



## DESIGNING CONTINUITY

# How India Inc is Rethinking Succession



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THE BEST  
SUCCESSION  
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**F**or the longest time, succession in Indian businesses was treated as a milestone. A moment that marked change, often accompanied by uncertainty, speculation, and a reset of expectations. Today, it feels very different. In my experience working closely with business families, the conversation has moved beyond “who takes over next” to a far more fundamental question: how do we ensure the business continues to run exactly as it should, irrespective of who is in charge? That shift, from event to process, is quietly redefining how India Inc approaches leadership

transitions.

A recent example of this can be seen in the transition at Bharti Airtel. What stands out is not the leadership change itself, but the lack of disruption around it. There is no urgency, no visible friction, just a sense that the transition was always part of a larger plan. And that, increasingly, is what well-designed succession looks like.

What we are witnessing across Indian enterprises is a clear move towards a continuity-first approach. Transitions are being planned years in advance, often unfolding in phases. Leadership responsi-

bilities are not handed over overnight, they are layered in gradually. The idea is to remove the shock factor entirely, ensuring that the business, its stakeholders, and its strategic direction remain unaffected.

Wealth from the business, is now being consciously segmented into distinct pools such as entrepreneurial capital (for building future businesses), alpha capital (for growth opportunities), preservation capital (for stability), learning and development capital (for next-gen capability building), and lifestyle capital (for personal wellbeing and fulfilment). This segmentation helps incoming successors, particularly the younger generation in family business succession, to navigate responsibilities with clarity and purpose.

In parallel, there is a visible shift towards more institutionalised governance, where professional advisors are increasingly part of formal councils or steering committees. These structures are playing a critical role in enabling balanced, objective, and continuity-driven decision-making during generational transitions.

One of the most interesting shifts underpinning this change is the rise of hybrid leadership structures. Professional CEOs are taking on the responsibility of running operations, bringing in

institutional rigour and execution focus. At the same time, next-generation family members are being integrated into governance roles, contributing to long-term strategy and vision.

Equally important is how the next generation is being prepared for leadership. The older model of succession, where leadership was assumed by virtue of lineage, is steadily being replaced. Today, there is a visible emphasis on capability-building. Next-gen leaders are spending time understanding different parts of the business, gaining external exposure, and, importantly, building credibility with key stakeholders.

For business families, this requires a mindset change. The role of the promoter is evolving, from being deeply involved in operations to becoming a custodian of vision and capital. It is less about control, and more about stewardship.

External factors are accelerating this transition as well. The increasing presence of global investors, heightened regulatory expectations, and the need for long-term scalability are pushing businesses to adopt more structured approaches to leadership and governance. In this environment, succession planning is no longer a private family matter, it is a strategic business imperative. ■