

**The Bill Blackwood
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Succession Planning

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ABSTRACT

Succession planning is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because recent statistics reveal a large portion of baby boomers that hold leadership positions within organizations will be retiring, and many organizations do not have a program or initiative to develop employees to fill the leadership gap. The position of the researcher is that police organizations should develop a succession plan in order to properly prepare for a leadership void, help maintain a continuity of operations, and provide the basis for continued organizational excellence. The types of information used to support the researcher's position are a review of industry periodicals, reports issued by experts in the field of human resources management, statistics obtained through organizational research, reports published by the United States government, and a review of a study conducted by the IBM Corporation. The conclusion drawn from this position paper is that succession planning is essential if police organizations are to remain viable and successful in efforts to fight crime, continue being fiscally responsible, and remain responsive to the concerns of the public. Success is measured by judging the quality of those who continue the legacy.

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INTRODUCTION

A chief of police in an organization unexpectedly retires as well as two top level administrators. The organization is left with a substantial gap in institutional knowledge and leadership. The mayor or city manager, city council members, community leaders, and the public begin to ask critical questions as to who will take their place, such as how long the process will take, if the right person for the job can be found, and if there is someone within the organization that is capable. During times of change and transition, organizations are vulnerable to a loss of purpose as departing senior leaders who helped shape the vision and mission are replaced by individuals who may not share the same ideology. The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) recently referred to government human resource management practices as an area of grave concern as the lack of leadership development threatens the organizational mission (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2001). The critical questions posed by city officials and community leaders and the need to develop future leaders could be addressed with succession planning.

If the above organization had instituted succession planning, there would be multiple people available from which to find a suitable replacement. An organization's vision is developed and implemented through the application of a leader's insight and values in making organizational decisions. The transfer of a leader's vision and insight to a successor requires a learning process, a process that is extremely time consuming. It requires not only understanding the mechanics of the decision, but also the principles used in arriving at them. The idea of succession planning is so important that Ray Blunt, the Associate Director and Fellow of the Washington Institute of Faith, Vocation, and

Culture, stated that “growing the next generation of public sector leaders may be the single most critical responsibility of senior public service leaders today” (Blunt, 2003, p. 4). For continued organizational success, it is imperative that organizations understand the necessity to develop and provide a talent pool capable of filling a leadership void.

Succession planning is a program or initiative designed to identify, assess, and mentor leaders at all levels in an organization. It is the building and maintenance of a talent pool for future leadership opportunities. The objective of succession planning is to maintain organizational continuity and efficiency when employees leave key positions. A succession plan may not be restricted to leadership positions and includes those positions within an organization that require a unique set of competencies and abilities (Iowa Department of Administrative Services, 2007). Succession planning ensures that key positions at all levels within the organization are filled with well prepared, talented and capable people.

Between 2002 and 2012, it was estimated that the nation would need 37,700 new police officers. This would be in addition to the 30,300 positions that are already necessary for replacing retirees and others who are leaving the job (as cited in Woska, 2006). Public sector organizations with shrinking budgets, hiring freezes, and vulnerability to downsizing can become susceptible to the effects of what these statistics bear out, which can perpetuate the leadership gap. According to Orrick (2005), law enforcement offices around the nation reported increased rates of turnover as well as hardships in maintaining current employment levels. Additional statistics revealed that 25 to 30% of baby boomers will retire within the next five years, and 70% will retire in ten years (as cited in Wickman, 2008). Because of these trends, there is a growing gap

between leadership talent and a need to plan for such circumstances. In order to fill the leadership gap, sustain organizational excellence, and help the organization be fully prepared to staff management positions, succession planning should be implemented.

POSITION

In 1841, the 9th President of the United States, William Henry Harrison, died 31 days into his presidency as a result of complications related to pneumonia. At the time, there was no constitutional guideline for succession. The death of President Harrison was an unplanned event and sparked much debate on who should be his successor. As the establishment of a clear line of succession was important enough to the nation to introduce the concept in the 20th Amendment in 1933, it is just as important today for the long-term success of an organization. With a high percentage of baby boomers leaving the workforce within the next several years, organizations will be experiencing a loss of institutional knowledge along with genuine relationships leaders have been able to establish over time. According to George (2003), a former CEO of Medtronic, "One of the most important things leaders do is to prepare for their own succession" (p. 187). Organizations need to establish a line of succession by developing talent internally so there are multiple choices when a successor is needed.

Recent statistics suggested there will be an exodus of baby-boomers retiring, of which many will have worked their entire careers with one organization, taking with them a vast amount of institutional knowledge, a career's worth of relationships, and a history of decision making in the organization. William Byham, CEO of Development International, stated, "the leadership gap is pervasive and creates the biggest threat to organizations since Y2K (as cited in Green, 2000, p. 339). A void in

senior management positions affects an organization's bottom line by creating additional costs that are reflected in lost knowledge, a decline in productivity, and hiring and recruiting a replacement. As a result, organizations can no longer ignore these mounting costs (Devine, 2009). Additionally, upon the appointment of a new leader, there is an indoctrination period. During this time, an organization's mission can be affected, making it difficult for the organization to move forward and remain productive and efficient. Organizational excellence and sustainability is linked to its ability to survive a void in leadership.

Succession planning allows for a plan so that key positions within the organization are filled with capable employees that are well prepared. Highly successful organizations do not stand by and wait for the future to come to them; they go after and establish the future by investing their time and effort into growing future leaders. In times of shrinking budgets, high turnover, and hiring freezes, succession planning helps organizations meet both long-term and short-term leadership needs at all levels within the organization. It provides sustainability and leadership depth necessary for the success of police organizations in carrying out the critical mission of protecting and serving the public. According to a Human Resource Planning Society and Hewitt Associates study, "fewer than 60% of companies have a succession plan in place" (as cited in Byham, 2000, p. 29). Developing a line of succession encourages a strong bench of employees who can lead under various scenarios and circumstances, an important element in building an organization capable of achieving excellence and meeting its mission.

Succession planning ensures continuity of management, and it sends a positive message throughout an organization. Promoting from within is good for morale and essential to a positive organizational culture (Ibarra, 2005). It shows that the organization is serious about its most valuable resource: people. Succession planning helps an organization prepare for the unexpected and the unplanned departure of key personnel by developing leadership abilities and capabilities in employees at all levels within the organization. It establishes a defined process so the organization has the right personnel for tomorrow's changing work environment.

The 10th President of the United States, John Tyler, went an entire presidential term without naming a vice president. While the thought of people other than oneself providing leadership and making decisions for an organization can be frightening, the alternative could be much more catastrophic for an organization. Selecting a replacement is often an obstacle many organizational leaders are unwilling to do. Organizational leaders must put aside their apprehensions and unwillingness to develop a successor for the betterment of the organization. Succession planning to some is an admission of their own mortality. As such, many organizational leaders put it off or simply do not buy into the concept. But, without it, leaders miss out on an opportunity for business continuity and future direction (Matthews, 2001). Leaders who do not prescribe to succession planning inevitably place the organization in a reactive position in need of conducting a timely and expensive search for a replacement instead of preparing suitable candidates from within one's agency who understand the agency's culture, processes, community concerns, and who are in a position to continue organizational success from day one.

The International Association Chief's of Police (1999) produced a report that stated, "The profession is obligated to ensure the continuing presence of an abundant pool of candidates who possess the personal attributes, academic preparation and formal training to meet the needs of a 21st century leadership" (p. i). In essence, regardless of a leader's personal affinity for not buying into the idea of succession planning or a leader's distrust of the decision making of others, police leaders must embrace the idea of succession planning so their particular organization is successful in carrying out their mission and to continually meet the needs and demands of the public.

COUNTER POSITION

Many organizations speculate that the employees retiring will return as contract employees, and there will be no disruption of police service or leadership within organizations. Organizations will be in a position to hire part time and full time employees. This idea is based on the belief that the mass exodus of retiring baby boomers will be a small blip on the radar screen for many organizations. However, with the history of fiscal constraints and downsizing, many organizations may not be in a position to hire.

To compound these problems public sector, organizations are exposed to the effect of an aging workforce, and according to Kiyonaga (2004), they "are facing the potential loss of 40 to 50% of their workforce in the coming years" (p. 357). Those organizations that have been unable to hire for extended periods of time are left with too few younger aged workers to replace the retiring baby boomers. With these types of statistics, decreasing budgets and governments implementing hiring freezes, organizations not engaging in succession planning will not be in a position to rehire

civilian employees. William Byham, CEO of Development Dimensions International, believes the typical organization will “experience at least a 33 percent turnover at the executive ranks in five years. One third of those organizations surveyed said they are not confident that they will be able to find suitable replacements” (as cited in Green, 2000, p. 439). Therefore, organizations with no succession plan are left with a growing leadership gap, reduced budget, and an inability to successfully fill key positions within the organization; positions vital to the success of the organization.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, supervisors, police and detectives will have 70.9% of the workforce permanently leaving the occupation (as cited in Dohm, 2000). What is unique is that the police profession already has an older than average workforce (Dohm, 2000). These statistics paint a bleak picture for organizations that do not develop future leaders. Successful organizations that grow future leaders develop a succession plan for continued organizational viability. In January of 2001, the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) released a report that contained the results of an extensive study conducted with first line supervisors. The report stated that only four of the 20 agencies surveyed by OPM had any type of formal leadership development programs for their new supervisors (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). Such statistics highlight the need for heads of police organizations to commit to succession planning rather than rely on the unpredictability of re-hiring retiring baby-boomers and leaving the development of organizational leaders to its human resource department.

The human resource department has remained primarily responsible for the development of a list of abilities and capabilities organizations look for when searching for new leaders. Most public service organizations fill vacancies by nominating an

interim until a hiring plan is developed. Once the plan is initiated, they fill the position permanently, satisfying the short-term goal, while leaving agency heads out of the decision making process and neglecting to find a long term solution to the leadership void. Allowing human resource departments the lone voice in deciding who will fill key positions may contribute to the inability of organizations to develop an institutionalized method for development of future leaders. To combat this, agency heads must be involved in the process and must be a committed partner in the development of a succession plan so effective and efficient delivery of police services remains uninterrupted.

Many baby boomers leaving the workforce have spent an entire career with one police agency. Organizations that do not create a plan or method for passing on those skills and abilities to the next generation run the risk of losing valuable knowledge gained over an entire career. It is imperative to create an environment in which there is the flexibility to address planned and unexpected departures within all levels of the organization. Leadership development and succession planning are not just a human resource responsibility but an organizational imperative. Senior management must realize the importance of being involved in the development of future leaders and not leave this idea for others to develop and implement. For too long has the organizational focus been on replacing those who leave instead of focused on what can be done for those remaining.

The human resource department's expertise is critical in creating a leadership development and succession plan that works. It is imperative that human resources collaborate with senior managers to create programs and training initiatives that develop

and enhance employees' competencies and abilities so they are properly prepared to fill vacant leadership positions. It is important for the continued success and viability of the organization. In 2003, a Human Resource Institute survey found that nearly three-quarters of the human resource professionals who responded saw leadership as an "extremely important management issue" (as cited in Mickelson, 2006, para. 6). While human resources may be a clearinghouse for organizational strategic planning, the implementation of such plans requires cooperation and participation at all levels within the organization. Managers working collaboratively with human resources and using their expertise in developing a succession plan means the organization has grown a number of mid-level managers ready to fill key leadership positions when the need arises.

Senior managers collaborating with human resources to develop a viable list of skills and capabilities will create a succession plan that will effectively and efficiently prepare future leaders. Dwindling budgets, hiring freezes, and a cry to do more with less punctuates the need to carefully justify the need to fill vacant positions. Police work is knowledge intensive and organizations are dependent on their most important asset: people; therefore, it is imperative for organizations to have institutional programs and initiatives for the recruitment, training, development, and mentoring of its leaders. Cost savings are twofold in that there is a potential loss of productivity during transition and there are costs associated with external hiring and training. Succession planning addresses these types of fiscal questions and provides answers about the priority of a position and its place in the organization (Kiyonaga, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Planning is the foundation on which organizations define and build their future success. Recent statistics showed that 25 to 30% of baby boomers will retire within the next five years, and 70% will retire in ten years (as cited in Wickman, 2008). These statistics reflect a gap between those individuals who have institutional knowledge and have spent years building strong relationships within the communities they serve and those that will be expected to fill leadership positions. Compounding the leadership gap is the revealing statistic that 75% of companies that responded to The Global Human Capital Study conducted in 2008 cited their inability to develop future leaders as a critical issue (as cited in IBM Global Business Services, 2008). Succession planning is an organization's way of ensuring its success. The future of an organization and its human resource abilities and capabilities are interrelated and must be considered together. Leadership development is too important to be left to chance.

With the assistance of an organization's human resource department that spends their time on rules, regulations, and compliance, along with support of management at all levels within an organization, succession planning provides the opportunity for key positions within the organization to be filled with persons who are talented and well prepared. The lack of leadership capability and its inevitable barrier to organizational growth is rectified with succession planning since it prepares the organization to staff management positions, fill a leadership gap, and ensure continued organizational excellence. Agency success is measured by judging the quality of those who continue the legacy. Integrating all levels of management and human resources in the

development and implementation of a succession plan builds the foundation and basis for a legacy.

As public sector agencies anticipate the need for future leaders, succession planning helps promote an organizational culture that believes in leadership development and sets an example of an organization that cares about its people. Succession planning is consistent with an empowerment philosophy that encourages employees to take on responsibility, assume risk, make decisions, develop, and grow through their achievements. It provides continuity of management and assists in directing resources in an effort to meet organizational needs for today, tomorrow, and the future. It is an obligation that police leaders need to take to heart if they are to meet the challenges of shrinking budgets and retiring baby boomers, all while maintaining focus on the challenges of tomorrow.

Statistics suggested that not all retiring baby boomers will be headed back to the workforce as some police leaders may assume. With estimations of upwards of 70% of baby boomers retiring within the next five years and the potential loss of employees with specific industry knowledge, police leaders cannot leave succession planning to their respective human resource department. The future success of the organization depends on a collaborative effort of senior management, mid-level management, and human resource personnel developing a list of key capabilities and skills and implementing a development program to grow leaders.

Incoming data clearly showed that public sector organizations will experience a leadership gap that could have a severe impact on an agencies ability to provide high quality service. A leadership gap could affect the mission and responsibility the

organization has to the public. Public sector organizations, with shrinking budgets, hiring freezes, and continually having to do more with less, are susceptible to this leadership void. They are susceptible because without succession planning, the organization is placed in the position of expending time and money, which increases the burden when trying to reduce expenditures and cut budgets.

Succession planning grows a group of well prepared and dedicated employees capable of excelling in vacated leadership positions within the organization. It encourages employees along their career path and assists the organization in positioning itself for the future. With management throughout the organization and the human resource department working together to assess skills, abilities, capabilities, and knowledge for staffing management positions, they will be able to fill the leadership gap and help sustain organizational excellence. Succession planning is essential if organizations are to remain viable and successful in efforts to fight crime, continue being fiscally responsible, and remain responsive to the concerns of the public. Success is measured by judging the quality of those who continue the legacy.

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