

Leadership Renewal and Organizational Resilience: Why Healthy Organizations Need Both Continuity and Change

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Teaching Thesis:

Organizational resilience is strengthened not by automatically removing leaders after ten years, but by creating intentional rhythms of leadership evaluation, succession, empowerment, and renewal.

Primary Scripture:

“Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.” — Proverbs 11:14 (ESV)

Supporting Scriptures: Proverbs 15:22; Exodus 18:17–23; Deuteronomy 31:1–8; Joshua 1:1–9; Acts 6:1–7; Acts 13:1–3; 2 Timothy 2:2; Ephesians 4:11–13.

Leadership Renewal and Organizational Resilience

Why Healthy Organizations Need Both Continuity and Change

I. Introduction: The Tension Between Continuity and Change

Opening Question

Ask the leaders:

“What happens to an organization when one person leads it successfully for 20, 30, or 40 years?”

Allow leaders to consider both possibilities:

Potential strengths

- Institutional memory
- Relational capital
- Consistent vision
- Cultural stability
- Deep expertise
- Trust and credibility

Potential vulnerabilities

- Organizational dependence upon one person
- Resistance to new ideas
- Concentration of power
- Loss of adaptability
- Leadership bottlenecks
- Weak succession
- Cultural stagnation

Key Statement

The question is not whether leaders should remain or leave. The deeper question is whether the organization has developed the capacity to remain healthy when leadership changes.

Research on CEO tenure demonstrates that tenure has both benefits and risks. Long tenure can produce accumulated expertise and organizational knowledge, while research has also identified possible problems of rigidity and declining environmental fit.

Scripture

“Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”
— Proverbs 15:22 (ESV)

Leadership principle:

A resilient organization is not built around one person's wisdom. It develops **distributed wisdom**.

II. The Biblical Principle of Leadership Seasons

A. Moses: A Great Leader Who Had to Develop Other Leaders

Exodus 18:17–23

Jethro observes Moses attempting to carry the entire leadership burden himself.

“What you are doing is not good.” — Exodus 18:17 (ESV)

Jethro's solution was not to remove Moses.

It was to **multiply leadership**.

The Pattern

Moses → Elders → Leaders of thousands → Leaders of hundreds → Leaders of fifties → Leaders of tens

The organization became more resilient because leadership responsibility was distributed.

Leadership Principle #1

If everything depends upon the senior leader, the organization is not yet resilient.

Ask:

- Who can make decisions without me?
- Who can lead in my absence?
- Who knows what I know?
- Who can challenge my assumptions?
- Who could lead this organization after me?

III. Moses, Joshua, and the Theology of Leadership Succession

Deuteronomy 31:1–8

Moses eventually says:

“I am no longer able to go out and come in, and the LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not go over this Jordan.’”

— Deuteronomy 31:2 (ESV)

Joshua succeeds Moses.

Notice something important:

The mission continues even though the leader changes.

Israel's identity was not:

“We are Moses' organization.”

It was:

“We are God's people.”

Moses had to understand the difference between:

My leadership

and

God's mission.

Joshua 1:1–9

God tells Joshua:

“Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan...”

— Joshua 1:2 (ESV)

The transition is dramatic.

Yet the mission continues.

Leadership Principle #2

Healthy leaders build organizations that can outlive their leadership.

A leader's greatest legacy may not be what happens while he or she is leading.

It may be what happens **after the leader leaves.**

IV. The Research: Does Leadership Tenure Affect Organizational Resilience? — 10 Minutes

A. There Is No Scientific “10-Year Rule”

We should be intellectually honest.

Research does not establish that every organization should replace its leader every ten years.

The ten-year period is better understood as a **potential evaluation and renewal milestone**, not a universal expiration date.

B. The “Seasons” of Leadership

Hambrick and Fukutomi (1991) proposed that executive tenure moves through discernible seasons:

1. **Response to mandate**
2. **Experimentation**
3. **Selection of an enduring theme**
4. **Convergence**

5. Dysfunction

Their model suggests that leadership tenure is dynamic rather than static.

Teaching Illustration

Think about a leader's first decade:

Years 1–3:

“What needs to change?”

Years 4–6:

“What is working?”

Years 7–9:

“This is how we do things.”

Years 10+:

“Why would we do it any other way?”

The danger is not experience.

The danger is when **experience becomes unquestioned certainty**.

C. Long Tenure Can Create Both Strength and Vulnerability

Miller (1991) found that longer-tenured CEOs were less likely, in his study, to maintain an appropriate match between organizational strategy and environmental conditions, particularly in uncertain environments.

This produces an important leadership question:

“Is our organization still designed for the world we are actually living in?”

Not:

“Is this how we've always done it?”

D. But Leadership Change Is Not Automatically Better

A major meta-analysis of 60 samples representing **13,578 CEO successions** found that succession was associated with short-term performance decline, while there was no significant direct long-term performance effect. Long-term outcomes were influenced by factors such as whether the successor came from inside or outside the organization and the strategic changes that followed.

Therefore:

Changing leaders is not the same thing as creating resilience.

Poorly managed succession can actually weaken an organization.

Leadership Principle #3

The goal is not leadership turnover. The goal is leadership renewal.

V. The Biblical Model: Leadership Multiplication

2 Timothy 2:2

Paul tells Timothy:

“...what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

— 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

Notice the multiplication:

Paul → Timothy → Faithful people → Others

This is four generations of leadership transmission.

Paul's objective was not merely:

“Do what I do.”

It was:

“Develop people who can develop other people.”

Leadership Principle #4

The test of leadership is not how many people depend upon you, but how many people have been equipped because of you.

VI. Jesus and Leadership Reproduction

Jesus demonstrates an even deeper model.

Mark 3:14

“And he appointed twelve... so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.”

Jesus:

1. Called leaders.

2. Formed leaders.
3. Modeled leadership.
4. Gave leaders responsibility.
5. Corrected leaders.
6. Sent leaders.
7. Eventually released leaders to continue the mission.

John 14:12

“Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do...”

— John 14:12 (ESV)

Jesus' leadership did not create permanent dependence upon Jesus' physical presence.

His leadership created **reproducing disciples**.

Leadership Principle #5

Great leadership creates successors, not spectators.

VII. Acts 6: Organizational Adaptation

Acts 6:1–7

The early Church experiences organizational stress:

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing...”

— Acts 6:1 (ESV)

Growth creates a problem.

The apostles respond by restructuring responsibility.

They say:

“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...”

— Acts 6:3 (ESV)

What happened?

Problem → Discernment → Delegation → New Leadership → Continued Growth

The result:

“And the word of God continued to increase...”

— Acts 6:7 (ESV)

Leadership Principle #6

Resilient organizations adapt their structures without abandoning their mission.

The apostles did not say:

“We’ve never done it this way.”

They asked:

“What structure will allow us to fulfill our mission in this new season?”

VIII. A Leadership Renewal Model

Introduce the following framework:

The 10-Year Leadership Renewal Cycle

Important: This is not a mandatory ten-year term limit.

It is a **governance and spiritual discernment framework**.

Years 1–3: FOUNDATION

Questions:

- What is God asking us to establish?
- What must change?
- What culture are we creating?
- What leadership team must be developed?

Years 4–6: CONSOLIDATION

Questions:

- What is working?
- What is not working?
- What systems need strengthening?
- Are we developing second-generation leaders?

Years 7–9: MULTIPLICATION

Questions:

- Who are we empowering?
- What responsibilities can be transferred?
- Who can lead without us?
- Are we unintentionally creating dependency?

Year 10: RENEWAL REVIEW

Conduct a comprehensive assessment.

Five Questions

1. Mission:

Are we still accomplishing our God-given mission?

2. Environment:

Has our cultural, technological, economic, or ministry environment changed?

3. Leadership:

Is the current leader still the best person to lead the next season?

4. Succession:

If the leader disappeared tomorrow, could the organization continue?

5. Renewal:

Does the organization need continuity, transition, or a new leadership configuration?

IX. Practical Application: The Resilience Audit — 3 Minutes

Have leaders rate their organization from **1–5**.

Leadership Resilience Audit

1 = Very weak | 5 = Very strong

Area	Score
Clear mission independent of one leader	___
Leadership team	___
Succession plan	___

Emerging leaders	___
Distributed decision-making	___
Organizational adaptability	___
Financial resilience	___
Institutional knowledge	___
Leadership accountability	___
Ability to function without senior leader	___

Interpretation

40–50: Strong organizational resilience

30–39: Moderate resilience; areas need development

20–29: Significant leadership dependency

Below 20: Organizational vulnerability

X. Five Practical Commitments for Leaders

Ask each leader to identify one action under each category.

1. DEVELOP

Who is the next leader I need to develop?

2. DELEGATE

What am I doing that someone else should be doing?

3. DISTRIBUTE

Where is too much authority concentrated?

4. DISCERN

What assumptions have become unquestioned?

5. DESIGN

If I were not here tomorrow, what would happen?

XI. Closing: Build Something That Can Be Passed On

Return to Moses and Joshua.

Moses' ministry was successful.

But Moses was not the destination.

Joshua continued the mission.

Paul's ministry was successful.

But Paul was not the destination.

Timothy continued the mission.

Jesus' earthly ministry was successful.

But the disciples continued the mission.

Final Principle

A leader's responsibility is not merely to build an organization that succeeds under his or her leadership. It is to build an organization capable of continuing the mission through generations of leadership.

Closing Scripture

“And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”

— 2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)

Final Challenge

Ask leaders to prayerfully answer:

“If God gave me another ten years to lead, what must I build now so that the organization will be stronger—not weaker—when those ten years are over?”

And then ask the more difficult question:

“If God asked me to hand leadership to someone else tomorrow, would the organization be ready?”

That question moves leadership from **personal success to organizational stewardship**.

Suggested Teaching Summary

The entire lesson can be reduced to this progression:

Leadership → Stewardship → Multiplication → Succession → Renewal → Resilience

The central message is not:

“Every leader should leave after ten years.”

Rather:

“Every leader should build an organization that is capable of renewal, succession, and continued mission beyond the leader's personal tenure.”

That distinction makes the concept both biblically grounded and empirically defensible. Research supports the importance of considering tenure, succession, accumulated expertise, environmental adaptation, and strategic change—but does not establish a universal ten-year expiration date for leaders.

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