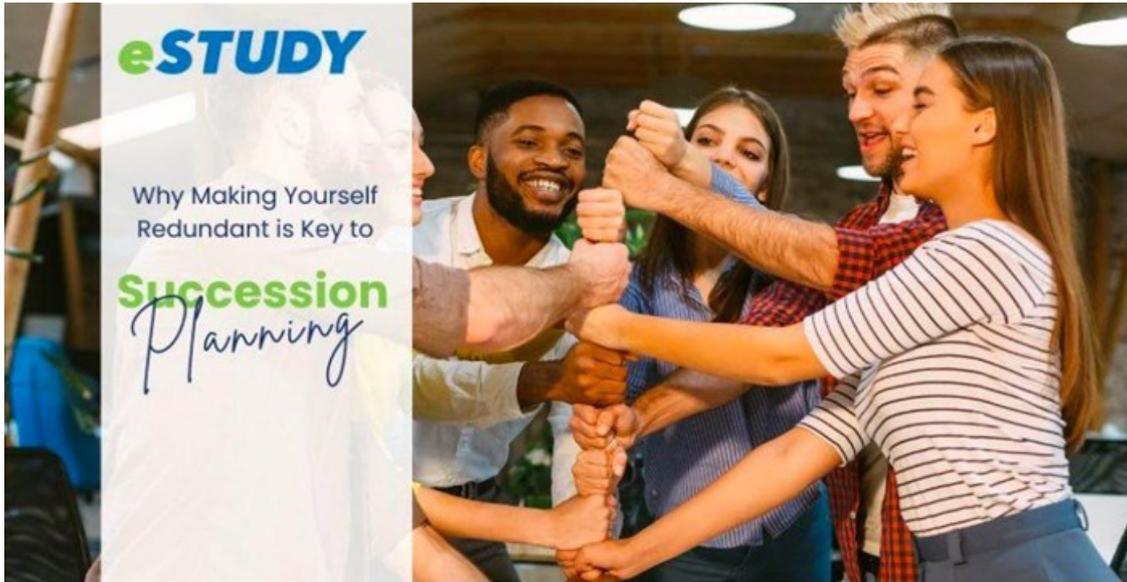


Why making yourself redundant is key to succession planning

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All effective leaders aim to make themselves redundant. They work towards building a team, department or business that no longer needs them. And while this may seem a strange ambition for those of us who like being in the limelight, making ourselves redundant enables us to leave a legacy of empowered people and move on to the next opportunity for growth.



Not convinced? Let's dig a bit deeper.

What happens if leaders *don't* become redundant? The leader stagnates

To grow as people and as leaders, we need to face new challenges. Doing the same thing day in and day out doesn't facilitate growth, and neither does being the 'smartest' person in the room or 'knowing it all'.

“ If your personal tagline might as well be “Been there, done that, got the T-shirt,” you're probably stuck in a rut. ”

You lose the good ones

Although a small number of employees might be prepared to while away their time in a job that's going nowhere, the vast majority of people are ambitious. Yes, they want to earn more, but they also want to have more say in decisions; they want to take more responsibility; they want to become an expert in their field. They want to move into the limelight!

If the leaders in your business are clutching onto their chairs refusing to move, there'll be nowhere for employees to grow to. And the chances are that the really great employees – those who want to make a difference in the business they work for – will seek greener pastures elsewhere.

The business stagnates

Stability in leadership is critical to business success, but so is new blood. If there's a high turnaround in your leadership team you have a serious problem, but if your leadership team stays the same year after year, you're in just as much

trouble.

The business environment is volatile, and what worked 10 or even five years ago might not work today. Add to this digital disruption, new technologies that are exploding onto the market every day, and consumers who are now buying through different channels and increasingly supporting 'green' businesses.

Succeeding in this environment requires input from and collaboration with a diverse range of people – including those whose ideas (and ideals) haven't been grinded down into 'the way we do things around here' through endless management meetings and strategy documents that seldom translate into reality.

“ To keep moving and growing, businesses need mavericks – people who are independent-minded and often unorthodox – and there's a good chance that these people will be outside the boardroom. ”

Knowledge and skills waste away

That being said, most boardrooms aren't filled with bright-eyed 20-somethings who are looking to turn everything upside down, and there's a good reason for this: There's simply no substitute for experience.

Those who've been around the block have made (and learnt from) mistakes. They've weathered storms. They know what success looks and feels like. They understand the complexity and inner workings of the business and its market. And this insight – what we call 'institutional knowledge' – can't be learnt in a book or YouTube video, and it can't be fully captured in a business policy or procedure.

If leaders in your business aren't working to make themselves redundant, they're likely to hold onto their institutional knowledge rather than sharing it with others – and then take it with them the day they leave. The business loses invaluable knowledge and skills, and the leader loses the opportunity to leave a legacy.

Practical tips for promoting redundancy

If you're an HR Professional you'll know that succession planning should be incorporated into your individual development plans (IDPs), and you can learn more about how to do this through our [recent article](#).

“ But succession planning requires more than IDPs – it needs to be woven into the very fabric of the business and become a defining characteristic of your organisational culture. ”

So, what can you do to promote succession planning and leadership redundancy in your business?

1. Recognise that everyone is a leader

When businesses talk about 'succession planning' the focus is usually on management or other critical positions, but if you've read the preceding section of this article, you'll know that developing a growth path is important for all employees – and for the business as a whole.

While your receptionist or payroll administrator may never ultimately sit on your Exco (although stranger things have happened) there's no denying that they have unique insights into their role based on their experience. They are leaders to others who aspire to their role in the organisation, and their experience should be shared so it becomes part of the business's institutional knowledge.

“ All employees are part of the complex ecosystem that makes a business work. And if you believe that employees in certain roles are easily replaceable, the chances are that your business is hemorrhaging knowledge, skills, and experience. ”

2. Encourage and facilitate knowledge and skills sharing

The sharing of knowledge and skills should be actively encouraged and facilitated in the business. Leaders should lead by example by engaging in both formal and informal mentoring and coaching activities, but you can also consider the following:

- **Work shadowing**

When an employee closely observes another employee performing their role, this provides an opportunity for learning, sharing and reflection.

The performing employee may discover new insights into their work as a result of explaining it to someone else. On the other hand, the observing employee may develop a new career ambition – or at the very least an appreciation for the complexity of the business ecosystem.

- **Knowledge-sharing opportunities**

Knowledge-sharing opportunities – both formal and informal – can contribute to boosting and protecting institutional knowledge.

- What about a Department Career Day once a month, where employees are invited to have their tea break with employees of a specific department in the business?
- Or a Teams channel where employees can share a best practice or time-saving tip they've discovered?
- Or a cross-functional Book Club where employees select a business book and then meet to discuss what they've learnt?

The HR department and leadership team should actively create and promote such opportunities.

3. Acknowledge and reward redundancy

Employees need to be acknowledged and rewarded for their ability to empower others. They need to have the confidence to say, “I no longer need to do this task alone” or “She now does this better than me!”. These are the employees who are truly leading others and contributing to business sustainability.

Rewards for redundancy could include formal recognition as a business leader (such as an award or certificate), access to training and development opportunities, flexible work arrangements, and finally promotion.

“ In fact, a demonstrated ability to empower others could be a requirement for promotion to all positions in the business. ”

Closing thoughts

Shifting focus to redundancy will require significant change management, since many employees (leaders included) believe that knowledge is power. In other words, they withhold what they know because they fear being replaced. But replacement and redundancy aren't the same thing.

A leader who is replaced is typically replaced by another individual who is deemed to be a better fit for the role. A leader who has become redundant:

- Has empowered others to take on more responsibility and leadership roles.
- Has built a team that can function without them, ensuring that the business will continue to thrive even if they're no longer there.
- Has created a legacy of people who will continue to get things done long after they have moved on.
- Has freed up their time to focus on bigger challenges and opportunities.

While this article has not focused specifically on IDPs, the career path laid out in the employee's IDP should go a long way to setting minds and hearts at ease – even if I become redundant in my current role, the business and I have already planned for my next step up the career ladder.

For those employees who are nearing the end of their careers, or who have achieved their personal career goals, opportunities to coach, mentor, and share their skills and knowledge will help them crystallise their legacy and enjoy recognition for what they've learnt and achieved.

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