Emergency Succession: The 72-Hour Control Plan for Founder Incapacity

A First-Seventy-Two-Hours Framework for Lawful Control and Enterprise Continuity

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Abstract

A founder's sudden incapacity can remove leadership, banking authority, customer confidence and tacit knowledge at the same moment. The first seventy-two hours determine whether the enterprise establishes lawful interim control or enters a compounding crisis. This paper develops a practical emergency succession system for founder-led and family-owned businesses. It begins with objective activation triggers, verified incident facts, an authorised incident lead and a secure decision log. The authority workstream maps directors, officers, attorneys, signatories, trustees, protectors, shareholders and delegated managers, then tests quorum, appointment powers, conflicts and written-resolution mechanics. Interim leadership is time-limited and has explicit authority, reporting, removal and handback rules. Treasury controls combine verified bank mandates, dual approval, a thirteen-week cash view and a payment waterfall covering payroll, safety, critical suppliers, debt, tax and customer delivery. Revenue continuity preserves milestone evidence, invoicing, collections and account ownership. Operational triage protects priority customers, essential suppliers, licences, systems and confidential information. Lender, insurer and regulator notifications follow contract and rule-specific triggers supported by verified facts. Family welfare, ownership decisions and company management use separate authority channels. The plan monitors unauthorised transfers, related-party dealings and unusual payments during the control gap. Founder-only dependencies are converted into an institutional knowledge brief. Formal gates at twenty-four, forty-eight and seventy-two hours test authority, liquidity, delivery, stakeholder confidence and the sustainability of interim governance. Unresolved authority gaps escalate through the appropriate shareholder, trustee, lender, regulator, arbitral or court route. A thirty-day stabilisation plan then governs handback or permanent transition. Five figures, five tables, eight frequently asked questions and twenty-six primary or authoritative sources support implementation. Numerical readiness scores are illustrative analytical examples. Company-specific conclusions require current documents, evidence and authorised legal, governance, employment, regulatory, banking, tax, insurance and communications advice.

JEL Classification: G32, G34, L21, M12, M14

Keywords: emergency succession, founder incapacity, business continuity, interim leadership, banking authority, crisis governance

1. Define the 72-hour control objective

Preserve lawful authority, cash, critical delivery and stakeholder confidence when a founder suddenly cannot act.

The succession team should reconcile governing documents, delegations, critical processes, obligations, relationships and disruption scenarios. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an emergency succession charter.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

2. Define activation triggers

Specify incapacity, disappearance, detention, medical emergency, death and communication-loss thresholds with authorised confirmation.

The succession team should reconcile legal advice, medical or official evidence, documents, policy and board authority. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an activation trigger matrix.

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3. Name the incident lead

Appoint a capable coordinator with authority to convene, record, escalate and integrate legal, operational and family workstreams.

The succession team should reconcile delegations, board rules, succession policy, contact tree and competence evidence. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an incident command appointment.

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4. Establish the emergency room

Create a secure cadence, decision log, situation report and controlled document channel for the first 72 hours.

The succession team should reconcile contact list, collaboration tools, security controls, templates and owner availability. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an emergency governance room.

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Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

5. Verify legal status and facts

Confirm what is known, who can certify it and which conclusions remain pending before changing authority.

The succession team should reconcile official records, medical advice, counsel, witnesses and timestamped communications. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a verified incident fact pattern.

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6. Map current authority

Identify directors, officers, attorneys, signatories, trustees, protectors, partners and delegated managers who can act now.

The succession team should reconcile registers, resolutions, powers, mandates, contracts and institution records. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an emergency authority map.

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7. Test board continuity

Confirm quorum, chairing, notice, alternate directors, conflicts, written resolutions and appointment powers.

The succession team should reconcile articles, shareholder agreements, company law, board calendar and counsel advice. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a board continuity certificate.

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8. Activate interim leadership

Install a time-limited acting structure with role boundaries, reporting, removal and handback rules.

The succession team should reconcile succession plan, delegations, employment terms, board decision and candidate readiness. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an interim leadership mandate.

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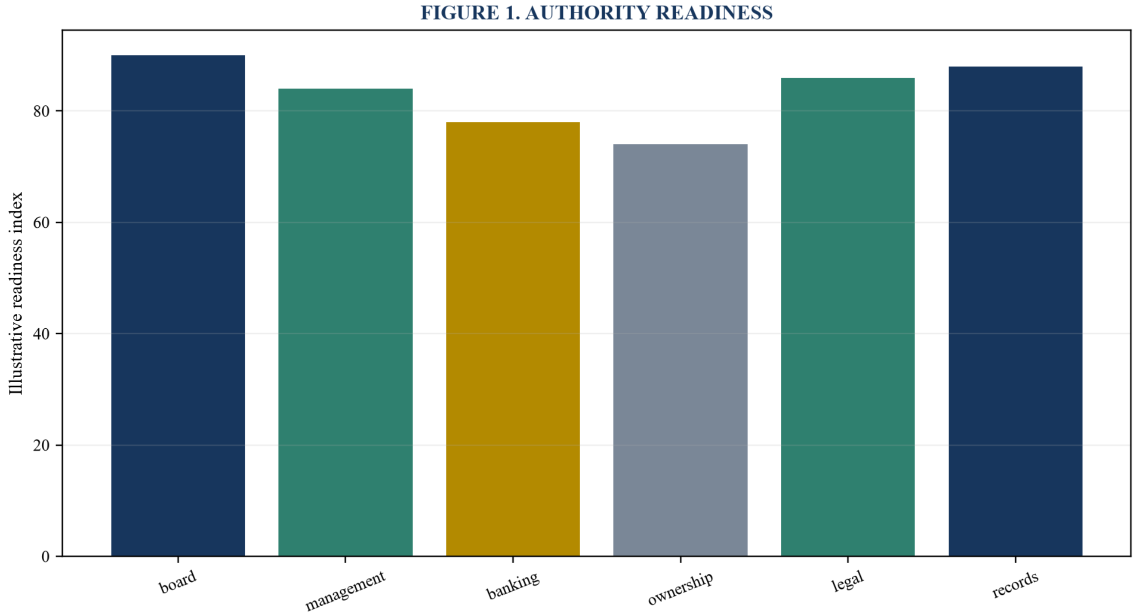
Table 1. Emergency authority map

Domain	Immediate authority	Evidence
board	quorum and appointment	articles and resolutions
management	acting mandate	delegation
banking	approved signatories	bank mandate
ownership	trigger mechanism	governing instrument

Illustrative programme design; company-specific facts and authorised advice govern.

Figure 1. Authority readiness



Values are illustrative readiness indices and require company-specific evidence.

9. Protect banking access

Verify signatories, transaction limits, dual controls, token access, emergency contacts and institution requirements.

The succession team should reconcile bank mandates, facilities, treasury procedures, KYC files and relationship records. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a banking continuity pack.

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10. Secure the cash position

Produce immediate cash, collections, payroll, debt service, tax, supplier and restricted-fund visibility.

The succession team should reconcile bank data, receivables, payables, payroll, facilities, forecasts and covenants. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a 13-week emergency cash view.

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11. Prioritise payments

Rank payroll, safety, critical suppliers, debt, tax and customer obligations under lawful authority and liquidity limits.

The succession team should reconcile cash forecast, contracts, law, operational priorities and approvals. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a controlled payment waterfall.

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12. Preserve revenue and collections

Keep invoicing, acceptance, milestone evidence, collections and customer escalation functioning without founder intervention.

The succession team should reconcile contracts, delivery records, billing systems, account ownership and customer contacts. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a revenue continuity plan.

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13. Protect customer delivery

Identify critical commitments, single-point dependencies, quality gates and authorised exceptions for priority accounts.

The succession team should reconcile customer contracts, project plans, service levels, resources and incident data. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a customer delivery triage.

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14. Stabilise suppliers and partners

Secure essential inputs, credit, logistics, licences and subcontractors through controlled communication and payment.

The succession team should reconcile supplier register, contracts, dependencies, cash plan and relationship owners. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a critical supplier plan.

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15. Control employee communication

Provide factual, role-based messages on leadership, payroll, safety, reporting and confidentiality.

The succession team should reconcile verified facts, HR policy, legal advice, manager cascade and Q&A. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an employee communication brief.

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16. Retain key personnel

Identify flight risk, critical knowledge, authority gaps and proportionate retention measures.

The succession team should reconcile role map, contracts, reward data, succession cover and board approval. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a critical-person retention plan.

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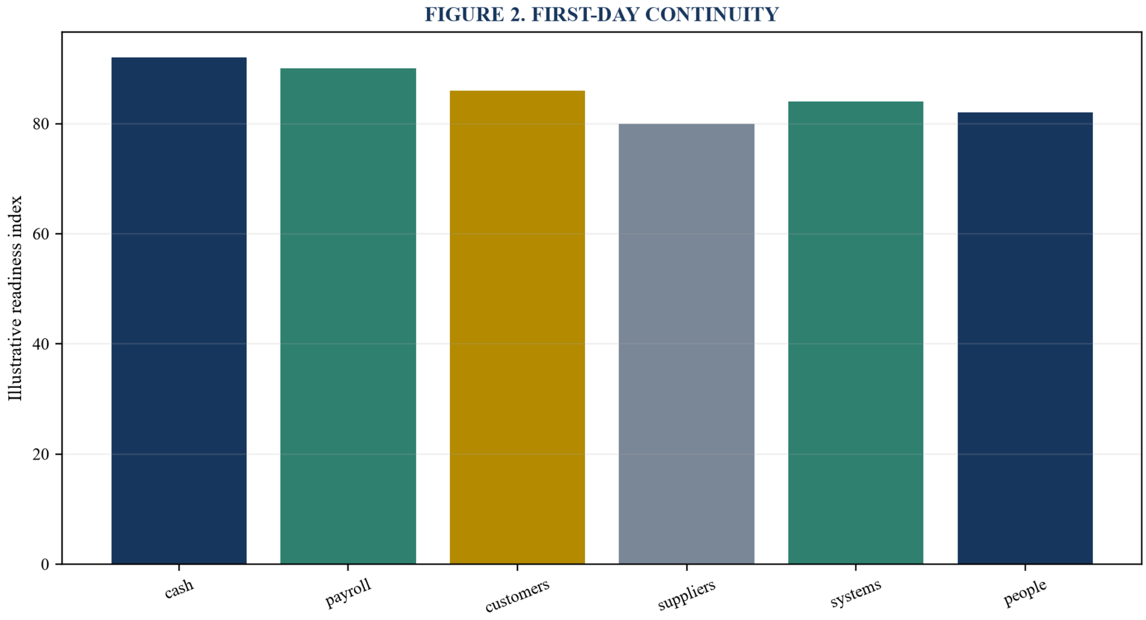
Table 2. First-day operating priorities

Priority	Core evidence	Decision
cash	bank and 13-week view	payment control
people	payroll and critical roles	retention
customers	delivery and collections	triage
suppliers	critical dependencies	stabilise

Illustrative programme design; company-specific facts and authorised advice govern.

Figure 2. First-day continuity



Values are illustrative readiness indices and require company-specific evidence.

17. Protect confidential information

Restrict medical, family, legal, transaction and personal data to authorised recipients and secure systems.

The succession team should reconcile data map, privacy law, privilege, access controls and incident protocol. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a confidential information plan.

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18. Secure physical and digital access

Review premises, devices, credentials, certificates, administrator rights, backups and emergency recovery without bypassing controls.

The succession team should reconcile asset register, identity systems, cyber procedures, custody and authorised support. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an access continuity protocol.

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19. Preserve books and records

Lock down accounting, contracts, approvals, registers, correspondence and evidence needed for later review.

The succession team should reconcile systems, repositories, retention policy, audit trail and custodians. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a records preservation notice.

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20. Notify insurers where required

Review key-person, life, disability, D&O, business interruption and cyber notice conditions without prejudicing coverage.

The succession team should reconcile policies, brokers, incident facts, deadlines and counsel input. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an insurance notification schedule.

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21. Test financing covenants and defaults

Identify key-person events, representation issues, consent needs, reporting deadlines and liquidity consequences.

The succession team should reconcile facility agreements, security, covenants, waivers, forecasts and lender contacts. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a financing event matrix.

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22. Manage lender communication

Provide verified facts, continuity actions, cash evidence and requested consents through an authorised channel.

The succession team should reconcile facility terms, board mandate, situation report, forecast and advisers. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a lender communication pack.

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23. Protect regulated permissions

Identify licences, approved persons, responsible officers, notifications and conditions affected by leadership disruption.

The succession team should reconcile licences, regulator rules, personnel records, legal advice and reporting calendar. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a regulatory continuity schedule.

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24. Stabilise transaction processes

Assess live M&A, financing, litigation, procurement and investment approvals for authority, confidentiality and timetable risk.

The succession team should reconcile deal list, mandates, approvals, data rooms, counterparties and counsel. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a transaction continuity register.

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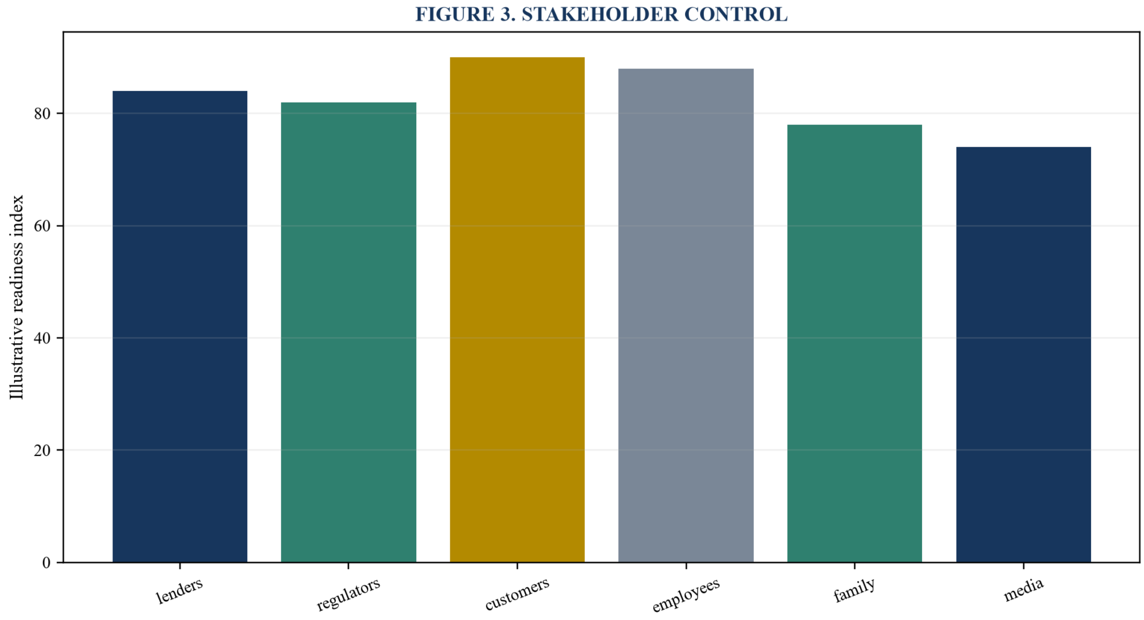
Table 3. Stakeholder notification frame

Stakeholder	Trigger	Control
lenders	key-person or consent event	verified pack
regulators	approved-person impact	timely filing
customers	delivery risk	account plan
employees	leadership uncertainty	manager cascade

Illustrative programme design; company-specific facts and authorised advice govern.

Figure 3. Stakeholder control



Values are illustrative readiness indices and require company-specific evidence.

25. Control public and media statements

Use one authorised spokesperson, verified facts, legal review and monitoring across external channels.

The succession team should reconcile communications policy, incident facts, stakeholder map and approvals. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an external communications protocol.

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26. Coordinate the family interface

Separate family welfare, ownership decisions and operating management while maintaining an authorised information route.

The succession team should reconcile family constitution, ownership map, privacy, council roles and company authority. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a family-company interface plan.

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27. Activate ownership procedures

Follow valid share, trust, foundation, estate and shareholder mechanisms triggered by incapacity or death.

The succession team should reconcile governing instruments, registers, trigger evidence, valuation and legal advice. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an ownership activation map.

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28. Protect against unauthorised transfers

Monitor changes to shares, assets, mandates, related-party dealings and unusual payments during the control gap.

The succession team should reconcile registers, transaction monitoring, dual approval, alerts and audit evidence. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an emergency asset-protection control.

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29. Map founder-only dependencies

Identify personal relationships, tacit knowledge, guarantees, passwords, licences and decisions that lack institutional cover.

The succession team should reconcile interviews, systems, contracts, contact data and process observation. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a founder-dependency register.

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30. Transfer critical knowledge

Capture priority decisions, relationship context, project status, obligations and next actions from available records and deputies.

The succession team should reconcile board packs, diaries, messages, CRM, project files and deputies. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a critical knowledge brief.

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31. Set decision thresholds

Distinguish reversible operating decisions, protected strategic matters and actions requiring shareholder, court or lender authority.

The succession team should reconcile delegations, reserved matters, law, contracts and risk appetite. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an emergency decision-rights matrix.

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32. Run the 24-hour gate

Confirm authority, cash, payroll, safety, priority delivery, communications, data security and immediate notices.

The succession team should reconcile incident log, authority map, cash view, operational reports and counsel checks. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a first-day control certificate.

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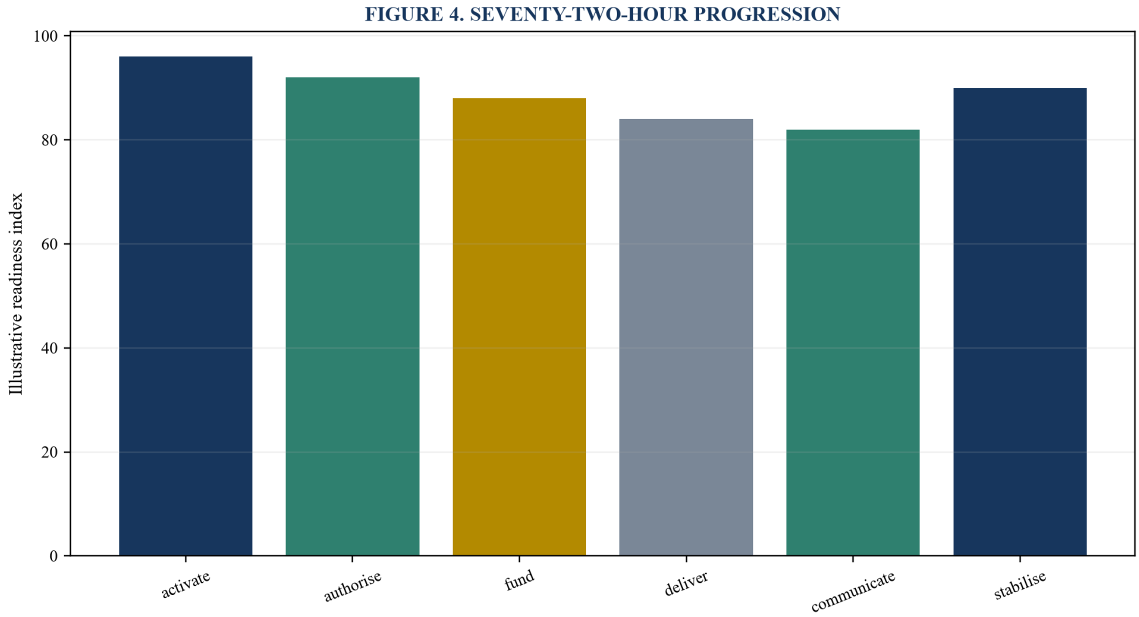
Table 4. Seventy-two-hour gates

Gate	Required outcome	Evidence
24 hours	control established	authority certificate
48 hours	operations stabilised	stakeholder record
72 hours	interim model sustainable	continuity certificate
30 days	transition path approved	stabilisation plan

Illustrative programme design; company-specific facts and authorised advice govern.

Figure 4. Seventy-two-hour progression



Values are illustrative readiness indices and require company-specific evidence.

33. Run the 48-hour gate

Confirm acting leadership, customer and supplier continuity, lender posture, regulatory actions and key-person stability.

The succession team should reconcile board record, stakeholder updates, covenant analysis and workforce evidence. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a second-day stability certificate.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

34. Run the 72-hour gate

Confirm sustainable interim governance, funded operations, active risk controls, ownership pathway and next review cycle.

The succession team should reconcile integrated situation report, forecasts, approvals, exception log and advisers. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a third-day continuity certificate.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

35. Escalate unresolved authority gaps

Seek urgent shareholder, trustee, lender, regulator, arbitral or court action where documents cannot supply lawful authority.

The succession team should reconcile gap analysis, forum rules, evidence, urgency, counsel and proposed relief. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an authority escalation brief.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

36. Plan the next thirty days

Convert emergency response into leadership assessment, cash management, governance, ownership and stakeholder workplans.

The succession team should reconcile 72-hour findings, business plan, family objectives, forecasts and adviser scopes. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a thirty-day stabilisation plan.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

37. Design handback or permanent transition

Define evidence, approvals, timing and communications for founder return or appointment of permanent leadership.

The succession team should reconcile medical or legal status, performance evidence, succession process and governing documents. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a leadership transition protocol.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

38. Test the plan through simulation

Exercise absence, incapacity, death, cyber lockout, bank freeze and customer shock scenarios with observed response times.

The succession team should reconcile scenario scripts, participants, systems, decision logs and remediation owners. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is an emergency succession exercise report.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

39. Remediate structural weaknesses

Update delegations, mandates, board composition, insurance, systems, documentation and succession cover after testing.

The succession team should reconcile exercise findings, legal review, cost, dependencies and approvals. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a succession resilience programme.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

40. Issue the emergency succession conclusion

Present activation, authority, cash, delivery, stakeholder, ownership, risk, approval and remediation conclusions.

The succession team should reconcile verified facts, decision logs, models, simulations, advice and consents. Each conclusion records the accountable body, source, timing, candidate or owner, evidence, dependency, control and unresolved exception. The immediate output is a board emergency succession paper.

Management continuity must be proved through operating outcomes while ownership choices remain explicit. Reviewers test capability, authority, relationships, stakeholder confidence and downside response against native records and observed performance. Company strategy, role requirements, family objectives and governing law control every conclusion.

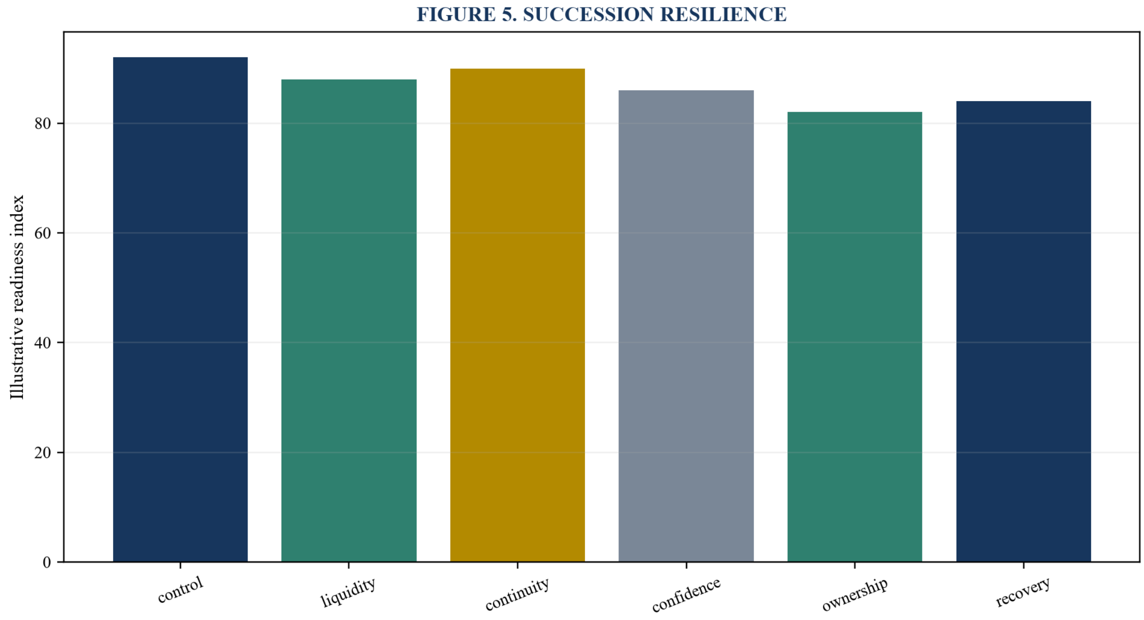
Material gaps require an owner, corrective action, test, advice and decision date. Consequences should flow through leadership capacity, customer delivery, cash, financing, value, control, fairness and transaction timing. Residual risk remains visible until authority is operable, stakeholders are protected and the relevant governing bodies approve the next gate.

Table 5. Emergency succession certificate

Dimension	Required conclusion	Decision use
authority	lawful actors identified	control
liquidity	critical obligations funded	survival
delivery	priority commitments protected	confidence
transition	next leadership path approved	continuity

Illustrative programme design; company-specific facts and authorised advice govern.

Figure 5. Succession resilience



Values are illustrative readiness indices and require company-specific evidence.

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Chennakeshav (CK) is a corporate finance and investment banking executive with 25+ years of global experience in deal origination, structuring and execution across M&A, growth capital and corporate strategy. He has led value-creation mandates for founders, corporates and funds — bridging the boardroom view to hands-on execution and close.

His career spans Morgan Stanley, HSBC, Lloyds Banking Group, EWEC, ADQ portfolio companies and Emirates Growth Fund, across TMT, real estate, fintech, deeptech, cleantech, infrastructure and energy. He has partnered with C-suite leaders, private equity and venture funds, sovereign wealth funds and family offices to finance complex fund raises and scale-up ventures, and has led M&A due diligence, post-merger integration and business-transformation initiatives to create value.

At Matchpoint Partners he is Managing Partner, leading the firm's corporate finance, M&A and capital-raising practice. He holds an MBA from London Business School, an engineering degree from VTU and a Master of Laws (LLM, in progress) from UCL London.

An active start-up mentor, CK mentors at Techstars, DIFC FinTech Hive, Startup Grind, Founder Institute and IN5, serves as Entrepreneur Mentor in Residence (EMiR) at London Business School, and judges the Entrepreneurship World Cup.