The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

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Succession Planning and Promotional Exams in Texas

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ABSTRACT

Succession planning and promotional exams in Texas are relevant to contemporary law enforcement because they represent a paradigm shift. In organizational development, succession planning is the process of identifying and preparing suitable employees through mentoring, training and job rotation. Having a viable plan allows leadership to be prepared for a decline in or loss of current personnel. Many organizations fail to envision future needs and there are no formal documented succession plans. As senior-level positions are vacated, most organizations rely on existing personnel to fill the positions. One of the pitfalls of this process is that it rewards good test takers (those who study "how-to" books on taking examinations) and the person with the most knowledge and skills may be considered unqualified.

The purpose of this research is to prove the necessity of planning for succession, examine the damage caused by not doing so and provide relevant examples of how to develop a succession planning strategy. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, books, journals and a phone survey conducted with 50 survey participants. The researcher discovered that themes in the literature indicate that police leadership training is often inadequate and that assessment centers are not generally designed to provide leadership training and, therefore, provide validation of the need for a paradigm shift in contemporary law enforcement.

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that competition for advanced work roles (i.e., sergeant and lieutenant) among police officers and other law enforcement officials is intense (Love & DeArmond, 2007). The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not officers who are promoted to higher ranks are qualified for such assignments. Succession planning and promotional exams are indeed relevant to law enforcement in that they aid in the successful preparation and qualification of police officers who are promoted to higher level positions.

The research question to be examined focuses on whether or not police officers are being adequately prepared for promotion to higher level positions in law enforcement. The intended method of inquiry includes a review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, books, and a telephone survey conducted with 50 participants. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research is that a paradigm shift is required in order to ensure that police officers are prepared and qualified for promotions.

In an effort to do exactly this, many police departments have elected to rely on Assessment Centers (AC). Through ACs, police officers are subjected to a variety of personality and other tests that are designed to predict on-the-job performance. Love and DeArmond (2007) stated that these ACs were useful in identifying officers with leadership potential and recommending which officers should be guided toward examinations that lead to promotion. However, what these centers did not do was provide training for leadership.

Thornton and Morris (2001) stated that, traditionally, police departments often include a written knowledge test, an assessment center, credit for seniority, and a score based on recent performance ratings when conducting promotional examinations. Each of these elements may evaluate some important job-related attributes, but scholars such as Thornton and Morris (2001) asserted that they have limitations. Most specifically, these analysts believe that traditional assessment and promotion procedures do not measure intangible attributes that are associated with an individual's competency to perform at higher levels or to exhibit the kinds of attributes, attitudes, and behaviors that are needed for proactive police work, supervision, and policy formation. Consequently, Thornton and Morris (2001) argued that it is increasingly important to explore alternatives to traditional promotional systems in order to tap into otherwise unrecognized talent and attributes which could be of value in a police department.

As Thornton and Morris (2001) suggested, developing a more comprehensive and effective system for promotional assessments represents a challenge to many police departments. Smaller departments may lack the necessary in-house resources for comprehensive evaluations. Locating professional assessment organizations can also be challenging and costly. Developing appropriate testing measures can be an exhaustive task, because it requires the elimination of any and all forms of bias that could affect the process and the stakeholders involved.

The field of law enforcement will benefit from this non-experimental, empirical research study because it not only affirms that police leadership training is often inadequate, but it also provides an examination of methods that have been proven to

help police officers prepare for the demands of promotion to leadership positions. This in turn will help law enforcement agencies operate more effectively and efficiently with fewer turnovers.

Grossman (1994) commented that beginning in the mid-1980s, opportunities for advancement in law enforcement agencies began to decline. At the same time, law enforcement agencies began to develop innovative strategies for enriching the jobs of police officers who could not expect to be promoted to sergeants and lieutenants. Training programs proliferated, as did a movement to professionalize the police department by encouraging officers to obtain college degrees in fields such as criminal justice, criminology, forensic science, or pre-law.

Even after promotion, many police officers lack the specific traits needed for successful leadership. Effective leadership skills in law enforcement include excellent communication skills, knowledge of the law and management practices, interpersonal skills, and motivational skills (Camp, 1999). Many police officers do not automatically possess such skills, despite their supposed competency as evident on promotion exams and assessment center analysis.

Given this background, the purpose of the present study is to identify the skills that are needed in order to become an effective sergeant, lieutenant, or police chief. Leadership efficacy is distinct from job related knowledge (Dayan, Kasten, & Fox, 2002). Consequently, identifying the specific skills, traits, attributes, and behaviors of effective police leadership can be of great benefit in designing training programs which will help prospective leaders become more efficient and effective in their jobs. The non-experimental research design garnered input from officers in Texas police departments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature moves from a brief analysis of the role of leaders in organizations to a focus on leadership skills, attributes and activities specific to law enforcement and the management of police departments by sergeants, lieutenants and chiefs. It identifies key leadership attributes that are needed for success. It highlights the deficits in leadership training made available to law enforcement officers seeking advancement.

Leadership, as defined by Kotter (1996), is distinct from management and is a set of "processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances" (p. 25). In addition, Kotter (1996) also stated that "Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires then to make it happen despite the obstacles" (p. 25). From Kotter's (1996) perspective, the process of leadership was both transformational and inspirational. He also believed this process of leadership should be driven by one's values with change as the main goal and purpose. Therefore, a person considered to be a leader would know how to motivate, influence, inspire, and model desired behaviors.

Argyris (1976) took a different perspective and suggested that leadership develops and/or is exhibited within the context of an organization's culture. From this viewpoint, it is believed that the values found within the culture influence how leaders in the organization behave and what they expect from those they lead. Similarly, Bolman and Deal (1991) also contended that the culture of an organization creates and conveys values, and leaders within that organization emulate these values while communicating a vision for the organization that is value-driven. Additionally, Bolman and Deal (1991)

proposed that an organization could be analyzed, understood, and thereby changed via a range of different means, and it is the leader's role to utilize these means to accomplish the task.

According to Pierce and Newstrom (2000), the position of leadership is multi-faceted with a mixture of characteristics. Pierce and Newstrom (2000) described the process of leadership as "both interactive and dynamic. Leaders influence followers, followers influence leaders, and all parties are influenced by the context in which the exchange takes place" (p. 5). Therefore, leadership is a relationship of social influence where two or more people bonded within a group interact and are mutually dependent upon one another. In order for a leader to successfully "make over" those who follow them into innovative individuals and entrepreneurs, they must first see themselves excelling in those same roles.

More than 30 years ago, Fiedler (1972) affirmed that leaders are most effective when they are mindful of the types of situations within which they find themselves and whether or not they must behave proactively or respond to negative catalysts within the situation. In other words, leadership is a type of response to both internal and external constraints within one's environment. Acting in response to these environmental constraints requires the leader to again be mindful of the status quo but also be ready to abandon it when necessary.

With these considerations in mind, leadership in police departments requires many of the same skills that are important in other environments. Werder (1996), the Chief of Police at Cooper City, Florida, underscored the significance of the police sergeant and his or her leadership in today's culturally diverse and multifunctional police

offices. Werder (1996) stated that "in simple terms, no law enforcement agency can function well without good sergeants. Clearly, the role of the sergeant or first line supervisor is the most important and influential position within a law enforcement organization" (p. 1).

Given that most police departments are expanding agencies that are characterized by diversity in terms of culture, experience, and education, the police sergeant is a key role model in facilitating the development of individual officers. As Werder (1996) noted that regardless of what a police officer has personally encountered, they always remember their first superior and will contend that their ensuing success or failure, accomplishments or lack thereof, are a direct result of their interaction with this individual.

As a leader, the police sergeant is responsible for recognizing and eliminating any cultural barriers or biases that may negatively affect team development in the department. The sergeant is also responsible for modeling the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that are expected of officers, taking a lead role in developing teams, and motivating/inspiring others to perform up to high standards. In the context of teamwork, the sergeant is responsible as well for assigning partners, monitoring interaction among team members, and evaluating team efficacy. These are difficult tasks which must be approached with sensitivity as well as a thorough understanding of what is expected of team members as a group and as individuals (Werder, 1996).

The highest priority among all of these obligations is functioning as a supervisor directly responsible for the activities of patrol offices. In essence, the police sergeant is the mediator between "top brass" and the line officers. He or she directs the flow of

work while also serving as a resource for line officers. Somewhere between what one can describe as labor and management, the police sergeant is simultaneously an advocate for lines staff and their supervisor. It is one of the most important and influential positions within a police department and represents a paradox. As Werder (1996) noted, the sergeant must be approachable and quick to respond to everyone under his direct command. The personal protocol for performance and service established by the sergeant, including how accurately and consistently he/she performs, will be the standard for the department. No other individual has the ability to set this standard more than the sergeant. Similar comments apply to the roles of lieutenants and chiefs or captains (Swanson, Territo & Taylor, 2004).

According to Swanson, Territo, and Taylor (2004), the police chief in any jurisdiction essentially wears two different hats: on the one hand, this individual is a public official who interacts directly with superiors in city government such as the mayor and city council, while on the other hand, he or she is a bureaucratic administrator who is ultimately responsible for overseeing of supervising the activities of a substantial number of often diverse subordinates. Added to this is the fact that the contemporary police chief is increasingly responsive to and held accountable by the general public and the media for activities that may not necessarily be under his or her control (Swanson et al., 2004).

Assessment centers are used to identify potentially skilled police officers who may be capable of functioning effectively at higher ranks (Dayan et al., 2002). Assessment centers and promotion examinations are meant to screen applicants not only for an original job, but for promotions (Wing, 1981). The problem with these

processes is that they tend to focus on knowledge that is related to the job of police work rather than police work itself (Moore, 2004). They also tend to look at job related competencies that do not necessarily incorporate leadership attributes as discussed above. Moore (2004) suggested that while assessment centers and promotion examinations are necessary in order to ensure that all officers seeking a promotion will have an opportunity to be considered for a new position, these centers fall short on meeting the needs of leadership training.

A criminal justice administration course or program targeting the needs of police departments and police chiefs should incorporate information regarding budgetary matters, media relations, communications, supervision, sexual harassment, community policing, and multiculturalism (Swanson et al., 2004). Such courses should be practically oriented and while police chiefs would certainly benefit from understanding the various theoretical and causal explanations of crime and deviance, their role is administrative in nature and it is the tools of the successful administrator that are most necessary in such programs.

Wing (1981) commented that written tests used to determine eligibility for advancement have been the center of controversy in that they have been regularly modified to avoid any possible racial, gender, or ethnic biases that may exist and thereby to create a more level playing field. While this is certainly an admirable goal, it is not necessarily one that is linked to leadership identification. Camp (1999) made the case that a promotional program that incorporates leadership training and workshops and seminars would be highly desirable because it would facilitate the identification of potential leaders while also enhancing the ability of otherwise qualified police officers to

be effective leaders once they are promoted. What is missing from the literature is a thorough going assessment of what ranking officers feel is needed in terms of the leadership skills of officers seeking a promotion (Kingshott, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

The central research question to be examined in this non-experimental, quantitative research study considers the degree to which police chiefs believe that the promotional process in their jurisdictions, which leads to the placement of sergeants and lieutenants, is adequate with respect to identifying leadership skills. A related issue is to determine what types of leadership skills police chiefs consider necessary for success in the role of sergeant, lieutenant, or captain.

The researcher hypothesizes that police chiefs are likely to accept their promotional processes as adequate to the task of identifying potentially successful, sergeants, lieutenants, and captains. The researcher also hypothesizes that police chiefs will express belief that the promotional process and assessment center do not provide adequate leadership training to career oriented police officers.

To test these hypotheses, a telephone survey instrument (see Appendix A) will be developed by the researcher. The survey instrument will be administered to a sample of 50 small to medium-sized police departments in Texas defined as departments with a staff of 15-30 employees serving communities of at least 10,000 citizens. The survey will be administered by the researchers over a two month period. A total of 62 calls will be made and is intended to elicit a response of 50 individual police chiefs. The response rate to the survey instrument was 80.7%.

The data to be obtained from the survey will include basic demographic or background data on each of the participating police chiefs who will be assured that their responses will be held in confidence. The data will include answers to open-ended questions and Likert-type scaled response items. Simple descriptive statistics such as means and percentages will be used in analyzing the data.

According to Babbie (2004), a quantitative study of this type, which is essentially testing a new instrument, is exploratory rather than explanatory in nature and does not require inferential statistical analysis. Had the survey compared different groups of police chiefs based on, for example, number of employees or size of jurisdiction, more sophisticated statistical analysis would have been indicated. For the purposes of this study, only basic descriptive statistics were required.

Babbie (2004) further suggested that research employing what amounts to a convenience sample can lay the groundwork for more extensive research at a later date. The present study was limited to police departments of a certain size, in a single state and therefore the results may not be generalized to a larger population without some caveats. The research results are most directly applicable to small to mid-sized police departments located in Texas.

FINDINGS

The phone survey, which generated 50 responses, revealed that 52% of the police chiefs surveyed possessed a Bachelor's degree, 35% held an advanced degree, 12% had an Associate degree and 6% had only a high school degree. Of the 50 subjects, 36 (72%) identified themselves as non-hispanic whites, whereas 8 (16%) percent identified them as Hispanic, and 6 (12%) identified themselves as black. Forty-

two of the survey respondents (84%) were male, while 8 (16%) were female. The average age of respondents was 51.6 years.

These data indicated that the participants in this survey were relatively homogenous in that the vast majority were male, a substantial majority were non-Hispanic whites, and 41 subjects, or 82%, claimed to have either a Bachelor's or higher degree. When age range was considered, the youngest participant stated that she was 39 years old. The oldest participant was 64. This is a fairly narrow age range, with most of the respondents clustered in the 45 to 50 year old age cohort.

The first portion of the survey presented nine open-ended questions. The first question sought to determine if the department participated in management or leadership training. Eighty percent (40) of the respondents indicated that this was the case. Other items from this section of the survey showed that 92% believed that succession planning was important, 58% had documented succession plans for their departments, 72% believed their current promotional process was effective, 64% of the departments offered career counseling, 76% of the departments offered mentoring and 42% of the respondents felt their departments embraced peer leadership.

When asked what methods were employed in the promotional process, all 50 respondents indicated that examinations for advancement were standard. Six of the participants (12%) indicated that assessment centers were involved in this process. The final question in this section of the survey asked respondents to identify the qualifications and criteria used in their current promotional processes.

All subjects stated that examination results were key criteria used in promoting police officers. Thirty-six (72%) said that questions regarding diversity influenced the

promotion process while 29 (58%) indicated that years on the job or experience were considered in the promotion decision. Only 21 (42%) of the subjects indicated that college degrees were significant criteria used in making decisions regarding promotions.

The second section of the survey offered respondents a five point, Likert-type response scale, ranging from one or "strongly agree" to five or "strongly disagree." The data was summed, and an average response for each item was calculated.

Of the participants, an average of 5.8% stated that their departments were well organized. Also, 5.6% stated that their current promotional process was adequate. For 2.8% of the participants, succession planning was important to the continuity of leadership. Core competencies for supervisory positions were necessary to 2.4% of the participants. According to 4.2% of the participants, the utilization of testing assessment centers is best suited for promotional process. Also, 3.4% of the participants said that internal testing is best suited for the promotional process. A total of 3.2% of the participants said that a combination of assessment centers and in house centers is best suited for the promotional process. Regarding success in the organization, 5.6% of the participants said that emphasis should be placed on mentoring and developing employees to succeed. It was found that 4.6% of the participants included a development plan for employees in their departments' strategic plans. And finally, 3.2% of the participants said that the best way to prepare future leaders for leadership roles in the organization is through training, education and placing people in assignments that would benefit the organization and develop the employees.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The research problem addressed herein focused on whether or not the current promotional processes and practices used by police departments are perceived as generating leadership competency in officers who are promoted to the position of sergeants, lieutenants, and captains. The research questions focused on whether police chiefs would regard their departmental promotional processes as adequate and whether they would express a belief that these processes and assessment centers do not provide sufficient leadership training.

The researcher hypothesized that police chiefs are likely to accept their promotional processes as adequate to the task of identifying potentially successful, sergeants, lieutenants, and captains. The researcher also hypothesized that police chiefs will express belief that the promotional process and assessment center do not provide adequate leadership training to career oriented police officers.

Based on the findings presented above, several conclusions were drawn. First, the police departments whose chiefs participated in the survey appeared to be actively involved in management and leadership training and to incorporate succession planning into this process. There appeared to be a significant reliance on traditional examinations as well as variables like years on the job, education, and diversity mandates in making promotion decisions. The survey also indicated that mentoring is common in these departments but that peer leadership is less common. Further, the vast majority of respondents believed that their current promotional process was effective.

When questioned more specifically about the linkage between leadership and the promotion process, these police chiefs presented a somewhat different understanding of their departments. They tended to disagree with the idea that their department was well organized in planning for its future leaders and with the statement that their promotional process was adequate. While they strongly agreed that core competencies are necessary for success in supervisory positions, they were more ambivalent on the question of whether assessment centers and internal tests would be most likely to generate successful leaders.

Though they had earlier indicated that they placed an emphasis on mentoring, in the next section of the survey they said that they did not. This may have been due to some confusion regarding the wording of portions of the questionnaire or to concerns regarding its delivery via phone as opposed to hard copy.

Based on these results, the research hypotheses can be tentatively accepted. Hypothesis one is more broadly supported than hypothesis two. The study was limited with respect to participation and the use of a previously untested instrument. Nevertheless, these results support the conclusion that police chiefs view the promotional process as a means of identifying potentially effective sergeants and lieutenants and captains while also recognizing that existing promotion processes and assessment centers are not necessarily the best mechanism for leadership training. Additional research to refine and test the survey instrument is advisable. An expanded sample of more diverse police departments which would facilitate comparison on the basis of departmental size is also recommended.

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Appendix A

Police Chief Phone Survey

1) Does your Department participate in any form of management or leadership training?

2) Do you feel that succession planning is necessary for continuity and the selection of competent leaders in the promotional process?

3) Does your Department have formally documented strategic and succession plans for personnel development and for future leaders?

4) Do you feel the current promotional process is effective?

5) Does your Department offer the officers career counseling?

6) Does your Department offer any form of mentoring?

7) Does your Department embrace peer leadership?

8) What method is utilized in the promotional process at your Department?

9) What are the qualifications and criterion used in the current promotional process?

Appendix B

This survey is anonymous; <u>do not</u> put your name on it.

Chief of Police Survey

Circle the item that best describes how you feel.

1. **My department is well organized in its planning for its future leaders.**

    Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
    Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

2. **The current promotional process at my department is adequate.**

    Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
    Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

3. **Succession planning is important to the continuity of leadership.**

    Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
    Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

4. **Core competencies for supervisory positions are necessary.**

    Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
    Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

5. **The utilization of testing assessment centers is best suited for the promotional process.**

    Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
    Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

6. **Internal testing is best suited for the promotional process.**

    Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
    Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

7. **A combination of assessment centers and in house testing is best suited for the promotional process.**

    Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
    Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

8. **Emphasis is placed on mentoring and developing employees to succeed in the organization.**

Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

9. **My department's strategic plan includes a development plan for employees.**

Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

10. **The best way to prepare future leaders for leadership roles in the organization is through training, education and placing people in assignments that would benefit the organization and develop the employee.**

Strongly   Somewhat   Neutral   Strongly   Somewhat
Agree   Agree   Disagree   Disagree

Personal Data

Highest Educational
Level

A. HS or GED

B. Associate Degr.

C. Bachelor Degr.

D. Advanced Degr

ETHNIC ORIGIN

A. Black (Non Hispanic)

B. Hispanic

C. White(Non Hispanic)

D. Asian/Pacific Islander E. American Indian/Alaskan Native F. Other	
GENDER A. Male B. Female	**AGE** _____

This is the end of this survey. Thank you for your participation. Your time was greatly appreciated.