

Sustainable Business Continuity: Early Warning Systems and Succession Planning as Instruments for Organisational Resilience

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Abstract

The long-term sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) depends not only on financial performance or strategic planning, but on an often-overlooked dimension: the preservation and transfer of knowledge embedded in people. While textbooks can convey structured frameworks and formal management principles, much of what keeps a business alive and adaptive lives elsewhere: in the intuition of a founder who has navigated a crisis, in the unspoken judgment of a key manager who knows when something is about to go wrong, in the relationships that hold a company together across generations of leadership.

This paper examines two interconnected mechanisms through which entrepreneurial support ecosystems can address this challenge: early warning systems for businesses in distress, and structured succession planning programmes. Drawing on the experience of Early Warning Slovenia and the CEED network, a community of over 1,200 SME founders built around peer-to-peer learning and mentoring, the paper argues that the most effective interventions in both crisis and transition scenarios are those that facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge: through trusted relationships, honest peer exchange, and guided mentoring.

The paper explores how peer groups, mastermind formats, and mentor-supported processes create conditions for knowledge that would otherwise be lost: at the moment of crisis, or at the moment of ownership change to remain within and benefit the organisation. In this framing, sustainability is not merely an environmental or governance concept, but a human and organisational one: the capacity of a business to carry forward the knowledge, values, and relationships that make it viable across time and circumstance.

The findings suggest that structured entrepreneurial communities, when designed around trust and honest dialogue rather than formal instruction alone, can serve as a meaningful infrastructure for sustainable business continuity and that this model has relevance well beyond Slovenia.

Keywords: tacit knowledge, SME resilience, early warning systems, business succession, peer learning, entrepreneurial ecosystems

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