



# Leader Succession the MU Way

By Matthew Owens

If you filled a room with 100 CEOs and asked – is leader succession a top 10 priority – a sea of hands would be raised. Ask how many believe their organisations address this topic effectively, the sea would instantly be reduced to a pond. Increasingly unpredictable macroeconomic, geopolitical, and sociological conditions inevitably make predicting the future in any business context extraordinarily difficult. However, the biggest contributing factors to this persistent failure to manage this universal business risk tend to be closer to home. They include – inadequate planning, lack of investment, investment in the wrong things, ineffective leader development processes, and above all else – the lack of a systematic, precisely tailored evaluation of the capabilities needed to deliver future success. Our research and experience at MU unequivocally indicate, the most common mistake made when planning leader succession is a failure to grasp a single fundamental truth: **every leadership role is unique.**

Why can we make this assertion with such confidence? Because, for more than 50 years, MU has pioneered an unrivalled science-based approach to leader succession and selection. We can prove we get it right more than 90% of the time. Our approach builds on this simple but critical truth: no two leadership roles are the same. The business context and client situation is always unique, and the capabilities needed to deliver future success are not generic. To reliably predict future success in any leadership role, the systematic evaluation of the client business context and situation must be the starting point. Every future leader has potential, but potential for what? Most leader succession strategies fail to address this question effectively. Without a robust, systematic approach, enabling a reliable evaluation of the capabilities needed, the chances of selecting the right future leader are reduced to a coin flip.

**MU Experts provide a reliable alternative to leader succession planning. Our expert advice, based on MU Leader Selection Science®, leads to improved performance and diversity of Leaders.**

At MU, our approach to leader succession is tailored to reflect the unique client context and situation. Our analysis and methodology is based on the latest scientific research. Our Experts apply robust science-based methods and tools designed specifically for the selection of future leaders in a specific business context. Our methodology substantially mitigates the unwanted consequences of inconsistent processes, and the errors that inevitably occur because of cognitive bias. **In short, the MU approach is science-based and precisely tailored. Diverse leadership is also assured because only the criteria most relevant to future success are considered when making bench strength for specific future leadership roles. Only the right candidates are included in MU Leadership Development Programmes.**

## The MU approach to leader succession involves the following critical steps:

- 1. MU Predictive Analysis:** Every MU Expert uses the same systematic approach and method for analysing the client's unique business context and situation. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders are conducted in order to gather relevant data associated with the client's market, result expectations, strategy, organisational structure and people capability requirements.
- 2. The MU Success Profile:** Perhaps the most important step in any leader succession process, and probably the one most often neglected. MU Experts build a unique MU Success Profile for every assignment using the data gathered in Step 1. In every case, the same logic is applied:
  - a. Specify the relevant success criteria:** specify the results expected short-term (year 1 & 2) and longer-term (year 3 and beyond), the contribution expected in terms of inter-personal relationships (on an individual and organisational level), and the potential for further development (in the role and beyond the role).
  - b. Identify relevant context and situation characteristics:** specify the characteristics relevant to success across the same 4 dimensions – business context, functional context, change context, and adaptability need.
  - c. Specify the key tasks and responsibilities:** specify the tasks and responsibilities most critical to success in the unique client business context and situation.
  - d. Specify the unique capabilities needed:** the 4 most relevant capabilities needed to deliver the desired short and long-term results in the unique context are specified, together with the 4 most relevant capabilities needed to perform the key tasks and responsibilities in the unique client context.
- 3. The MU Leadership Assessment:** each future Leader is evaluated against the same future need specified in the unique MU Success Profile. The MU Expert uses the same science-based method and tools when executing this objective, consistent and systematic capability evaluation. Relevant gaps in capability are identified. An accurate and reliable evaluation of the future leader talent pool is presented in relation to the specific leadership role in scope.
- 4. MU Facilitated Leader Development Planning:** each future leader is given the support they need to use the outcomes from their MU Leadership Assessment to build a bespoke Personal Development Plane that reflects their preferred way of learning, and the future needs of the business.

Only Boards and CEOs who invest in a systematic, science-based approach to leader succession, can be confident they are effectively future proofing their businesses from a leadership perspective.



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