

# Implementation of Intentional Pathway Planning

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## Abstract

In the post-COVID era, many organizations have recognized the need to revise their leadership hiring practices. Previous research introduced the concept of Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP) as a more effective alternative to traditional succession planning. This paper explores the implementation of IPP through qualitative research, including interviews and surveys with companies currently using the approach. Findings reveal that IPP offers more efficient and adaptive strategies for filling leadership vacancies, contributing to organizational success and employee retention.

## Keywords

Intentional Pathway Planning, Succession Planning, Training, Employee Retention, Innovation

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## 1. Introduction

In the aftermath of COVID-19, businesses realized that returning to traditional operations was no longer viable. Increased competitiveness became essential for organizational survival. One significant shift involved how companies approached hiring to fill leadership and other key vacancies. This study builds upon previous research, which introduced the concept of Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP) and its practical implementation.

This article will explore the following areas:

- 1) A basic introduction to Intentional Pathway Planning;
- 2) Shortcomings of traditional succession planning;
- 3) Organizational changes following IPP implementation;
- 4) Effective training strategies;
- 5) Results—both positive and negative—of using IPP; and

6) Recommendations for employers to implement IPP effectively.

## 2. Methodology

The researchers explored the emerging concept of Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP) to gain deeper insights into its effectiveness as a method for filling leadership vacancies. This study utilized an informal qualitative design with an exploratory approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data sources included scholarly articles, interviews, and online surveys gathered from academic websites and institutional documents.

Two companies were interviewed to assess the impact of IPP in the post-COVID business environment. The qualitative nature of the study allowed for a more flexible exploration of how IPP functions in real-world contexts, focusing on employee retention, hiring efficiency, and leadership development.

### 2.1. Succession Planning Shortcomings

Succession planning has traditionally been used to fill leadership vacancies as individuals retire or leave their roles. While this approach can be effective when timelines and proper training are provided, many companies experienced significant challenges. One common issue was grooming an employee for a role, only to delay the transition—causing the trained individual to leave for another opportunity (Forbes, 2022).

Another limitation of succession planning is its narrow focus on specific individuals or roles. By failing to take a holistic view of leadership development, organizations may overlook broader opportunities for innovation and resilience (Forbes, 2022).

Survey responses gathered for this study highlighted the following key challenges of succession planning:

- **Employee Departure Post-Grooming:** Employees trained for leadership roles often left before assuming the position, taking valuable knowledge with them.
- **Lack of Defined Timelines:** Groomed employees lacked clear expectations for promotion, leading to disengagement.
- **Insufficient Innovation:** Successors often lacked the vision and adaptability needed to drive innovation.
- **Missed Opportunities:** Organizations struggled to anticipate future challenges due to a lack of proactive leadership planning.

### 2.2. Intentional Pathway Planning Defined

Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP) emerged in response to challenges exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike succession planning, IPP emphasizes a holistic strategy that goes beyond replacing individuals and focuses on organizational sustainability and long-term growth (Adkins, Neack, & Ryan, 2024).

IPP begins with identifying strategic goals for the short-, mid-, and long-term. Rather than preparing for a single leadership role, it encourages planning across

multiple key roles—executive and otherwise—including the board of directors. This broader approach fosters resilience and ensures continuity in organizational leadership (Morelli, 2023).

### 2.3. Implementing Intentional Pathway Planning

Implementing IPP requires adaptability and open communication between leadership and employees. Retaining top talent means creating opportunities for growth, not necessarily through promotions, but also through lateral moves that offer new challenges. Companies should evaluate their incentive structures to support employees interested in exploring new responsibilities.

#### Steps for Implementing IPP:

- 1) **Strategic Planning:** Develop a plan to replace all key leadership roles. Identify responsibilities that can be distributed and cross-trained.
- 2) **Employee Engagement:** Communicate with staff to identify those interested in lateral moves or leadership roles. Offer training and incentives.
- 3) **Customized Training:** Design training programs tailored to the needs of open positions, distinguishing between tasks that must remain with leaders versus those that can be redistributed.
- 4) **Cross-Training:** Promote collaboration and communication through cross-training, which supports job satisfaction and morale.
- 5) **Internal Communication:** Clearly communicate upcoming opportunities and timelines to qualified internal candidates.
- 6) **Internal Interviews:** Prioritize internal interviews for lateral or upward moves.
- 7) **External Hiring (if necessary):** When no qualified internal candidate is available, proceed with external recruitment.

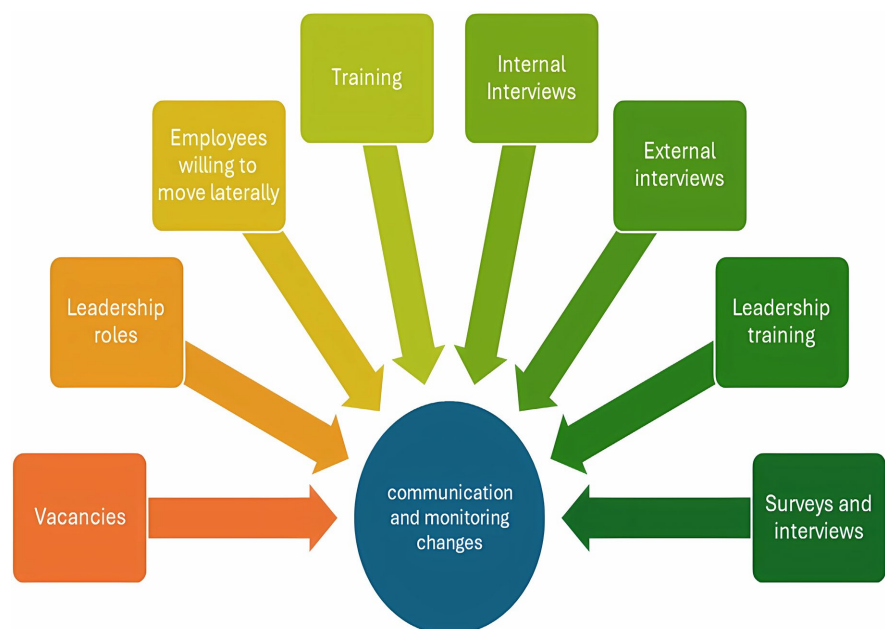


Figure 1. Considerations when implementing IPP.

**8) Orientation:** Provide clear job expectations and responsibilities, which are simplified when the move is internal.

**9) Feedback and Monitoring:** Conduct surveys and reviews at 30, 90, and 365 days to assess effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

*Note:* **Figure 1** (in the original paper) outlines key factors to monitor during the IPP process. The emphasis remains on proactive communication and adaptability. When internal candidates are unavailable, lateral moves can be a useful interim strategy. However, internal hiring is generally preferred for morale and retention benefits.

## 2.4. Case Study: Google

In 2018, Google recognized the need to improve employee satisfaction and retention. Although it had previously relied on succession planning, the company found it insufficient for meeting evolving workforce needs. Google transitioned to a more holistic approach, incorporating principles of Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP).

The company began by conducting interviews and surveys to understand how employees viewed their roles and responsibilities. The feedback was used to restructure employee development pathways.

Key features of Google's IPP-style implementation included:

- Clear, individualized career growth plans for all employees—not just those seeking promotions.
- One-on-one meetings to identify employee goals.
- Defined expectations and required skills for advancement.
- Coaching programs to support personal and professional development (Axios, 2020).
- Allocating 20% of employee time toward personal growth goals (Google, n.d.).

Google's success hinged on its ability to listen and communicate with employees. These changes helped retain staff and maintain high morale, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

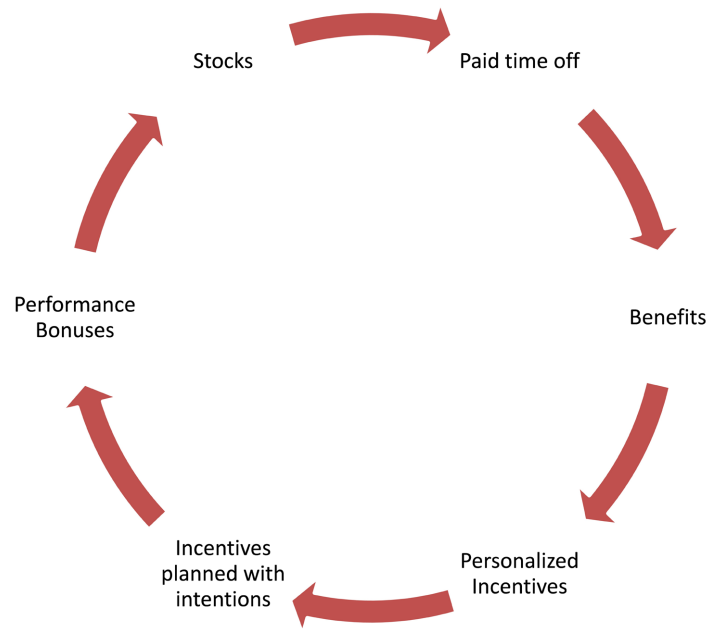
## 2.5. Effective Incentives

Incentives play a critical role in motivating employees to pursue either promotions or lateral career moves. Surveys and interviews are useful tools to understand which incentives will be most effective for a given organization.

Common effective incentives include:

- **Paid Time Off:** Encouraging rest and personal well-being.
- **Flexible Work Environments:** Allowing remote work or adjustable hours.
- **Performance Bonuses:** Recognizing contributions to organizational success.
- **Intentional Leadership:** Having leaders who can identify and motivate talent.
- **Personalized Rewards:** Providing benefits such as stock options, professional development opportunities, or wellness programs.

*Note:* **Figure 2** in the original document outlines a variety of motivational incentives tailored to diverse workplace needs.

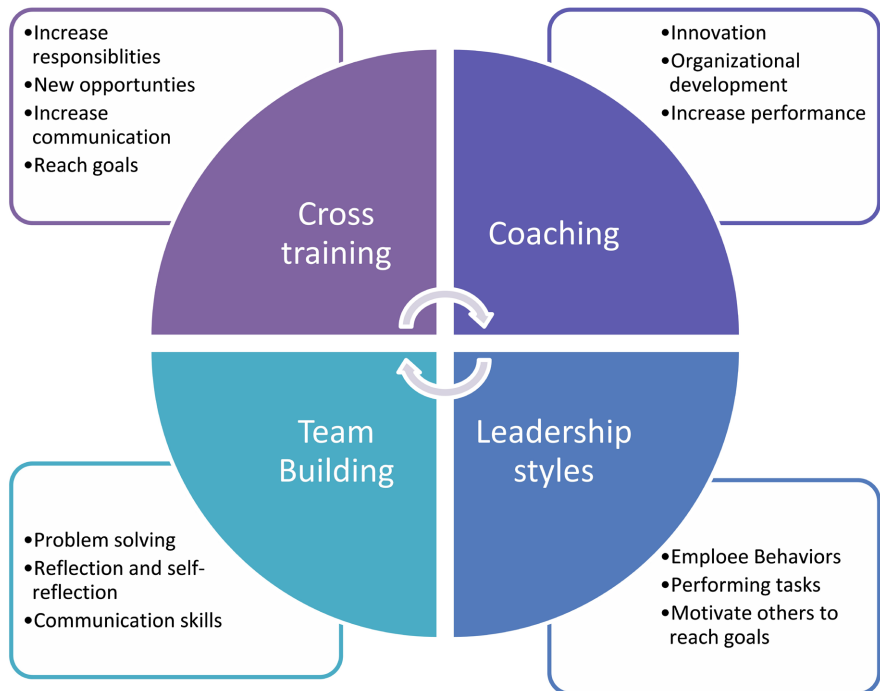


**Figure 2.** Incentives that motivate employees.

### 2.6. Effective Training to Increase IPP

Intentional Pathway Planning relies on strategic training methods to ensure organizational resilience and employee development. This section outlines key training types that have proven effective for IPP implementation.

**Figure 3** in the original document summarizes training methods and their intended outcomes.



**Figure 3.** Effective training methods and uses.

- **Coaching:** Enhances innovation, individual development, and performance (Huline-Dickens, 2021).
- **Team Building:** Improves problem-solving, communication, empathy, and self-reflection skills (Strnadová et al., 2014).
- **Leadership Training:** Equips employees with skills to influence, motivate, and collaborate effectively (Michie & Zumitzavan, 2012).
- **Cross-Training:** Encourages teamwork and prepares employees for lateral or promotional roles (Hedges et al., 2019).

Strong communication skills are a critical component across all training types. Transparency and open dialogue between employees and management foster alignment, satisfaction, and retention.

### 3. Data and Findings

To evaluate the effectiveness of Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP), the researchers distributed surveys to various companies and analyzed the feedback received. The results suggest that many employers are increasingly looking within their organizations to fill leadership vacancies. Internal hiring was shown to improve morale and reduce retention challenges.

#### Incentive Strategies Used to Retain or Recruit Employees

Companies reported using a range of incentives to retain and attract top talent. These were grouped into several categories:

##### Financial Incentives:

- **Competitive Salaries:** Ensuring base pay is at or above market rates.
- **Performance-Based Bonuses:** Linking bonuses to individual, team, or organizational performance.
- **Sign-On Bonuses:** Offering one-time incentives for new hires, especially in high-demand roles.
- **Equity or Stock Options:** Aligning employee interests with company success through ownership.
- **Profit Sharing:** Distributing a portion of company profits among employees.
- **Retirement Matching:** Providing employer contributions to 401(k) or similar plans.

##### Professional Development Incentives:

- **Tuition Assistance:** Supporting employees in their educational goals.
- **Certifications:** Covering the costs and offering time for industry-relevant certifications.
- **Conferences:** Funding travel and attendance at professional events.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Pairing less-experienced employees with senior mentors.
- **Internal Training:** Offering in-house programs for skills and leadership development.
- **Career Path Planning:** Creating structured growth plans for advancement

within the company.

**Work-Life Balance Incentives:**

- **Flexible Work Hours:** Allowing customizable schedules.
- **Remote Work Options:** Enabling employees to work from home or alternate locations.
- **Generous PTO:** Providing sufficient time off for vacation, illness, and personal needs.
- **Parental Leave:** Supporting new parents with extended paid time off.
- **Wellness Programs:** Offering gym memberships, counseling, or health initiatives.

**Other Incentives:**

- **Recognition Programs:** Publicly acknowledging employee achievements.
- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs):** Providing confidential support for personal or work-related issues.
- **Cultural Fit and Values Alignment:** Fostering an inclusive and positive work environment.
- **Lateral Move Opportunities:** Encouraging skill expansion and job variety.
- **Meaningful Work:** Assigning impactful projects aligned with the company's mission.

**Training for Promoted or Successor Employees**

Organizations also shared the types of training provided to employees before stepping into new leadership or lateral roles:

**Orientation Programs:**

- Introduction to company culture, values, policies, procedures, and key stakeholders.

**Leadership Development:**

- Training in leadership styles, strategic planning, decision-making, change management, and coaching.

**Technical Skills:**

- Job-specific instruction, including software, tools, or procedures unique to the role.
- Industry-relevant knowledge and trends.

**Soft Skills:**

- Effective communication, presentation, listening, time management, and team-building.

**Management Training:**

- Performance reviews, budgeting, project oversight, and HR compliance.

**Cross-Training:**

- Exposure to responsibilities across departments.
- Job rotations to build a versatile skillset and broader organizational perspective.

**Retention Challenges**

A follow-up question in the survey addressed how many employees left the company after receiving succession-related training. While exact figures varied, several companies noted a pattern: when there was no clear timeline or assurance of advancement, trained employees often left, taking their acquired knowledge with them

## 4. Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the findings from this exploratory study, several recommendations are offered for organizations interested in implementing Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP) as an alternative to traditional succession planning.

### 4.1. Recommendations

#### 1) Prioritize Clear and Consistent Communication

Open and ongoing communication with employees is essential throughout the IPP process. Regular updates on training opportunities, internal promotions, and lateral roles can enhance transparency, trust, and engagement. Annual performance evaluations provide an ideal time to discuss career paths and future opportunities.

#### 2) Develop Comprehensive Training Programs

Training plans should address both lateral and upward career movement. These programs must extend beyond technical proficiency to include leadership development, team collaboration, communication, and other soft skills. A holistic training model better prepares employees for long-term success within the organization.

#### 3) Offer Incentives for Lateral Roles

Encourage internal movement by offering incentives that appeal to employees' personal and professional goals. These may include professional development opportunities, mentorship, increased responsibilities, or additional flexibility—not solely monetary rewards.

#### 4) Leverage Cross-Training to Boost Resilience

Cross-training supports collaboration, teamwork, and employee satisfaction. It also provides operational continuity by ensuring multiple employees are capable of stepping into key roles. This approach reduces the impact of sudden vacancies and boosts organizational resilience.

#### 5) Monitor and Evaluate IPP Progress

Companies should conduct regular check-ins—at 30, 90, and 365 days post-transition—to monitor employee progress and refine the IPP process. Internal hiring should remain a priority due to its positive effects on morale and retention. When external hiring is necessary, onboarding should include a clear orientation process that outlines responsibilities and organizational expectations.

### 4.2. Conclusion

Intentional Pathway Planning presents a strategic and modern alternative to tra-

ditional succession planning. As businesses adapt to a post-COVID environment, IPP offers a more inclusive, flexible, and proactive approach to developing talent and filling vacancies.

By focusing on the organization's long-term goals and employee development, IPP helps improve retention, increase engagement, and foster innovation. This research suggests that companies adopting IPP experience more efficient hiring processes, stronger internal mobility, and greater organizational resilience.

While these preliminary findings are promising, future longitudinal research is recommended to assess the sustained impact of IPP over time. Tracking its implementation across one-, two-, and five-year intervals could provide valuable insights into its long-term value across various industries.

## 5. Future Research Directions

Intentional Pathway Planning (IPP) has demonstrated potential benefits across a wide range of industries. By taking a holistic and strategic approach, IPP can help employers reduce costs associated with high turnover and improve overall employee satisfaction and retention.

As a relatively new concept, IPP would benefit from continued exploration and validation. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to evaluate its long-term impact. Specifically, researchers should consider interviewing companies that have implemented IPP at different stages—such as one year, two years, and five years post-implementation. This will provide valuable insights into the sustainability and scalability of the model across various sectors.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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