLOSE TO \$1 TRILLION IN LOST MARKET VALUE ANNUALLY.

(Fernandez-Araoz et al., 2021)



MARKET VALUE LOST DUE TO POOR SUCCESSION PLANNING IS STRONGLY CORRELATED WITH THE UPTAKE IN MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS.

(Liu & Wang, 2013; Harding et al., 2024; Gordon, 2025)



10 TO 15% OF CEO SUCCESSIONS HAPPEN UNEXPECTEDLY DUE TO DEATH, DISMISSAL, OR HEALTH ISSUES.

(Gentry et al., 2021; Quigley et al., 2017)



MANY COMPANIES VASTLY UNDERPRIORITYZ SUCCESSION PLANNING, AS 37% OF BOARDS HAVE NOT "ALLOCATE[D] SUFFICIENT MEETING TIME TO CEO SUCCESSION PLANNING OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS,"¹ AND "70% OF ORGANIZATIONS HAVE NO FORMAL SUCCESSION PLAN IN PLACE."²

¹(Sikora, 2023), ²(Eser, 2024)

MODERN MEDIA STORIES

In the last 2 decades, there have been 660,000 major mergers and acquisitions, worth \$56 trillion (Harding et al., 2024; Harding & Rovit, 2004). Acquiring companies now seek to diversify business models and complement core competencies, as in 2022 when Elon Musk overcame legal challenges to purchase social media firm Twitter (now X) and initiated broad scale organizational change and relocation (Conger & Hirsch, 2022). More recent is Disney's acquisition of the majority stake in FuboTV (Farooque, 2025). Another example is the hotly contested merger of Paramount Global, one of Hollywood's top film studios, with Skydance Media to create a "New Paramount," replete with new leadership at the C-suite level (Littleton, 2024; Littleton & Spangler, 2024; Spangler, 2024). These realities are significant because they come from news and entertainment media, and because they speak to everyday concerns about succession planning

across industries and over time (Hao, 2022; McCombs & Guo, 2014).

High-profile corporate transitions don't just reshape industries, they also capture public imagination through extensive media coverage that shapes entertainment content. The cultural narratives that emerge from such succession events serve as powerful lenses through which society examines and understands organizational leadership transitions. The entertainment industry's own succession stories are particularly self-referential, as they simultaneously demonstrate and dramatize the challenges of organizational change. These succession stories can influence how the public views the dynamics of organizational life (McCombs & Shaw, 1993). In a December 2024 interview on *Jimmy Kimmel Live*, *Succession* actor Jeremy Strong (Kendall Roy) noted that news and entertainment media storytelling has the power to reveal

emotional truths about real-world leadership situations that, if faced, can guide real-world change. "I've been accused of taking it seriously, and I do take it seriously," Strong said. "It," in this case, is the story of succession planning being written in real-time by media representations (Kanter, 2024).

Leaders, regardless of industry or role, must understand the cultural narrative and reconceptualize succession planning as an opportunity to usher in the next era of leadership development — one that requires the courage to communicate through conflict, the agility to drive short- and long-term results, the patience to exercise emotional intelligence, and the foresight to ensure the next generations of leaders are equipped to thrive in a brittle, anxious, and non-linear world. Zooming out, succession planning is about how stories have the power to shape organizational systems and the broader cultural landscape.

WHY MEDIA STORIES MATTER TO YOUR ORGANIZATION

SEE THE LANDSCAPE

From the family-run firms in *Dynasty* and *Empire* to the modern tech-driven worlds in *Westworld* and *Silicon Valley*, popular media narratives provide a lens for examining how succession dynamics evolve over time. Our analysis of these stories reveals that succession stories are moving away from the “romance of leadership” approach and moving toward addressing systemic issues that affect leadership aspirations and employee engagement. Companies that understand this plot twist will have “first mover advantage” as they take the chance to create industry standards for talent and teams that are best for long-term sustainability.

FIND THE WHY

Media stories like *Succession* and *The Crown* explore high-stakes leadership transitions, amplifying reactive decision-making, fragile relationships, personal flaws, and the weight of legacy — unspoken truths about how many leaders are made. Shows like *Veep* and *The Good Wife* explore these themes as well as undermined authority, underestimated qualifications, and glass ceilings. Leaders can use these media narratives as exercises in “leader prototyping” to recognize and, when necessary, revise preconceived notions about leadership that influence judgments about who is fit to lead next and why.

SOLVE THE PROBLEMS

Media narratives like *The Morning Show* and *Dallas* expose key pitfalls in succession planning: power struggles, bias, and underinvestment in communication, technology, and culture. Leaders can leverage these stories to pinpoint systemic obstacles and underscore the importance of moving beyond competency-based skills training to focus on vertical development. Companies that perform retrospectives to identify problems and integrate emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, and adaptability into their development efforts to solve problems can ensure their selection processes align with immediate priorities and long-term goals. This strategy builds resilience, empowering organizations to adapt swiftly, seize emerging opportunities, and outpace competitors.

DRIVE THE RESULTS

Media narratives give us a common vocabulary, connecting us around the critical insight that leadership transitions fail without execution. *Ted Lasso*, *Star Trek*, and *Yellowstone* highlight the importance of turning strategies into action by addressing investment and execution gaps. Organizations secure buy-in for change by actively engaging stakeholders, addressing concerns, and attaching economic value and incentives to culture efforts. Clearly articulating success factors — such as measurable operational goals, leadership alignment, market value, and stakeholder engagement — ensures everyone understands what success looks like.

Industry Stories

"The... Board's thoughtful and disciplined approach... helps make this transition smooth."

- Walt Bettinger, former CEO of Charles Schwab

We collected 190 real-life industry examples of succession planning across 19 industries in 2024 that depict many of the same dynamics in award-winning television narratives, but with a different level of perceived credibility because they are real-world industry cases.

Take the following example. In September 2024 Walt Bettinger, the CEO of Charles Schwab, announced his retirement after a notable 16-year career, stating he would be succeeded by Rick Wurster, currently president of the company, on January 1, 2025. In his statement, Bettinger emphasized the Schwab Board's strategy:

The Schwab Board's thoughtful and disciplined approach to succession planning helps make this transition smooth. Rick Wurster and I have worked together on a daily basis for more than 8 years. I have complete confidence in his

leadership, and I am thrilled that the Schwab Board of Directors has selected him as my successor (Pound, 2024).

Like Schwab, financial firm Northern Trust Bank garnered attention for its excellence in succession planning, which also includes a broad focus on segments and regional innovation (Northern Trust, 2023; Southland Marquee, 2023).

Organizations across industries are also recognized for their strategic leadership transitions. Red Lobster has been praised for appointing Damola Adamolekun, a 35-year-old former CEO of P.F. Chang's, as its new CEO amid the company's bankruptcy and significant debt restructuring. His leadership is expected to bring operational and financial excellence, technological innovation, significant change to the C-suite team, and strategic vision to revitalize the iconic seafood chain (Haddon &

Bruzzese, 2024). Pharmaceutical firms like Novartis and Pfizer create robust pipelines of talent-ready successors to step into critical roles when needed and include board succession planning processes (Terry, 2018). Media production company Shondaland created its own approach to succession planning that encompassed new creative opportunities, inclusive talent pipelines, diversified content and partnerships, enhanced leadership skills, and a focus on long-term sustainability (Berman, 2022; McGirt, 2018). Agribusiness organizations Cargill and Mars have focused succession planning efforts on stewardship, effective communication, corporate governance, transition periods, and alignment with strategic direction (Carlock, 2016; Mars, Inc, 2022).

Innovative succession planning is also a trend among smaller, family-owned agribusinesses. For example, the Faaborg family farm in Iowa transitioned from hog farming to mushroom cultivation and, in doing so, ushered in a new generation of leaders. This is an example of agility in succession planning, showcasing the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, embrace sustainable environmental practices, and ensure long-term viability (Buckley, 2024). The perspectives embodied in these succession planning approaches serve as a model for how organizations across industries can cultivate lasting resilience and positive impact in an ever-evolving business landscape.

Real-world succession planning stories can also take a different turn, demonstrating hard-learned lessons. For instance, Manhattan's Chinatown faces a significant succession planning problem as aging small business owners struggle to pass their enterprises to the next generation,

leading to concerns about the preservation of the neighborhood's cultural identities and economic viability (Schwab, 2024). Historical examples at the executive level include Apple and General Electric, whose post-succession performance challenges underscore the importance of ensuring chosen leaders are equipped to navigate changing business landscapes and fast-paced innovation over time (Colvin, 2024; Townsley, 2021). A recent executive-level example is tech startup-turned-giant Open AI and its "3-CEO weekend," where several abrupt leadership changes occurred without clear transition or communication plans (Christ, 2023; Quiroz-Gutierrez, 2024). Another is Disney, where the sudden departure of CEO Bob Chapek and "surprise return" of former CEO Bob Iger in 2022, who is slated to retire again in 2026, highlighted a dramatic interplay between board members and executives (Jarvey & Press, 2024). In September 2024, a

trial began to determine the fate of the Murdoch family's succession plan for its media empire, including Fox News (Gold, 2024). The trial ended in December 2024, when the heirs' legal team wrote a "Succession Memo" to avoid an outcome depicted in season 3 of *Succession* (Sorkin et al., 2024).

In other news, recently appointed CEOs at Boeing, Starbucks, Bumble, and Victoria's Secret are utilizing co-location to prioritize availability and address post-pandemic organizational concerns (Cutter, 2024; Isidore, 2024). Cases like these are signals, which mirror broader organizational dynamics across industries and offer rich ground for analysis and reflection. Recognizing and learning from these real-world examples allows for cross-disciplinary insights and encourages a narrative understanding of succession planning as an unfolding process, a complex system, and a deeply humanistic mindset.

Notably, our analysis shows that succession planning in 4 industries is especially exigent: media and entertainment (40 cases), government and policy (24 cases), financial services (23 cases), and technology (19 cases). These industries stand out for their distinct demands and connections: media and entertainment for its creative leadership and cultural communication; government and policy for its challenges with stability, alignment, and public trust; financial services for its continuity orientation to mitigate operational risks; and technology for its ethically demanding and disruptive approach to leadership. See Figure 4.

SUCCESSION PLANNING BY INDUSTRY

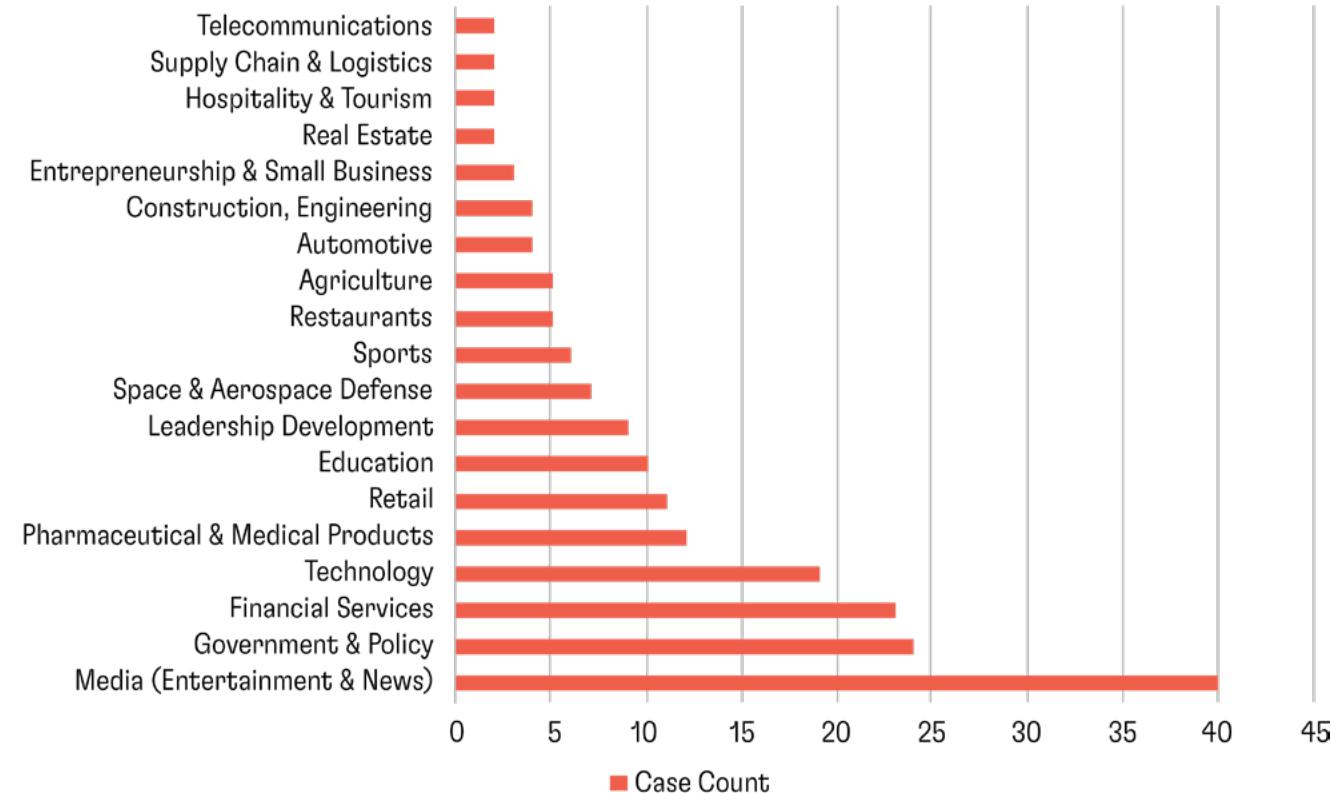


Figure 4. Distribution of succession plans that generate media coverage across industries. Line lengths are proportional to the number of plans observed in each industry, offering a visual representation of the relative concentration of succession planning signals and highlighting the current state of succession dynamics and priorities within various sectors.

Further examination of real-life succession cases underscores the dominant role of external factors influencing succession planning (Wallach, 2022; Webb, 2025). See Figure 5 below.

SOCIAL



- Globalization of ideas, narratives
- Demographic shifts
- Decline of institutional trust

TECHNOLOGICAL



- Rise of “living intelligence”
- Rise in big data
- Energy and natural resources

ECONOMIC



- Disaggregated, distributed work
- Multi-polar global economic order
- Consumer confidence, purchasing power

ENVIRONMENTAL



- Migration
- Pandemics
- Resource scarcity

POLITICAL



- Regulatory compliance
- International relations
- Decline of institutional power

Economic factors predominate. Consequently, organizations prioritize financial imperatives like reducing firm valuation risks and maintaining market stability. Social factors emerge as secondary concern, emphasizing the importance of preserving intangible assets such as trust and relational capital. Next are political forces that focus on governance and long-term strategic alignment, especially in contexts where leadership transitions intersect with regulatory and public policy concerns. The role of technology is also increasingly prominent. Today's organizations are investing in predictive analytics, enabling them to identify star performers and refine succession strategies with data-driven insights.

Figure 5: Selection of megatrends across 5 dimensions — social, technological, economic, environmental, political — influencing today's succession planning efforts.

Despite these advances, our analysis reveals notable gaps in succession planning practices as communicated publicly. Cases related to environmental factors are sparse, suggesting an underexplored opportunity to integrate sustainability and environmental stewardship into leadership transitions. Likewise, a lack of cross-industry collaboration signals an untapped potential for sharing best practices and fostering innovation across sectors.

Our research identified 4 key themes that point to dynamic changes in how organizations approach leader development and succession:

AGILITY

Implement phased leadership transitions with the goal of ensuring knowledge transfer. Develop role profiles and identify candidate pool. Consider fractional executives to maintain agility while prioritizing continuity in leadership.

INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATION

Focus on talent management and leadership development that harmonizes intergenerational differences. Specifically, when identifying who will step aside and who will lead, pursue succession plans that can balance the need for implementing modern technological innovations amidst changing operational environments while sustaining legacy.

GOVERNANCE

Ensure boards and leadership teams are equipped with frameworks and clear success criteria to support fair and transparent succession processes. Eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy in the succession planning process.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Develop and measure leaders' emotional quotient alongside their ability to maintain operational efficiency to maximize the human-centered core of leadership. Assist potential successors in mentally preparing for increased responsibilities while preparing current leaders for their transitions out of role.

These priorities reflect contemporary challenges, underscoring the need for organizations to develop and select leaders capable of navigating change in a brittle, anxious, non-linear, and seemingly incomprehensible world (Cascio, 2020).

1. CULTIVATE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



As emphasized in our *Leadership at the Peak* program, senior executives must master emotional regulation, strategic influence, and relationship management to lead with confidence and clarity. By prioritizing training that develops these advanced competencies, organizations ensure leaders are prepared to navigate complex interpersonal dynamics and make ethical decisions that drive successful succession outcomes.

2. LEVERAGE PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS RESPONSIBLY



Predictive analytics can identify star performers and provide actionable insights into their developmental needs. However, there are risks of relying on systems that may encode biases or reinforce systemic inequalities. Reduce data anxieties by addressing biases and operating transparently in data collection and analysis.

3. TUNE IN TO CULTURE AND INDUSTRY FOR INSPIRATION



Pay consistent attention to the cultural narrative told by news, entertainment, and social media. Connect with leaders in different sectors to enhance networks and uncover innovative practices. Map relationship patterns and information flows to help you identify emerging industry trends and leadership capabilities, ultimately enriching succession strategies.

4. INTEGRATE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY INTO SUCCESSION PLANS



Climate risks and innovative solutions are coming into sharper focus, thanks to effective science communication. As stakeholder sentiment toward sustainability waxes and wanes across generations, it is imperative to have transparency in your organization's values, supply chain, and leadership success factors.

5. STAY CURRENT ON LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS



Make a habit of exploring developments in litigation and regulation. Evaluate and refine your existing succession strategies to address emerging topics, fill existing gaps, and build organizational resilience.

6. BRIDGE STRATEGIC VISION WITH EXECUTION



Incentivizing leaders to achieve actionable, measurable goals in the short and medium term ensures alignment with long-term priorities. This approach drives accountability, sustains leadership transitions, and delivers meaningful impact through clear communication.

7. CULTIVATE COMMUNITY AND COHESION

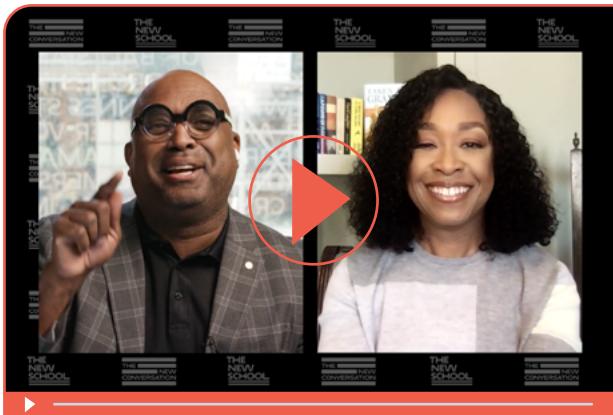
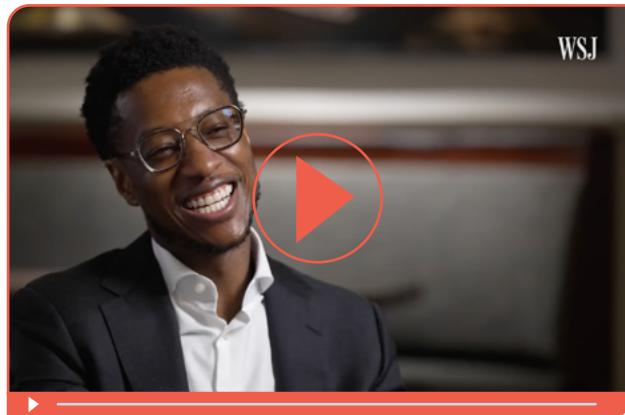


Evaluate how transitions impact cultural narratives and shared organizational heritage. Address leadership needs and attach economic value and incentives to culture efforts, making space to maintain and evolve organizational purpose and legacy.

LEADER STORIES TO WATCH

Succession planning, talent management, and leadership development in real time and across industries. These leadership transition stories are rewriting the future, exploring who is here, who is next, and how they will lead.

Click below for the full breakdown.

A screenshot of a news article from WSJ.com. The headline reads: "Charles Schwab CEO Walt Bettinger to retire at end of 2024, Rick Wurster to replace him". The article is published on Oct 1, 2024, at 8:03 AM EDT. A red arrow points to the headline. Below the headline is a video thumbnail showing two men in suits. A caption below the video reads: "CHARLES SCHWAB CEO BETTINGER TO RETIRE Charles Schwab CEO Walt Bettinger on retirement: 'Incredibly excited' to turn it over to Rick".

Charles Schwab CEO Walt Bettinger to retire at end of 2024, Rick Wurster to replace him

CHARLES SCHWAB CEO BETTINGER TO RETIRE

Charles Schwab CEO Walt Bettinger on retirement: 'Incredibly excited' to turn it over to Rick

A screenshot of a news article from WSJ.com. The headline reads: "Bumble founder Whitney Wolfe Herd returns as CEO amid a dating app decline". The article is published on Jan 17, 2025, at 8:49 PM CST. A red arrow points to the headline. Below the headline is a video thumbnail showing a woman in a dark dress gesturing. A caption below the video reads: "Wolfe Herd left the post in January 2024, but soon, she'll be back running the dating app company she started in 2014 after co-founding Tinder."

Bumble founder Whitney Wolfe Herd returns as CEO amid a dating app decline

Wolfe Herd left the post in January 2024, but soon, she'll be back running the dating app company she started in 2014 after co-founding Tinder.

PLAYLIST

A curated mix of Emmy and Golden Globe Award-nominated television shows on succession planning and leadership, providing entertainment and insights.

Star Trek (1966–present, various series)

A sci-fi adventure across generations, Starfleet's leadership changes highlight the challenges and opportunities of transitioning command under pressure.

Dallas (1978–1991; 2012–2014)

Classic family drama that chronicles power struggles, offering a sharp look at how ambition and betrayal shape succession.

The Good Wife (2009–2016)

This legal and political drama centers on a woman's return to law after her husband's political scandal, highlighting themes of professional succession and personal resilience.

Veep (2012–2019)

A satire that delves into the political arena, showcasing the tumultuous journey of a female vice president navigating succession in the highest office.

Empire (2015–2020)

A glamorous and intense depiction of a music mogul's efforts to pass on his empire based on King Lear, exploring the intersection of family conflict and leadership succession.

The Crown (2016–2023)

Historical drama exploring the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, providing insight into royal succession and the personal and political challenges of global leadership.

Succession (2018–2023)

Offers a dark and realistic portrayal of a media mogul's family vying for control of the empire, identifying the challenges and changes that are obstacles to succession.

Yellowstone (2018–2024)

This modern Western drama delves into the Dutton family's fight to preserve their ranch, tackling the intricacies of family legacy and succession planning.

Ted Lasso (2020–present)

While primarily about football/soccer and optimism, this heartwarming comedy also explores themes of mentorship, leadership growth, and team succession planning.

Shōgun (2024–2026)

This epic series combines Samurai culture with political intrigue, showcasing the intricacies of power transfer and cultural adaptation in leadership and colonization.

THE DAILY SHOW IN 2035: A SUCCESSION-CENTRIC EVOLUTION

This hypothetical scenario set in 2035 is designed on the recommendations shared in this report and outcomes we believe are achievable. It considers opportunities and threats. It is neither a prediction nor a conclusion. Rather, this scenario is designed to stimulate thought, facilitate discussion, and drive innovation.



The Daily Show in 2035: Where AI Meets Satire—A bold fusion of synthetic hosts, cutting-edge technology, and human creativity redefining the future of succession in late-night television. Created by CCL and Chat GPT-4o.

THE DAILY SHOW IN 2035: A SUCCESSION-CENTRIC EVOLUTION

Gone are the days when late-night television relied on a single charismatic host. By 2035, *The Daily Show* stands as a living case study for leadership in the succession-centric era, blending its cultural heritage with cutting-edge technologies and adaptive leadership frameworks. Its transformation is a story of media evolution and a narrative about how leadership succession evolved.

The journey began with the Paramount–Skydance merger of 2025, a seismic shift that reshaped media and entertainment. For *The Daily Show*, the merger meant adapting to technological disruption while navigating leadership transitions against a backdrop of corporate realignment and regulatory changes.

Further, the show's own history of prolonged host transitions following Jon Stewart's 2015 departure (and 2024 return) and Trevor Noah's 2022 exit underscored the urgency of robust succession planning. With new executive leadership emphasizing AI-driven technologies across functions, the show adopted a dynamic system of creating synthetic hosts. These avatars, imbued with the rhetorical styles and comedic timing of past hosts, could adjust in real-time to cultural and political shifts, delivering content personalized to audience needs. Producers leveraged AI and predictive analytics to preserve the show's satirical DNA while embracing a new era of audience engagement across augmented reality, virtual reality, and spatial computing platforms.

By 2035, *The Daily Show* embraced synthetic hosts and established an independent ethics board to ensure AI-generated content upheld its values of satire and critique. Before fully transitioning, a 6-month pilot program paired synthetic hosts with human comedians. To mitigate bias and maintain audience trust, the ethics board conducted regular audits and published transparent reports on the AI system's performance and ESG metrics. Metrics such as viewer engagement, social media sentiment, ratings, and energy and water consumption helped refine the approach. The results were promising. Audience engagement rose by 25%, and surveys reflected strong satisfaction with the show's cultural relevance and commitment to sustainability.

Leaders at *The Daily Show* responded by leveraging technology and audience data to elevate topics like leadership transitions, trust, and fairness. By doing so, the show not only preserved its satirical edge but also proved that, in an era of synthetic hosts and fragmented platforms, human ability to shape societal priorities remained as vital — and impactful — as ever.

We used data-driven and theory-based research methods to offer insight and evidence to leaders on media and industry narratives about succession planning.

MEDIA / ENTERTAINMENT STORIES

To understand the content and evolution of succession planning stories, we built on existing research in Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1993; McCombs & Guo, 2014). Agenda Setting is about how the media can shape what we think is important. The theory suggests that the media tells us what to think about. By choosing which stories to highlight and which stories to cut, the media sets the agenda for public discussion. Over time, this can influence public opinion and even what topics are addressed by organizational or public policies. Essentially, Agenda Setting Theory shows how media plays a key role in focusing our attention on certain issues while other topics may be overlooked. For example, if news and entertainment constantly share stories

on CEOs' leadership transitions, people might start to see these transitions as a top priority, even if there are other important issues going on in organizational life.

We scraped genre, plot, and cast data from IMDB. To enhance relevance, we only considered Emmy and Golden Globe-nominated TV shows from 1970–2024, the same years academic research about succession planning began to proliferate. We relied upon several sources of information to determine genre distinctions: Variety Insight, IMDB, and Box Office Mojo.

We confirmed and analyzed 161 shows out of 349 Emmy and Golden Globe-nominated TV shows from 1970–2024.

We coded plots for “succession planning,” which was defined as preparing for the future by developing people for key roles and building an organizational legacy. First, succession planning was identified in the plots, which yielded 161 TV shows. Specific questions about being an outgoing or incoming leader were included, as well as general information about gender demographics. Our confidence in categorizing gender is high (we demonstrated a .88 correlation between our coders’ judgments and the gender status of actors playing characters in media content). Animal, robot, and supernatural creature characters that were not depicted as human-like were not sorted into any category for gender and are excluded from analysis.

INDUSTRY STORIES

We used STEEP analysis to offer insight and evidence to leaders on emerging trends in succession planning. We reviewed a variety of sources to collect 400 signals across 19 industries, including alerts, market analyses, earnings calls, industry reports, government publications, blogs, songs, online databases, academic literature, conference presentations and papers, news media stories, and social media posts.

We confirmed and analyzed 190 out of 400 signals based on coding for “succession planning,” which was defined as preparing for the future by

developing people for key roles and building an organizational legacy. Once relevance was confirmed, we coded each signal using the STEEP (social, technological, economic, environmental, political) framework. We identified primary and secondary factors for each signal and analyzed the concentration of signals across categories.

Each factor was evaluated for evolution over time, evidence-backed influence, and organizational impact. Interactions between STEEP factors were assessed. Key findings were ranked by relevance to succession planning efforts. Analysis yielded key trends and priorities that

impact succession planning, which were used to identify opportunities and threats facing today’s leaders and organizations. Opportunities and threats were shared as strategic recommendations. STEEP analysis insights were used to develop scenarios for the succession-centric era in leadership, which are present throughout the reports. Another major outcome is a framework that can be used to conceptualize succession planning strategy presented in the accompanying *Blueprints for Success* report.

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