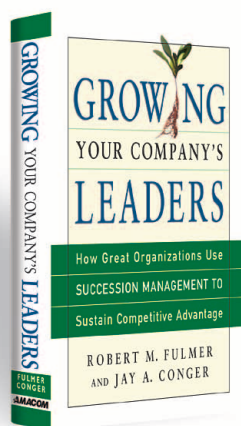




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## How Great Organizations Use Succession Management to Sustain Competitive Advantage

# GROWING YOUR COMPANY'S LEADERS

By Robert M. Fulmer and  
Jay A. Conger

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## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

*For decades, succession management identified replacements for senior executives who, it was assumed, would eventually depart the organization through death or retirement. In many companies, the planning for succession was simply one of several "annual events," without much thought given that the process could be deployed for development and/or retention of talented employees. These days, good workers are often lured away to competing organizations, and companies without strong succession processes are left hanging. Many top managers move on and must be replaced. In Growing Your Company's Leaders, authors Robert Fulmer and Jay Conger explore how the competition for talent is changing, and how several best practice companies have used succession management as a source for strategic advantage.*

## What You'll Learn In This Summary

- ✓ **Why there's renewed interest in succession.** Contemporary succession systems no longer think solely about the replacement of talent; they are also focused on developing the best employees possible. Potential outweighs current performance, and everyone gets involved in the assessment of talent.
- ✓ **Who "owns" succession management?** Best practice companies have three main groups that make succession management possible and successful — owners/champions, process owners, and implementers.
- ✓ **Defining and identifying talent.** What kind of talent does your company need? What does it look like? How can it be best developed and deployed?
- ✓ **Linking succession to development.** Why "rank and yank" employees when your company's future might hinge on a late-blooming superstar?
- ✓ **Measuring and ensuring long-term success.** Successful succession management systems measure their own record of identifying developmental opportunities and filling them with the right people at the right time.

# GROWING YOUR COMPANY'S LEADERS

by Robert M. Fulmer and Jay A. Conger

## — THE COMPLETE SUMMARY

### A New Imperative

Succession management has been traditionally considered a necessary human resources system in most companies, with the purpose of identifying replacements for senior executives who would eventually depart the organization. Few, if any, regarded the practice as being use-

### What Are Best Practices In Succession Management?

“Succession-savvy” corporations each possess several traits that characterize their winning approaches to succession management:

✓ Their succession systems are easy to use.

Winning systems are nonbureaucratic, uncomplicated processes — with a unified approach to ensure consistency and maintain objectivity across business units, organizational levels, and geographic areas.

✓ The best systems are developmentally oriented, rather than simply replacement oriented. The system becomes a proactive vehicle for managers and executives to reflect on the progress of their talent and the opportunities they require for genuine development.

✓ Highly effective systems always actively involve the very top players of the organization. Senior executives view effective succession management as a critical strategic tool for attracting and retaining talented leaders.

#### Spot Gaps in Talent

✓ Best practice succession systems are effective at spotting gaps in talent and identifying important “linchpin” positions — the select set of jobs that are critical to the overall success of the organization.

✓ Succession planning does the job of monitoring the succession process, enabling the company to make certain that the right people are moving into the right jobs at the right time and that gaps are being spotted early.

✓ The most successful systems are built around continual reinvention. Best practice companies continually refine and adjust their systems as they receive feedback, monitor developments in technology, and learn from other leading organizations.

ful for developing or retaining talented individuals in the lower rungs of the organizational hierarchy. It was assumed that top managers were in place for the duration, until an unfortunate circumstance (a health problem, an accident, etc.) removed them from their places.

Most companies possessed an essential but largely unheralded succession management list, identifying an adequate and appropriate pool of replacements, warmed up and ready, should any of the top players in the company leave the field. Such a model of succession management had several fundamental shortcomings. For one, it was focused only on the very top positions of the company and, as a result, the names were chosen at the general manager level.

Secondly, it gave top management few options in the search for the next generation of company leaders. Rather than focus on leadership development, the list merely acted as the ladder on which lower-rung executives could climb if they stayed with the organization long enough. As a participant, you were moved methodically after a certain number of years from one step to the next step. So, while you might prove to be a fast learner and a high performer, you still had to stay within the lock step of the career path.

#### Succession in the Modern World

Today, we are witnessing the impact of an emerging new breed of succession systems. Contemporary systems no longer think solely about the replacement of talent. They are also focused on development. These new systems take a more systemic approach toward the organiza-

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### A New Imperative

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tion's talent and strategy, placing more emphasis on the candidate's potential than on recent performance alone.

Where old systems were characterized by complete confidentiality and secrecy, today's systems actually encourage involvement by individuals who are participants and candidates. Under older systems, few participants knew where they actually stood in terms of their potential for career opportunities ahead.

#### *Why There's Renewed Interest in Succession*

The forces that have renewed interest in succession systems and changed them in dramatic ways are trends that have affected business in the new global economy:

1. Leadership is, and has always been, a relatively scarce commodity within companies. To lose a strong, effective leader is a serious blow to any organization.
2. The leading players in the work forces of today's companies tend to be the knowledge workers — highly intelligent workers who are also highly mobile.
3. Employee “contracts” centered on performance entered the employment picture in the '80s and accelerated in the '90s, destroying the old “lifetime employment for loyalty” contract that had been in place, though often unspoken, since World War II. Companies reward high performers with opportunities for development, not necessarily extended, long-term employment.
4. The Internet has enhanced the mobility of leadership talent, making it easy for employees to find opportunities elsewhere, and for those opportunities to come knocking on their door.
5. Executive recruiters and headhunters today possess greater clout and sophistication. No longer is it “ungentlemanly” to recruit your competitor's best and brightest workers.
6. Nonstop, unpredictable organizational change has caused organizations to quickly identify growing gaps in talent, and emerging needs for new types of talent. ■

### Who ‘Owns’ Succession Management?

Historically, the human resources function has been the champion of succession planning, but for it to have sole responsibility is a mistake. The effectiveness of any succession system depends on a much broader set of owners and sponsors.

#### *The Owner and Champion*

For any organization that wishes to engage in truly effective succession planning, senior-level commitment is absolutely essential — mere verbal support from the

top is not enough. The CEO and his or her executive team must be enthusiastic champions, holding their direct reports accountable for ensuring the reliability of the system in finding, developing and retaining top talent. These champions must truly believe that talent is a corporate-wide resource, not the property of a particular function or division. Without this level of critical support from the very top, succession management can end up a more mechanical process with “hit or miss” results.

Executive-level buy-in is critical for the financial support of a succession effort, as well as to affirm genuine commitment to the process for all employees. Top-level support ensures a much tighter link to the organization's overall business strategy and to corporate values.

#### *The Process Owners*

It is not, however, realistic or desirable for CEOs to be solely responsible for the development of talent and leadership. Senior human resources leaders also play a role, perhaps the most extensive ownership role in the succession process. Indeed, HR makes the process behind succession management work, integrating its overall leadership development process into the structure of the succession management process in delivering successful outcomes.

Alignment of succession planning and leadership development is achieved far more easily when the two report to a common organizational entity, such as a corporate HR function. With the focus of a new generation of succession systems on development, this integration is a particularly critical task.

#### *The Implementers*

As the emphasis has shifted from a “replacement” process to a developmental one, more and more succession processes reach deeper into organizations than ever before. Even though top-level buy-in is critical to the success of a succession management system, it is often left to the management level(s) below the executive level to effectively implement succession processes.

Sonoco Products Company, for example, addresses succession planning at the plant manager, area manager, and general manager levels. Each level is addressed in a separate meeting. Each meeting, in turn, is guided by five key principles:

- **Build from the bottom up.** When you start succession planning at the bottom of an organization and work upward, the data builds on itself, which is helpful when examining key issues across the organization.
- **Involve those who are closest.** Those who observe the individual being evaluated on a daily basis are invited to the meeting.
- **Use performance data.** Decisions should be made using the performance management documents of those

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### Who 'Owns' Succession Management?

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being evaluated. Other data should be taken into account as well, including education, work history, and interactions with management.

- **Use consensus decision making.** Decision making should involve a well-deliberated consensus.

- **Time investment is a requirement.** Human resources specialists and executives must be willing to commit significant time to the succession effort. The system should be designed for efficiency and to provide reasonable returns on the time investment. ■

For Additional Information on an example of a succession champion, go to: <http://my.summary.com>

### Defining and Identifying Talent

At the foundation of succession management is the definition and identification of talent — what it looks like, who has it, who needs to develop it, and how it can be best developed. The challenge in these endeavors is defining what the term “talent” means in light of a company’s needs, as well as how to assess that talent. Historically, performance outcomes were the simplest way to determine who had talent and who did not — those with the best current performance were deemed to be talented.

Time and experience, however, have taught organizations that the positions employees might attain in the future can require talents those employees simply do not possess. As a result, companies also look to assess a person’s potential for advancement and development. One area of particular interest to most organizations is leadership; as a result, more and more companies factor leadership competencies into their assessments.

Alignment between competency models, corporate performance objectives, and employees is a key characteristic of effectiveness in a succession management process.

#### Competency Models

We associate the term “competencies” with the behaviors and skills necessary for success in a particular role. These competencies might include corporate values or learning capability, as well as such “derailment behaviors” as arrogance or lack of integrity. Such tools as 360-degree feedback cemented the position of competency models as essential to the development and assessment field.

Companies employing competency models as the foundation of their succession management process have found they provide a variety of benefits, including:

### How Companies Handle Competency

Different companies look for distinct competencies from their employees, and assess them accordingly. Here are the core competencies of several best practice organizations:

#### Dow Chemical (Global Competencies)

- ✓ Initiative
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Interpersonal effectiveness
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Learning
- ✓ Market focus
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Value creation

Dow also uses a second set of competencies, specific to various functions in the organization.

#### Eli Lilly and Company (Leadership Behaviors)

- ✓ Model the values
- ✓ Create external focus
- ✓ Anticipate change and prepare for the future
- ✓ Implement with quality, speed and value
- ✓ Achieve results with people
- ✓ Evaluate and act
- ✓ Share key learning

#### PanCanadian (Leadership Competencies)

- ✓ Visionary
- ✓ Effective communication
- ✓ Decisiveness and follow-through
- ✓ Business acumen
- ✓ People/team management
- ✓ Innovation
- ✓ Change management

- Convey clear expectations for roles and levels of performance.
- Provide more valid and uniform corporate planning data.
- Link development activities to organizational goals.
- Motivate employees to improve by providing specific guidelines for professional development.
- Protect the morale of supervisors and subordinates alike by quantifying performance management.
- Streamline HR activities.
- Provide a common framework and language for discussing how to implement and communicate key talent and leadership development strategies.
- Set expectations for current senior leaders and/or serve as development targets for those in the organization who aspire to become senior leaders in the future.

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### Defining and Identifying Talent

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Best practice organizations use a variety of tools and techniques for identifying future talent and leadership potential. In most cases, the identification process is facilitated by dedicated members of the human resources organization working in partnership with executives doing the actual assessments. Tools they use include performance management results and multi-rater feedback, such as 360-degree feedback, which ensures that the multiple views of bosses, subordinates and peers are included in assessments and compared across a set of identical competency dimensions. Inclusion of peers in the process provides companies with a more complete view of an employee's leadership potential.

#### ***Focusing Efforts on 'Mission-Critical' Positions***

One of the vital roles of succession management is to help the organization understand what its critical management positions are. Companies today are more conscious of the fact that roles up and down the hierarchy (not just upper-level ones) can be considered "mission-critical," or absolutely essential to the organization's success, typically difficult to fill, and rarely stand-alone. There are several ways to determine the mission-criticality of a position:

- Determine the consequences should the position be vacated. If critical decisions will go unmade, customer needs will go unmet, or operations will function poorly, then it is likely a mission-critical role.
- Determine the uniqueness of a function to the organization's mission and the effectiveness of the operation if the person were to leave. These criteria determine the magnitude and importance of both the role and the person currently filling the role.
- Canvas executive teams to determine the positions under their responsibility that, if suddenly rendered vacant, would negatively affect the organization's ability to achieve results.
- Look at the company's history and identify times when the departure of an individual in a particular role resulted in serious organizational problems
- Engage in "network charting" — tracing recent major decisions back to the major contributors to those decisions. This yields insights about linchpin roles and the individuals in them.

Grouping high-potential employees into talent pools has proven to be an effective method for ensuring that the right person is available when a position opens up. The logic behind this is simply a recognition that more detailed attention can be focused on a subset of managers, rather than attempting to include everyone of a basic standard. Moreover, there is evidence that greater

returns are achieved by providing special opportunities for individuals who have the capability for greatest growth from the special developmental opportunities provided for them. ■

### Linking Succession To Development

The emphasis many companies place on recruiting top talent away from competitors is still a source of competitive advantage, but we can learn a lesson from the excesses of some firms, most notably in the way some newly hired employees were immediately placed on the fast track. As with anything else, even the best intentions of recruiting can be pushed too far.

There is a right way and a wrong way to approach succession management. Some organizations divide employees into performance groups. Top performers are put on the fast track, the middle group is encouraged toward future growth, and the bottom level of performers is pressured to "shape up or ship out." This process is called "differentiation and affirmation," but has a more colorful, decidedly truthful moniker — "rank and yank."

#### ***Why 'Rank and Yank' Does Not Work***

This approach to succession management is not effective in establishing long-term stability and productivity within a corporation for a number of reasons, many of which are elucidated in a Corporate Leadership Council survey on leadership bench strength and development strategies:

- Companies with above-average leadership bench strength enjoy above-average revenue growth, relative to their industry peers.
- Organizations that successfully reallocate their development resources to meet leaders' needs can measurably improve the strength of their leadership bench.
- Many organizations struggle to implement the most important leadership development programs effectively and would benefit by reallocating their development resources to meet leaders' needs.
- Feedback and relationship programs (such as coaching and mentoring) are the most effective leadership development strategies.
- Many leadership teams are weakest in the skill area that matters most, leading companies to look for solutions to the leadership development challenge.
- More than 8,000 leaders report that people management skills are the most important attributes of effective leadership, outranking strategic management, personal characteristics, and day-to-day business management.

Corporations clearly benefit quantitatively when they

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### Linking Succession to Development

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allocate their resources to partner with their employees, to help them gain the skills they require to become effective managers. The burden is not placed on the employee to “shape up or ship out.” That survival-of-the-fittest approach ignores the fundamental question of where tomorrow’s leaders are coming from.

The answer to that question is the same as it has always been — from inside the company. Talent is all around you; it manifests itself differently in different people, both in the form of capabilities and in the time it takes to mature into leadership positions. Leaders emerge in sometimes subtle ways, and at their own pace, perhaps only within a limited, yet crucial, sphere.

#### *Developmental Activities*

Developmental activities do not dramatically differ from one best practice organization to the next. In every case, these companies invest the majority of their time and resources on top-tier (executive) talent. There are four major common factors in how best practice organizations engage their current and future leaders in developmental activities:

- They believe that the most important developmental activity is job assignments or work experience, and they spend considerable time balancing the corporation’s need to fill vacant positions with assignments that will help key people grow and develop their potential.
- They use a variety of developmental activities, including mentoring, coaching, job rotation, traditional educational programs, and formalized feedback processes.
- They try new approaches to development, including special assignments, action learning, and Web-based educational activities.
- They find that computer-based technology has expanded their ability to effectively monitor developmental activities.

#### *Internal Leadership and Executive Education*

The best practice organizations all have formal internal programs in place that focus on the further development of their top-tier executives. Dell Computer, for example, focuses most of its development activities on the global corporate talent pool that houses its top talent, identifying its best and brightest, and holding business unit leaders accountable for carrying out whatever developmental actions are designated for those future stars.

Most best practice companies agree that the vast majority of real learning employees encounter takes place on the job. Consequently, most of these companies have a special assignments or action learning program in place. One of the most common and effective

### Dow Chemical Puts Premium On Performance

Dow Chemical employees are expected to engage in three performance activities: annual goals, performance reviews/discussions, and employee development discussions resulting in development plans.

Two tools are offered that involve input from multiple sources. The first is **360-degree development feedback**, which is based on the competency profile of the individual. This is for development purposes and is owned by the employee, who is encouraged to share the results and action plans with his or her supervisor.

The second tool is **performance excellence feedback**, which is based on the individual’s goals. This is for performance feedback and is owned by both the employee and the supervisor.

approaches is a task force assignment based on real and significant issues confronting the organization.

High-potential employees at Bank of America are assigned a specific enterprise topic to study and present findings to senior leaders. The company’s Six-Sigma efforts also help place these top performers on highly quantifiable and large-impact projects.

Best practice organizations all participate in mentoring and coaching programs, but typically on an informal basis. Formal coaching is usually reserved for top executive high potentials and is commonly outsourced.

#### *External University Courses*

Best practice organizations also use a mix of internal and external university-based education and development courses. PanCanadian, for example, offers an internal M.B.A. program, called the Management Forum, whose purpose is to provide management education by bringing best practices to participants, aligning management competencies with strategic direction to meet current and future needs.

With the vast and accessible training opportunities available through the Web, best practice organizations are making a wide array of courses available to their employees online. A good example is Dow Chemical, which currently has 60 tools and classes available online in its internal development program, including programs on ethics, Six Sigma, and Root Learning Maps that explain strategy, economic profit, etc.

More and more emphasis is being put on career planning and individual profiling as it relates to succession management. Individual development plans are used by all best practice organizations. These companies look

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### Linking Succession to Development

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closely at employees' career preferences and try to match their interests and career development to a future job within the company. Employee career preferences can influence the development process, and employee preferences are honored where possible.

Performance management and 360-degree feedback are linked throughout the succession management process and are the main tools used by best practice organizations to place employees into development plans. The tools are tied together and based on core and leadership competencies. Most of the organizations polled also employ the results of 360-degree feedback for development purposes. ■

For Additional Information on a job assignment example, go to:  
<http://my.summary.com>

### Measuring and Assuring Long-Term Success

Developing leadership talent is a long-term investment. The effectiveness of today's systems is determined by their ability to move talented individuals at an appropriate pace into the right development opportunities over the span of their careers. Tracking the progress

#### Eli Lilly's Mentoring Goals

The goals of the mentoring program at Eli Lilly and Company are to do the following:

- ✓ Facilitate short- and long-term business performance by developing the executive talent pool, with emphasis on minorities, females and diversity.
- ✓ Strengthen the relational and learning skills of mentors and mentees.
- ✓ Develop effective role models for mentoring among senior executives.
- ✓ Further develop the competencies of mentees, leading to an understanding of organizational culture, personal development, job satisfaction, and new career opportunities.
- ✓ Create expectations for mentoring throughout the organization.
- ✓ Identify general principles from which a culture supportive of mentoring can be built.

Since its launch in 1998, the program has succeeded with its target audience. However, a limited number of mentors has caused the formalized program to be run rather sporadically, although informal mentoring occurs more frequently.

of individual participants is a necessary dimension of a best practice succession process. The most successful systems must also measure their own record at identifying developmental opportunities, filling them with the right people at the right time, and spotting looming shortages or gaps in both talent and developmental positions, rectifying these gaps quickly.

Best practice organizations employ a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods of measurement and assessment, to ensure that desired outcomes are achieved and to provide the broadest and most fine-grained range of perspectives on the system's real effectiveness. The long-term success of these processes is the product of the owners' willingness to constantly revisit and redesign the systems themselves. Continuous improvement in both process and content is required for true success.

#### What Is Measured?

The most frequently used quantitative measurements of system effectiveness are the organization's ability to fill key jobs with internal candidates, rather than outside hires; ethnic and gender diversity in promotions; retention/attrition rates; and positive job evaluations following promotion.

Qualitative assessments tend to be based on issues such as the participants' transition experience into their new role, the quality of their preparation beforehand, reasons for attrition, and qualities of bosses in developmental assignments.

#### Best Practices: Metrics

**Sonoco Products Company** does not perform any statistical analysis on its succession planning process. Instead, its HR department supports a functional measure of the system, to determine whether candidates are being placed in appropriate open positions, and whether they are successful in those positions. When the company implemented its process, divisions reported a 75 percent savings in time, compared to time spent in previous years. In addition, Sonoco has an 80 to 90 percent success rate in performance and promotability.

One of the primary metrics reviewed by **Dell Computer** is bench strength. Each business unit is responsible for reporting the percentage of positions with a current successor and with identified successors.

The succession planning process at **Bank of America** is measured in several ways:

- **Measuring performance goals.** The bank tracks whether it is achieving its talent goals and whether it is positioned to do so in the future.
- **"Ready now" replacements.** Bank of America tracks and monitors the number of "ready now" replacement candidates for the company's top 50 jobs.

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### Measuring and Assuring Long-Term Success

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● **Diversity.** Given the changing demographics of the bank's customer base, both now and in the future, it is imperative for Bank of America to have the right diversity mix in its leadership ranks to make sure they mirror and even outpace customer demographics.

#### *Lessons for Long-Term Success*

Despite the innovative processes exhibited by best practice organizations, they all have faced challenges in instituting the succession planning process and have learned lessons along the way. In addition to the lessons learned, they have focused on the continuous improvement of their approaches.

The elements that contribute to success at **Eli Lilly and Company** include making the succession management process mandatory, overcommunicating to the appropriate people, strong CEO and senior management involvement, integration with other HR processes, and a drive to make the process and tools as simple and understandable as possible. Two recommendations for success offered by Eli Lilly are to implement one single, consistent and simple process, and one reliable technology solution (a database that works) for the enterprise.

**Sonoco Products Company** exhibits the following critical elements for a successful succession planning system:

- Senior management supports and uses the process, making it more than just an exercise.
- The process is simple and practical to use.
- The design solves the organization's succession planning needs.
- There is serious commitment on management's part to apply the results.

#### *Other Lessons for Success*

While the succession management process differs from one organization to another, there are certain characteristics of an effective program that are universal:

● **Smooth transitions.** Having someone to step into an important vacancy is a critical measure of the effectiveness of succession management. However, helping that person transition in a positive manner with all the necessary skills and knowledge is as important and often more challenging to execute.

● **The "right" developmental assignments.** A successful process includes job assignments that properly prepare candidates for their new positions, as compared to a sink-or-swim approach.

● **Meaningful appraisals and feedback.** Objective assessments are essential in order for management to specify what is required for a successful promotion.

● **Appropriate selection criteria.** A successful succession management system is dependent on the development of competencies for each job, giving everyone involved a clear picture of the skills, values, behavior and attitudes required to succeed.

● **A range of good choices.** A working succession system results in having more than one good person available for a key job. Real success requires choices between two or more qualified people. ■

For Additional Information on diversity and succession planning at PanCanadian, go to: <http://mg.summary.com>

## Promising Trends in Succession Management

There are several critical trends that will further strengthen the transformation of succession management from a replacement tool to a development and leadership capability tool, ensuring systems and processes are responsive and less bureaucratic.

Succession planning will continue to become more integrated into the everyday life of organizations, moving from a formal "annual event" to become a part of the daily fabric of doing business. Technology will integrate succession processes into the desktop computers of managers. A single icon will grant immediate and widespread access to succession planning information.

All of the components of human resources management are being looked at, appropriately, as fully integrated, aligned systems, rather than as a set of disconnected activities. Gone is the "silo" mentality that kept HR from other business units — the hyper-competition of the contemporary world makes such an approach outdated and dangerous to the bottom line.

#### *Technology Can Improve Planning*

To increase access to and use of succession planning, best practice organizations continue to use technology as a critical facilitator of the process. Web-based succession planning systems enable companies to run their process online and ensure continuous access to data. Employees can then take ownership of their own development plans through their own desktops.

While subjectivity will always be part of candidate assessment, great progress has been made toward more objective assessments, including 360-degree feedback. As its use expands, we will witness a broader array of raters, including administrative staff, support staff, internal and external customers, etc. Best practice organizations will increase their efforts at training line managers and executives to perform more objective assessments when providing 360-degree feedback. ■