



# The Papal Conclave is SUCCESSION PLANNING IN ITS HIGHEST FORM

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Vito wrote this article 3 years ago. We gave him this summer off, so we are running it now. Ed.

Let's explore the current ongoing papal conclave and the importance of succession planning for key resources that are essential to your organization's business continuity. To clarify, the conclave has been in the process of selecting the Pope (CEO of the church) for centuries since the Roman Catholic Church was established. The conclave is probably the oldest ongoing method for succession planning, as a process for managing the gap arising from the demise of the Pope. Like a business without a president, or CEO, the church without a Pope would face unfavourable risks, impacting operations.

Per Wikipedia, succession planning is a process for identifying and developing internal people with the potential to fill key (business) leadership positions. This has business continuity implications. In my experience, succession planning has always been associated with the organization's top talent, usually at the VP and C level. Current experience tells me that succession planning should be applied to lower management staff – the emerging senior leaders of the future, preparing for advancement or promotion into newer, more challenging roles.

Business Continuity Management is a process that highlights operational risks that can cause damage to the business and takes steps to mitigate those risks. Potential loss of key human resources cannot be overlooked. Any mature BCM practice will find resource planning a foundation block to operate the business when crisis strikes. Regardless of the business, employees (both management and operational staff) are essential to its viability. Today's companies face higher resource demands due to globalization, 7x24 operations, reliance on technology and automation, not to mention demanding customers who want more for less. With increasing burnout of inexperienced staff who are

challenged to keep up and the retirement of the 'Baby Boomers', the resource gap is widening, and the talent gap can strike your organization quickly, leaving you unprepared.

Having appropriate staffing levels when you experience operational disruptions impacting the delivery of products and services is vital to your ability to service and maintain your customers and your bottom line. Consider key positions and staff with unique skill sets when undertaking a Business Impact or Risk Assessment. Essential staff are an organizational strength, but can also be a weakness if they are not available for whatever reason and if there are no replacement strategies if they leave. A good business continuity plan has identifies both primary and back-up resources for all positions within the plan required to meet business deliverables. Succession planning for both day-to-day business and continuity planning can be achieved in four simple steps.

## Step 1: Identify critical positions

Understand which processes/functions are mission-critical, i.e. must be continued at all costs to meet obligations to stakeholders (may be legal, regulatory, customer). This should be an outcome from a BIA. Determine the minimum staff requirement to meet these obligations. In this step it is desirable to assess current and future needs based on multi-year strategic business plans. Note that critical positions may be found at all levels of the organization from the C-level down to the clerical.

## Step 2: Identify position capabilities

For each critical position identified, an inventory of required competencies should be developed. These may



already be part of an existing job description. Metrics for tracking and measuring performance for the position should also be defined. This information is needed when selecting suitable candidates both for everyday appointment and for succession / back-up.

### Step 3: Develop succession planning strategies

Once critical positions are identified, using a BIA approach, and capabilities are inventoried, the next step is to identify candidates who fit the competencies profile. Employ resource identification strategies similar to those used for recruitment. Networking and social media sites are key for identifying candidates seeking career renewal, training and success. In the papal conclave analogy, choosing from among all Cardinals brings focus onto those with known abilities to be considered as potential candidates. This approach has worked for centuries to ensure on-demand papal succession selection with minimal business disruption.

### Step 4: Employee succession action plan

With succession planning strategies in place, the next step is to organize a succession action plan. This can be a simple plan if the competencies and candidates are plentiful, or more detailed if the skill sets and experience needed are more complex. A succession action plan can take many

forms, but a written plan is best for managing the process with clear timelines to meet the goal.

In the Business Continuity Plan identifying and naming positions/individuals, both primary and alternate, is mandatory for successful plan execution when needed. Training and exercising the continuity plan with assigned individuals (also primary and back-up) is of paramount importance for two key reasons:

- To validate the operational viability of the plan to meet the required performance levels
- To provide valuable training for all individuals named in the plan

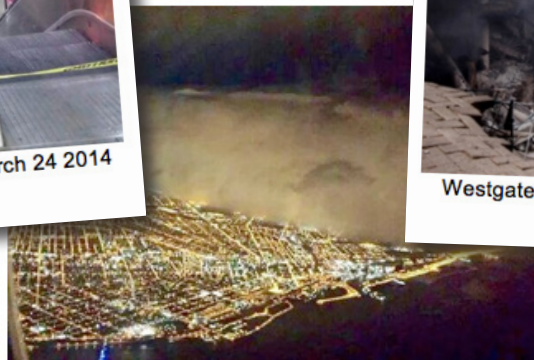
A planned or unexpected unavailability of employees in critical positions can introduce risks and business impacts both operationally and financially. Developing succession plans as part of the business continuity program improves the capability of the business to address staffing risk, including the risk of key employees leaving an organization for reasons having nothing to do with BCP events. Pre-planning allows the organization time to identify key employees and the risk of unavailability and time to develop appropriate strategies to address all scenarios of reduced human resource capacity. This is a fundamental safeguard for the business and a way to improve organizational resiliency and response and recovery capability. ■



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