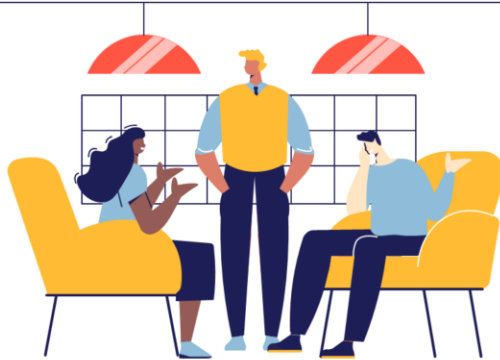




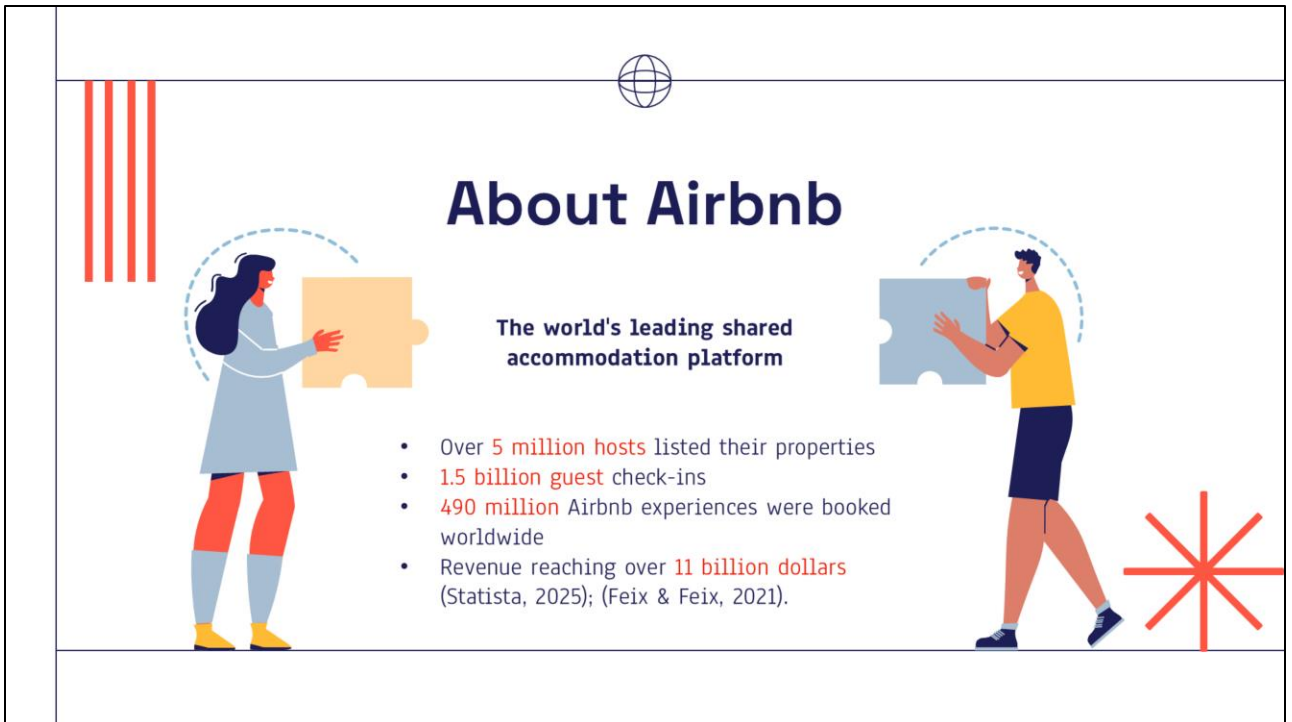
Employee Leadership Programme for Airbnb



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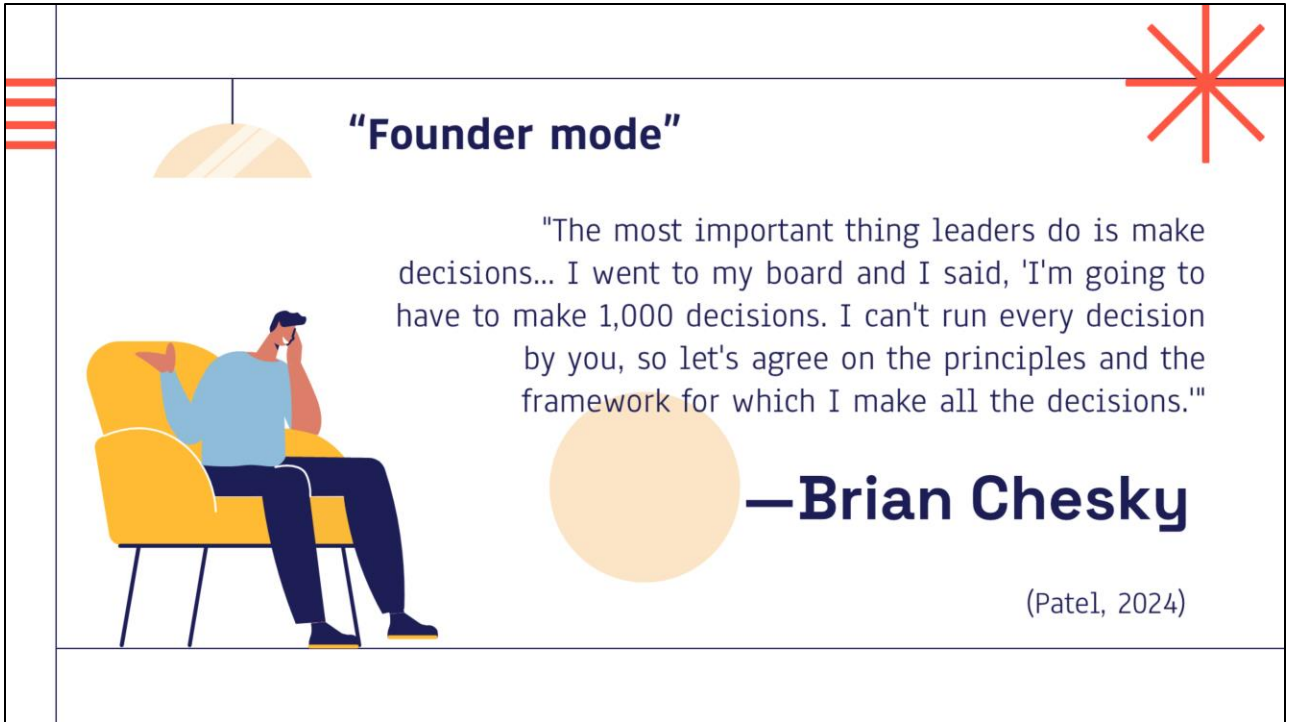


Hi, everyone. Today I am going to share you an Employee Leadership Programme for an online homestays company Airbnb.



Background

Founded in 2007 and headquartered in San Francisco, Airbnb is the world's leading shared accommodation platform. As of 2024, its revenue has reached over 11 billion dollars last year (Statista, 2025). However, as the business scale gets bigger, Airbnb has revealed significant challenges in leadership development and succession planning, because it heavily relies on the strategic perspectives and personal influence of its founding team (Feix & Feix, 2021).



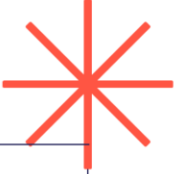
"Founder mode"

"The most important thing leaders do is make decisions... I went to my board and I said, 'I'm going to have to make 1,000 decisions. I can't run every decision by you, so let's agree on the principles and the framework for which I make all the decisions.'"

—Brian Chesky

(Patel, 2024)

In an interview, Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky discussed the concept of "founder mode," emphasising the importance of leaders being deeply involved in the details of their company. While this approach ensures alignment with the company's vision, it also indicates a centralised decision-making process. Chesky noted, "The most important thing leaders do is make decisions. He argues that he can't run every decision by the board.'" (Patel, 2024). We can see that although the decisions within the organisation is under a consistent framework, the leadership is mostly in the hands of the founders and it is difficult for employees to have a voice or participate in company decisions. And these lead to the following challenges Airbnb faces in the current stage

 Challenges  		
		
Career Growth Over-Centralized Leadership and Limited Career Advancement Opportunities (Hussain, 2023)	Succession Planning Insufficient Talent Pool and Ineffective Knowledge Transfer (In Practise, 2024)	Leadership Training Lack of a Systematic Leadership Development Programme (Luna, 2023)

Challenges

1. Employee’s Career Growth

This centralisation of leadership leads to limited career advancement opportunities for employees. As a result, many employees feel that their potential for upward growth within the organisation is constrained. This has contributed to low motivation and high turnover rates (Hussain, 2023).

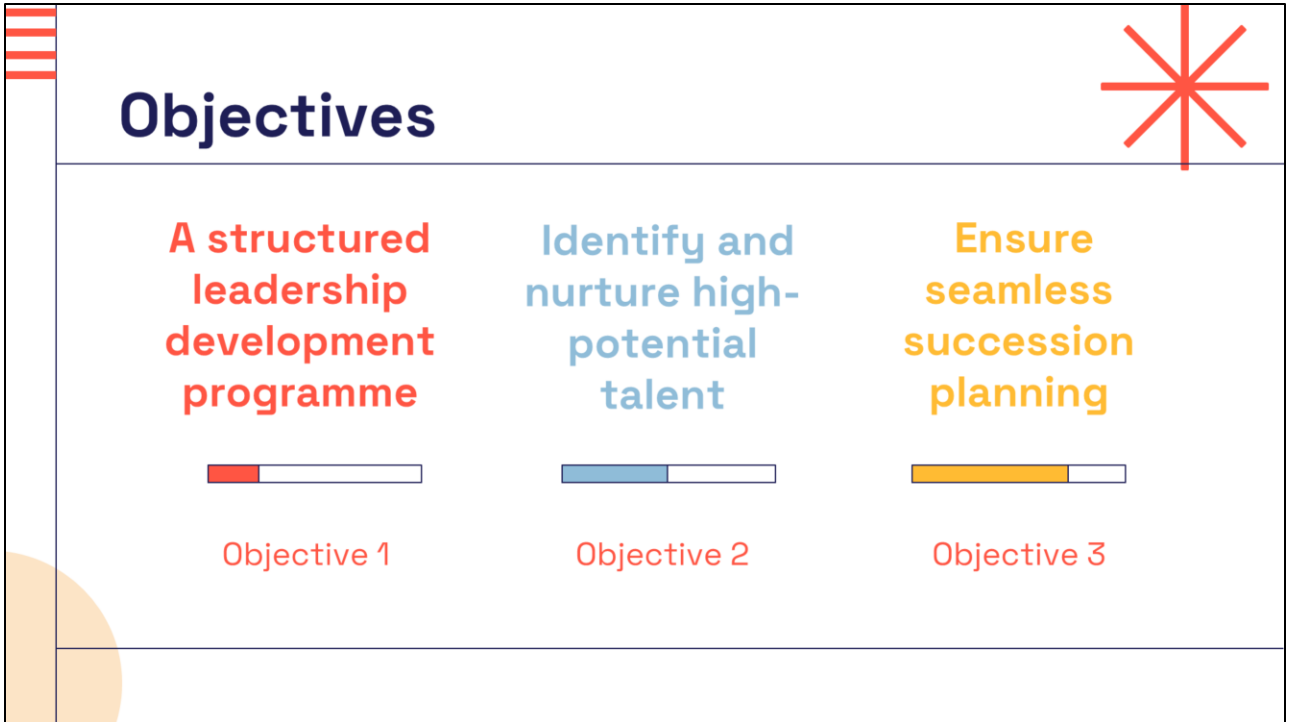
2. Succession Planning

In Airbnb, the current talent pool for middle and senior management positions is insufficient to meet the complex demands of diverse markets. Additionally, according to In Practise (2024), when senior leaders leave, their knowledge and expertise are not

adequately passed on to their possible successors because of a lack of effective knowledge transfer mechanisms within the organisation.

3. Leadership Training

Airbnb's leadership development initiatives have been insufficient. The lack of a well-structured, data-driven leadership development programme has led to gaps in the skills and competencies required for effective leadership. Furthermore, the challenges faced during the pandemic, including layoffs and restructuring, exposed significant deficiencies in crisis leadership and talent resilience management (Luna, 2023).



Objectives

Therefore, our goals are clear.

First, we need a structured leadership development programme that aligns with Airbnb's core strategy to entering the global business.

Second, we must identify and nurture high-potential talent, who are individuals who embody our values.

- Third, we have to ensure seamless succession planning through mentorship and knowledge transfer, so that when leaders leave, their expertise can be passed on.



Airbnb's

Employee Leadership Programme & Succession Planning



Programme Structure

- So now let's start with the Employee Leadership Programme & Succession Planning. Our leadership programme is built on three tiers, each targeting a different stage of employee growth.

Rising Stars Programme

– Emerging Leaders

Target: Juniors with 2–5 years of experience.

Focus: Self-leadership, teamwork, and Airbnb values.

Structure: Participants join squads with manager, peer mentor, and HR coach.

Activities: Lead 3-month real-world project; receive Micro-coaching.

Metrics: KPIs; 360° evaluation; Assessment on Growth journals and final presentation

According to Forbes (2024), an IMPACT Group study indicates that 84% of HR leaders believe assigning a coach or mentor to learners boosts engagement levels.



(Airbnb, 2024); (Forbes, 2024)

For emerging leaders, who are juniors with 2–5 years of experience, we’ve designed the Rising Stars Programme. The focus here is on self-leadership, teamwork, and deepening their connection to our corporate values (Airbnb, 2024). According to Forbes (2024), a study indicates that 84% of HR leaders believe assigning a coach or mentor to learners boosts engagement levels. The key to this is an approach called microcoaching, involving brief, focused sessions over a few weeks within a small growth group, which is proved to have positive impact on leadership development.

We will select employees who have shown excellent leadership potentials. Each participant will join a small squad led by a manager, a peer mentor, and

an HR coach. Over three months, the select employee will lead and tackle a real-world project, like launching a local community event, with squad members providing mentorship, support and evaluation upon their performance based on needed leadership traits.

Success of this programme isn't just about hitting KPIs, it's also about reflective growth. Participants will keep journals to track their processes and thoughts, and will present his or her growth to the other members in the squad and receive the assessment.

Leadership Rotation Programme

– Mid-Level Managers

Target: Operational leaders preparing for higher roles.

Focus: Strategic thinking, stakeholder influence, resilience.

Structure: 3-month cross-functional rotation in different departments.

Activities: Drive outcomes on real challenges; strategic insight report to executives.

Metrics: 360-degree evaluations; Quantitative metrics of operational results; Strategic Insight Report

According to Sihombing et al. (2022), internal rotation has a significant influence on leadership based on SPSS analysis on 170 employees in an Indonesia organization.

(Helmold, 2021); (Sihombing et al., 2022)

For Mid-level managers, we are excited to launch the Leadership Rotation Programme. This initiative is designed for leaders who aspire to step into broader, high-impact roles in the future.

In this programme, selected leaders will have the opportunity to participate in cross-functional rotations, spending three months fully immersed in a completely different part of the business. According to a study in 2022, internal rotation has a significant influence on leadership from an SPSS analysis in an Indonesia organisation (Sihombing et al., 2022), which is also convinced by the similar view of Helmold (2021). These rotations are not simple job shadowing. There are hands-on, outcome-driven assignments where

each leader is expected to drive meaningful contributions aligned with our company goals. Participants will tackle real business challenges, to build cross-functional partnerships critical for company's operations.

At the end of each rotation, participants will receive 360-degree evaluations from cross-functional colleagues, supervisors, and HR department, as well as quantitative metrics of results for the department. Besides that, they will deliver a strategic insight report to the Executive Leadership Team for multi-dimensional assessment, ensuring their practical learnings directly influence the future direction.

Succession & Crisis Leadership

– Senior Executives

Target: VPs and C-suite executives.

Focus: Succession planning, talent management, crisis leadership.

Structure: Annual 3-day summit; Executives present Talent & Succession Plan.

Activities: Highlight and review succession candidates; Crisis simulation labs.

Metrics: Measured by succession readiness, risk reduction, talent plan quality.

Key Cases

- Sudden regulatory changes in key markets like New York
- Operational disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Barcelona Local Communities' Complaints

(Martin and O'Shea, 2021); (Hoover, 2024); (The Guardian, 2023)

For senior executives, there is an initiative designed to support the top leadership including the VPs and C-suite.

Each year, HR department will hold a three-day executive meeting for leadership continuity and succession planning. Executives will be required to present a “Talent and Succession Plan” for their departments that outlines specific actions to highlight candidates for succession, and these will be reviewed at the board level to ensure accountability (Martin and O'Shea, 2021).

In addition, senior executives will engage in crisis simulation labs designed to enhance decision-making under pressure. Simulated scenarios ranging from regulatory breakdowns to reputational crises will test leaders’

agility and strategic resilience (Hoover, 2024). A noted case is about Barcelona's Local Communities: Residents have expressed concerns over the sudden increase of rentals and travellers. The tension between local communities and Airbnb hosts calls for leadership's swift resolutions and stricter regulations (The Guardian, 2023). Thus, embedding crisis response capabilities into leadership development will prepare executives to protect the brand in moments of tension and adapt Airbnb's strategic vision across global contexts.

Programme effectiveness will be measured by improvements in succession preparation, and the quality of Crisis Management plans. This initiative not only strengthens the resilience of the existing leadership, but also establishes a proactive talent management culture and continuity at the senior level.

Succession Route

Frontline Staff

From "Reserve Talent Pool" to Promotion
(Al Hajri, 2024)



Mid-level managers

From "Ready-now" label to higher leading roles
(Jooss et al. 2021)



Senior leadership

3-tier successors:
immediate replacements
emerging candidates
high-potential employees



(Li et al., 2024)

Succession Route

After the structure leadership development plan, we can see that the promotion route is clear.

For frontline staff, a "Reserve Talent" mechanism will be launched. A 2024 analysis emphasises the importance of developing a deep pool of potential candidates, prepared for leadership roles when opportunities arise (Li et al., 2024). Employees who complete the programme mentioned before and pass a competency assessment will enter a talent pool updated quarterly by HR. When vacancies arise, candidates from the pool will be prioritised for promotion.

For mid-level managers, candidates must meet project experience and cross-functional collaboration benchmarks to progress. A structured succession pool will label candidates as “Ready-now” or “Ready-soon”, enabling timely deployment.

For senior leadership, a formal succession system will designate three tiers of successors: immediate replacements, emerging candidates, and high-potential employees. This succession map will be updated annually and reviewed by the board’s committee. Additionally, the risk-monitoring mechanism will mark positions for which there is no planned successor, thereby initiating an urgent leadership or promotion plan.

Implementation Strategy



(Ahmad et al., 2023); (Bradley, 2021)

Implementation Strategy

Now, after the programme structure, we need to think about how do we bring this to practical implementation? We planned 3 phases.

Phase One: Task Force and Metric Definition

The programme begins by establishing a cross-functional task force comprising HR leaders, senior executives, department heads, and learning and development specialists. This group will work together to form the framework and success metrics for the initiatives (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Phase Two: Pilot and Iteration

A six-month pilot will be launched at Airbnb's global headquarters. We will utilise related systems, such as the Learning Management System (Bradley, 2021), to monitor individual development plans and succession pool progress. Feedback loops will be built into the pilot, allowing real-time content and process optimisation.

Phase Three: Full Rollout and Continuous Monitoring

Following the pilot's refinement, the programme will roll out comprehensively in Airbnb. Quarterly reviews will track data and feedback that will be used to continuously improve the programme to ensure long-term alignment with Airbnb's strategic goals.

Success Metrics by 2026

Leadership Programme Completion Rate



Achieve a 90% completion rate for leadership development programmes across all management tiers

Internal Promotion Rate



Increase the internal promotion rate for leadership roles for 10%

(Hanowell, 2024)

High-Potential Employee Turnover



Reduce annual turnover among high-potential employees by 20%

(Whiting, 2025)

Time to Fill Leadership Roles

Reduce the average time to fill senior leadership positions to 60 days, down from the current average of 75 days.

(Alicia, 2025)

Success Metrics

The following indicators can be measured:

1. Leadership Programme Completion Rate

The goal is to achieve a 90% completion rate for leadership development programmes across all management tiers.

High participation rates in leadership programmes are indicative of a positive employment culture and are linked to better organizational performance.

2. Internal Promotion Rate

We want to increase the internal promotion rate for leadership roles for 10%.

According to Hanowell (2024), the average promotion rate across industries is

around 8% in 2024, with employees are pessimistic about the company's internal growth. If a systematic approach to promotions and leadership development can be applied, it can dramatically improve employee motivation.

3. High-Potential Employee Turnover

The third one is to reduce annual turnover among high-potential employees by 20%.

Especially, high performers are a top-risk category, with an average of 47% leaving their companies in 2022 (Whiting, 2025). A 20% reduction would significantly enhance leadership continuity and reduce recruitment costs.

4. Time to Fill Leadership Roles

The goal is to reduce the average time to fill senior leadership positions to 60 days, down from the current average of 75 days (Alicia, 2025). Streamlining the hiring process and well planning succession strategies will minimise disruptions and maintain organisational momentum.

Addressing Resistance



Champions

Invite respected leaders to advocate for the programme

(Al Jahwari and Alwi, 2023)



Accountability

Put part of senior leaders' bonuses on talent development outcomes.

Incentives



Spotlight employees who exemplify leadership growth

Transparency



Publish updates to build trust and momentum

Addressing Resistance

However, change is hard. Resistance is inevitable. Here's how we'll overcome that:

First, **champions**. We'll invite respected leaders to advocate for the programme. A 2023 empirical study underscores the critical role of top management support in the success of initiatives. When a senior leader shares their support, others will listen (Al Jahwari and Alwi, 2023).

Second, **accountability**. Put part of senior leaders' bonuses on talent development outcomes will be a strategy. If they want higher promotion or leave for better opportunities, they must prove they've built a successor.

Third, **incentives**. We'll spotlight employees who show significant leadership

growth at important meetings and give some awards to them for encouraging the engagement.

Lastly, **transparency**. Every quarter, we'll publish updates about how many promotions came from within, which regions are hitting targets, where we're struggling. This will build trust and motivation.



Conclusion

To conclude, this leadership programme isn't just about checkboxes. It's about empowering every employee to think like an owner, act like a mentor, and lead with belonging.

When we invest in our people, we invest in our future.

So let's commit to build leaders who don't just manage processes but inspire communities. Who don't fear uncertainty but thrive in it. Who ensure that after the current leadership shifts, Airbnb remains a place where anyone, anywhere, can belong.

Thank you.

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