Inside the C-Suite: Top CHROs on Dynamic Leadership Talent Strategy

Learn how to future-proof your leadership pipeline

In a time of relentless change and rising expectations, future-proofing your leadership pipeline is more critical than ever. At this year’s PEER 150 Regional Dinner in Minneapolis, top CHROs shared candid insights on building dynamic leadership talent and succession strategies that meet the evolving demands of CEOs and Boards. Hosted by MDA Leadership, the panel explored how organizations can identify and develop future-fit leaders, create agile plans that adapt to shifting scenarios, and strengthen confidence with key stakeholders.

The Panel

Becca Hagen
Vice President, Human Resources
Securian Financial

Heidi Grange
Chief People Officer
Room & Board

Host Kevin Louiselle
EVP and Partner
MDA Leadership

Key Takeaways & Best Practices

New business challenges and opportunities require accelerated leadership.

Both panelists described navigating massive forces of change—macroeconomics, portfolio shifts, and the impact of technology and AI—that create tremendous uncertainty.

To drive strategic growth, Heidi spoke to the importance of creating an environment of continuous improvement, which requires an agile leadership mindset as well as individual accountability. Advances may come through new technology, system investments, innovative processes, or efficiencies gained.

Becca pointed out that leaders must first learn to lead themselves through disruption before guiding their teams. “When change comes at you from every direction, the first challenge for any leader is to find your own footing. Only then can you guide your team through uncertainty with confidence and clarity.”

Best practices:

- **Prepare leaders** to manage ambiguity and rapid change
- **Foster a culture of transparency** and candid feedback
- **Equip leaders** to support teams through uncertainty

“Succession planning isn’t just a board mandate; it’s become a priority for our executive team at every level. We’re now asking, ‘Where are our pinch points?’ What are the critical roles we need to plan for?”

– **Becca Hagen,** *Vice President, Human Resources*, Securian Financial

CEOs and Boards are driving top leadership priorities.

Succession planning is top-of-mind for CEOs and Boards, especially with highly tenured workforces and looming retirements. The focus is on protecting culture while planning for future leadership needs.

Securian Financial’s practical approach to managing risk became a powerful catalyst for change. Acknowledging the need to be prepared drove the organization to get serious about succession—accelerating plans, placing strategic bets on emerging talent, and building momentum that has proven the value of proactive leadership planning.

“Succession planning isn’t just a board mandate; it’s become a priority for our executive team at every level,” Becca explained. “We’re now asking, ‘Where are our pinch points? Where are the critical roles we need to plan for?’” This shift reflects a deeper commitment to building a resilient leadership pipeline and ensuring the organization is ready for whatever comes next.

Heidi added that in her experience with succession, “the goal isn’t just to fill roles; it’s to safeguard a company’s unique culture and values through every leadership transition. You want to build leaders for the future, while protecting what makes your culture so special.”

At Securian Financial, the Board has made culture a central focus, recognizing that the health of the organization depends on more than just strategy—it hinges on the everyday actions of its leaders. In the face of significant change and challenging engagement scores, leaders have become the key to unlocking cultural transformation.

By investing in leadership at every level and empowering leaders to build trust and engagement within their teams, Securian is seeing the positive impact ripple across the enterprise. As Becca shared, “Our leaders are the essential element in driving culture change—when we invest in them, we lift the entire organization.”

Best practices:

- **Anticipate retirements**—even unplanned ones
- **Accelerate succession planning** beyond top levels
- **Identify critical roles** and plan for pinch points
- **Invest in leadership development** to drive culture and lift engagement

Most organizations can strengthen their succession strategies.

When asked about their succession strategies, most organizations say they are on a journey to advance their approach.

At Securian Financial, the path to building a robust succession strategy has been one of honest reflection and steady progress. When Becca joined the organization, she found succession planning rooted in gut instinct rather than consistent criteria—a challenge she and her team tackled head-on.

By prioritizing clarity around what "high potential" truly means and fostering candid, well-rounded conversations among the executive team, Securian began to shift its culture. "Our leaders will not know there's a gap—or be able to grow—if they're not hearing the truth," Becca emphasized. Through transparency, calibration, and a commitment to actionable feedback, the organization is creating a flywheel of development—one that's strengthening leadership at every level and laying the groundwork for lasting success.

MDA finds that succession planning is now a focus for many organizations—one rooted in defining what truly matters in leadership. As Kevin described, the journey begins with clarifying the attributes and capabilities that will shape the next generation of leaders, ensuring they reflect the company's choices about how it will compete and grow.

"Once we validate your leadership profile, we can look at readiness of potential successors and focus on development," he said. By engaging leaders in thoughtful dialogue and calibrating expectations at the C-level, organizations can lay the groundwork for a succession strategy that honors its culture while preparing for the future.

Best practices:

- **Define what "high potential" means** and calibrate as a team
- **Leverage assessment** as an objective way to understand leaders' performance, potential, and readiness for next-level roles
- **Ensure talent reviews** include well-rounded perspectives on leaders backed by data
- **Encourage constructive feedback** to help leaders understand strengths, close gaps, and grow

"Becoming a change-resilient organization led by change-ready humans is a competitive advantage."

- **Becca Hagen,** *Vice President, Human Resources*, Securian Financial

Reimagine leadership roles and career paths for future generations.

The desire to step into leadership is shifting, especially among younger generations. Both Becca and Heidi spoke candidly about how Gen Z and early-career professionals are reimagining what it means to lead—often questioning whether management roles align with their personal values and aspirations. "I have two Gen Z children who've told me, 'I don't want a job like yours. I have no interest in taking work home,'" Becca shared, highlighting a growing preference for balance and meaningful work over traditional advancement.

Heidi echoed this sentiment, noting that "where there is an aspiration to move up, there are questions about what does this look like? Is there flexibility? Can I do things a little bit differently? Am I going to be empowered to lead? What kind of impact am I going to make? There's a lot more focus on sustainability, impact, and meaningful work." This generational shift is prompting organizations to reexamine their leadership pathways and create roles that resonate with the evolving expectations of tomorrow's leaders.

Best practices:

- **Rethink leadership roles** and career paths
- **Engage future leaders** in shaping their own journeys
- **Determine the experiences** that will be most transformative for new leaders and provide them ahead of time
- **Address the "why"** behind leadership aspirations to identify those wishing to make a positive impact on others

Measure the quality and depth of your leadership pipeline.

Measuring the strength of their leadership pipeline is an ongoing journey for many organizations. As Becca explained, the process begins with having succession plans in place for key roles, but true progress is seen when those plans are put into action—when transitions happen smoothly and development plans are followed through. "The real value comes when we see our succession plans enacted and our leaders stepping confidently into new roles."

Heidi echoed this approach, emphasizing the importance of starting with a clear vision for future leadership and working backward to identify milestones and experiences that prepare internal candidates for success. By building playbooks for critical transitions and focusing on readiness, both organizations are committed to ensuring the right people are in the right roles—ready to lead with impact and continuity.

Best practices:

- **Ensure plans are in place** for critical roles
- **Capture institutional knowledge** and build playbooks for key transitions
- **Identify milestones** rising mid-level and senior executives need to reach prior to advancement
- **Track follow through** on development plans, number of ready-now/ready-soon leaders in place, and utilization of succession plans when roles are vacated

Prepare leaders for rapidly changing conditions and scenarios.

As industries transform at breakneck speed, agility has become the hallmark of effective leadership. The presenters emphasized the importance of cultivating leaders who are not just skilled at managing change, but who thrive in it. Kevin shared, "Change agility is an essential skill for continued leadership success. Organizations that excel at managing change effectively align their teams around new strategies in response to critical challenges or opportunities."

At Securian Financial, Becca described how agility is now embedded into leader selection, expectations, and development, with clear criteria and ongoing support to help leaders grow more confident in navigating uncertainty. "Becoming a change-resilient organization led by change-ready humans is a competitive advantage," Becca shared. By investing in change leadership coaching and development, both organizations are positioning their leaders—and their businesses—to succeed no matter what the future holds.

Best practices:

- **Make change leadership** a core expectation
- **Foster cross-functional leadership circles** for peer support
- **Offer executive coaching** to help leaders navigate dynamic situations and build resilience
- **Provide leadership development** with experiential learning and simulations to help leaders practice being agile and leading change in a safe space

Conclusion

Dynamic leadership talent strategies are the foundation for long-term success. By aligning leadership development with business strategy, embracing agility, and cultivating a culture of growth, organizations can build resilient pipelines ready to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges.

MDA's Succession Maturity Audit™

A breakthrough tool to elevate your succession strategy

MDA Leadership is proud to introduce the Succession Maturity Audit—a cutting-edge assessment built on our proprietary Dynamic Succession Framework. This powerful tool gives HR leaders a structured, data-driven view of their organization's succession planning practices, revealing both strengths and constraints across five critical pillars.

As part of this year's PEER 150 event, MDA invited participants to complete the audit in advance. Twenty-eight organizations took part, and the aggregate results were shared live by Kevin Louiselle, MDA's EVP and Partner and host for the evening.

What we learned

The findings were eye opening:

- **Maturity is rare.** Only 11% of organizations rated as "mature" in Scenario Planning and Capability Calibration.
- **Measurement is the weakest link**. A staggering 79% are still at the "emerging" stage in succession metrics.
- **Key gaps persist:**
  - 61% have no dedicated budget for succession
  - 46% don't measure ROI
  - 57% don't link bench strength to business outcomes
- **Continuous improvement is not yet continuous.** Development efforts are often ad hoc, with limited executive involvement and accountability for high-potential leaders.

These results underscore a massive opportunity for HR to lead with agility, insight, and measurable impact.

See how you stack up

Want to know where your organization stands? Curious how your succession strategy compares to your peers? Looking for ideas for inspiration? Now's your chance.

Participate in the Succession Maturity Audit and receive a complimentary consultation with MDA experts to explore your results and get tailored recommendations.

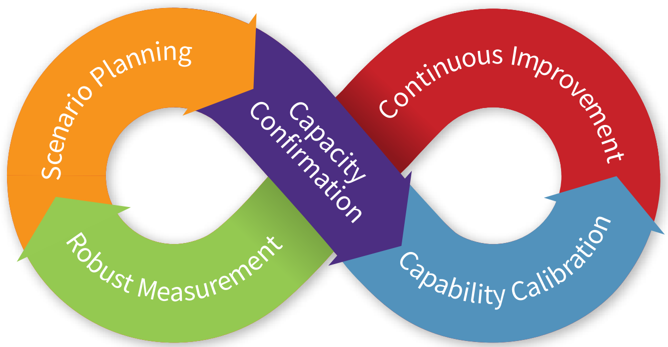
Contact MDA Leadership today to gain access and take the next step in future-proofing your leadership pipeline.

This **powerful tool** gives HR leaders a structured, data-driven view of their organization's succession planning practices, revealing both strengths and constraints across five critical pillars.

Succession Maturity Audit—PEER 150 results

To enrich the event experience, MDA Leadership invited PEER 150 registrants to complete the Succession Maturity Audit in advance, so we could share the aggregate results live that evening. Twenty-eight organizations participated and a snapshot of their maturity levels across the five pillars is shown below. If you would like to take the audit and benchmark your organization as well, reach out to MDA today. You'll receive a complimentary consultation with MDA experts to explore your results and targeted recommendations for enhancing your organization's succession strategy. You will gain clarity, context, and expert guidance on your leadership pipeline and succession practices.

MDA Dynamic Succession Framework™



	Scenario Planning	Capacity Confirmation	Capability Calibration	Continuous Improvement	Robust Measurement
	Align future-focused strategies with the leadership needed to deliver them	Determine bench strength & resource readiness to support accelerated growth	Gain data-driven insights into current leadership capability	Use targeted development to turn potential into high-impact leadership	Objectively evaluate succession impact and return
Emerging	39%	43%	43%	54%	79%
Developing	50%	57%	46%	46%	21%
Mature	11%	---	11%	---	---

Maturity Scale

Emerging
Leadership succession is mostly reactive and informal. Roles and strategies are unclear, and talent planning is disconnected from business needs.

Developing
Structured practices are forming with growing alignment between talent and strategy. Efforts are becoming more proactive, but remain inconsistent.

Mature
Succession planning is strategic and fully integrated. Talent and business strategy are aligned with strong cross-functional coordination and continuous improvement.

Let's Connect

To learn more how MDA Leadership's proven experience and expertise in leadership talent strategy and succession management can benefit your company, please contact us at +1 (612) 332-8182 or by email at info@mdaleadership.com.

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