

Growing Future Leaders Through Succession Planning and Development

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Abstract

One of the most critical challenges facing the professions of public safety in the 21st Century is succession planning and personnel development. In the last 20 years the issues of planning for succession and developing future leaders have become a topic of interest and concern. Leadership development and succession planning requires a dedicated process involving prioritization and commitment from agency leaders, the benefits of which may not be realized for a number of years. We examined several models of succession development including private sector succession planning, practices recommended by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and how the National Wildfire Coordination Group (NWCG) provides structure in the Fire Services environment. Recommendations have been developed and included for consideration of addressing the concerns associated with succession development. While public service agencies continue to exist due to their institutional nature, leaders must realize their responsibility to ensure the values and mission of the organization continue into the future while providing excellent public safety services to the community and their personnel. Ensuring an agency's positive legacy continues is the duty of agency leadership to enhance the growth of future leaders through succession planning and development.

Growing Future Leaders Through Succession Planning and Development

Succession planning and employee development are critical tools for leadership and organizational growth and continuity. By developing and implementing succession plans organizations can reduce or eliminate the loss of institutional memory, knowledge and leadership, through identification, development and placement of key personnel (Scott, 2019). Succession planning supports the agency and value is added to agency employees through development which increases individual retainment and provides for increased knowledge and opportunities. Employees who believe their agency is willing to invest in them, through training and leadership development are more likely to remain at an organization. They may also feel a higher sense of ownership and purpose in their responsibilities. Individual advancement must be seen as a priority and encouraged at all levels within the organization. Leaders within an organization must support and contribute to the formal process in order for succession planning to be successful.

The organization's successors identified and developed will guide the organization into the future and ensure the future leaders and organizations have similar vision; fostering an open dialogue with employees regarding career ambitions and assimilate this information as part of a performance development process. Future leaders are created through a combination of training, life experience, maturity, competence and development in a position. Without it, historical knowledge and skills may be lost, leaving those behind having to repeat lessons previously learned. Organizations that invest in succession planning are primed for competitive advantage and will be better prepared for dealing with the complex and often turbulent process of continuing evolution and future change.

The elements of succession planning are intertwined in the agency's mission and culture. Most agencies use a traditional promotion process consisting of a combination of seniority points, written test scores and assessment centers to identify optimal candidates for succession. It is often misinterpreted as a promotional process when in fact it is much more. The selection process does not take into account whether the candidate knows or understands and is willing to promote and support the agencies mission and culture. The goal of succession planning should be to identify employees capable of assuming leadership roles and to provide and encourage education and training to develop employees' competencies, leadership skills and the structural, functional and environmental aspects of the agency. In doing so the organization will help grow its future leaders.

Private Sector Perspective

The need for successful development of personnel and succession planning in the private sector has long been a concern of business leaders and management. According to William Rothwell, author of *Effective Succession Planning*, "When experienced people leave the organization, they take with them not only the capacity to do the work but also the accumulated wisdom they have acquired." (Rothwell, 2005). This occurs at all levels of the private sector organization or business. Therefore, the importance of personnel development at all levels is paramount, to prevent the loss of valuable institutional memory that leaves with the person when they transfer, retire, or otherwise leave the organization. Yet, "two-thirds of companies (have) no formal succession plan in place" (Charan, et al, 2018). Recognizing the need for succession planning and developing personnel to fit the future needs of an organization are only part of the process. In an article entitled *7 Steps to Successful Succession Planning*, published in Forbes

Magazine, the author provides an overview of the 7 steps to make succession planning successful. These include:

1. Lead from the top-successful planning must be managed by the executive level.
2. Reinvent the Human Resources Team - make HR a valuable part of the process and use technology to save time in non-priority areas.
3. Address the Next Generation - Consistently review talent and identify talented personnel at all levels.
4. Get Ready for the Proverbial Bus - Ensure that personnel are in the right “seats” on the “bus.”
5. Standard Approach to Assessment - Use a potential and performance grid to assess candidate’s readiness to assume a higher level of responsibility within the organization.
6. Lateral as well as Linear - Have a process for employees to assume lateral assignments in addition to promotional opportunities, to build diversity.
7. Don’t forget to look outside - Many talented individuals come from inside the agency, but don’t limit opportunities by not considering qualified outside candidates.

In Module 4, Week 6 of National Command and Staff College, Lt. Col. Wellington Scott embedded a video from Ritz Carlton on its organizational take on succession planning. In the video, the hotel emphasizes the importance of cross training its personnel to expand their talent and provide more challenge for their employees. A side benefit of cross-training is ensuring that other employees can fill positions at all levels of the organization in the event of an employee leaving the organization (Scott, 2019).

An article published in the *Harvard Business Journal* authored by Marshall Goldsmith entitled, *Four Tips for Efficient Succession Planning*, recommends the following 4 step process for successful succession planning and development. First it recommends changing the process from one of planning to one of developing by calling it “Succession Development.” Measuring outcomes and not processes is the next recommendation. The importance of leadership development should be a priority within any organization, and examining, for example, how many positions have been filled by internal vs. external candidates could be a measure of success or failure. Goldsmith recommends that the process be kept simple. Development of extravagant and complex assessments only complicates the process. Having realistic yet simple assessment processes is more important than spending unnecessary time developing unrealistic and complex processes. Assessments can dive deeper depending on the level of the position being filled. Finally, it’s important to stay realistic in developing personnel to assume higher levels of responsibility. If it’s not realistic for a particular person to potentially fill a promotional vacancy, its unproductive and damaging to set up elaborate training and development if its not realistic that the person in question will be considered for promotion if that is not the case (Goldsmith, 2009). Although the private sector has identified Succession Planning and Development as a top priority, it does not hold any monopoly on solutions to the universal problem of replacing talented, knowledgeable, experienced and wise personnel when they leave or retire from an organization.

Law Enforcement Best Practices

While many agencies agree on the importance of succession planning it appears very few have formal plans in place. The question was asked in a recent training by the California Police Chiefs’ Association on Strategic and Succession Planning, hosted by Buena Park Police

Department in October 2018 how many agencies had a succession plan. Of the forty-two (42) agencies represented only two (2) had a formal succession plan. (Dunbar, 2018). According to Bratton (2008) “Most chiefs of police and city managers agree that preparing and developing staff not only encourages retention but encourages the professional development of the agency staff and the quality of the agency as a whole.” He added “Author Jim Collins states in his book, Good to Great, that leaders need to have the right people on the bus and in the right seats for the organization to be successful.” Bratton summarized the importance of succession planning “Succession planning is intended to identify and develop individuals with high leadership potential at all levels of the agency. It is also a valuable tool to help chiefs ensure a lasting positive legacy by establishing continuity of operations and sharing institutional knowledge.

In his National Command and Staff College lecture Lt. Col. (ret) Wellington Scott (2019) mentioned in 1999 a committee on succession planning at the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) identified a four-step plan for succession planning. What follows is their recommendation on the best practices:

1. The senior level leadership identify key replacement needs; positions and people, clarifying current and future work activities.
2. Establish a succession plan that includes understanding job classifications and responsibilities and identify what the ideal candidate attributes sought. This plan should include strategies and goals including mentoring as well as a method to track and monitor.
3. Develop a succession plan policy with stated purpose and goals. Seek to gain organizational buy-in including the need for quality and readiness evaluation of

candidates. The plan should be dynamic; reviewed regularly for progress and results as well as seeking feedback from participants to adjust the plan accordingly.

4. Develop a checklist to systematically identify, nominate and select potential successors. This should include a review of their background, education, skills appraisals and evaluations. Lastly, the system should provide a path for feedback.

Despite the positive attributes of the model, it tends to be overly focused on identifying individuals for a particular position or assignment and not so much on the future leadership needs of the organization. These succession planning models tend to be discouraging to employees not “shoulder tapped” as the next in line. This is especially true of the newer generations of employees seeking to improve their leadership skills. A more holistic approach to succession planning is one of organization-wide leadership that includes everyone with potential to assume a formal leadership role. This provides an opportunity for mentoring and education of the organization’s leadership principles. In many agencies any leadership education is reserved for those holding formal leadership positions and usually occur following the promotion. The IACP Leading by Legacy (LBL) program provides guidance, via a four-step plan, on an open succession planning process (Weinzetl 2012).

1. Identify the potential talent within the organization. This can be done via observations and conversations to determine who may be interested in a leadership role. It is important to not be myopic in this process. There may be employees with leadership talent that may not show interest in that role. Opening your eyes and ears for informal leaders who are having a positive impact can identify the up and comers.

2. Provide training to those identified. Extend an open invitation to all employees to attend leadership training but be sure to encourage those mentioned above to attend. They may not recognize their potential or talent or be too humble to step forward.
3. Mentor the individuals who show promise. This can be both formal and informal but ensure time is allocated to provide guidance for their growth into the leaders of tomorrow. This can include inviting them to meetings that afford the opportunity to observe and learn from current leaders. It is critical the mentors model the leader behaviors most important to the agency.
4. Empower employees to make key decisions. Providing opportunities for these up and coming leaders to assume responsibility is an effective way to evaluate their capabilities. Involve them in important issues and discussions. Provide the opportunity for them to express their opinions and suggestions but also help them gain insight by explaining how leadership decisions are made.

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group Model

To assist agencies with identifying and developing future leaders, position task books could be utilized. The National Wildfire Coordinating Group uses position task books as a key component of the qualification process in the wildland firefighter community. The position task books provide an observable, measurable, and standardized means to evaluate and document trainee proficiency. The position task books contain all the critical behaviors, activities and tasks required to become qualified in a particular management position. The task book serves as the official record of the employee's evaluation and training. Only qualified personnel will record an employee's successful completion of required training and task performance in the task book. Tasks that must be performed are listed in the task book. If a specific standard (quality or

quantity) is required, it will be specified in the task. Task examples or indicators of items or actions related to the task that assist the evaluator in evaluating the Trainee are provided, but not all inclusive. Each task has a code associated with the type of training assignment where the task may be completed. While tasks can be performed in any situation, they must be evaluated on the specific type of incident/event for which they are coded. For example, tasks coded W must be evaluated on a wildland fire. Performance of any task other than the designated assignment is not valid for qualification. The codes are defined as:

- O = Other: In any situation (classroom, simulation, daily job, incident, prescribed fire, etc.).
- I = Incident: Task must be performed on an incident managed under the ICS. Examples include wildland fire, structural fire, oil spill, search and rescue, hazardous material, and an emergency or non-emergency (planned or unplanned) event.
- W = Wildland fire: Task must be performed on a wildland fire incident.
- RX = Prescribed fire: Task must be performed on a prescribed fire incident.
- W/RX = Wildland fire OR prescribed fire: Task must be performed on a wildland fire OR prescribed fire incident.
- R = Rare event: Rare events such as accidents, injuries, vehicle or aircraft crashes occur infrequently and opportunities to evaluate performance in a real setting are limited. The Evaluator should determine, through interview, if the Trainee would be able to perform the task in a real situation.

In addition, law enforcement agencies can identify and implement position qualification flow charts ensuring everyone is aware of all training and qualifications necessary to achieve a desired position.

Law enforcement agencies can develop a succession plan incorporating similar position task books and position flow charts that help to identify competencies and educational opportunities while providing mentoring. This process can assess the future leaders growth potential and accurately assess the commitment to the organizational strategies.

Recommendations

Hiring and promotion based upon character

According to Reynolds (2019), “The primary purpose of a succession plan is to ensure leadership continuity of the organization and maintain stability within agency operations. While we tend to think of succession plans in terms of the chief executive position, they are actually useful in helping us develop personnel for all positions within the organization” (para. 2).

Common mistakes made by organizations occur during both the hiring and promotional processes. Agencies can hire based upon skills and abilities and overlook or minimize character flaws during the hiring process. Processes to determine standards of character and alignment of agency and personal values should be utilized in hiring and recruitment to ensure the mission of the organization will continue long term. Most leaders realize skills are a much easier to address through training and practice than problems associated with lack of character or values.

Succession development planning is necessary to overcome traditional processes of promoting personnel based solely on time with the agency or performance in a current position. When promotions are based upon the above factors it can result in promoting for failure. A primary responsibility of the organization's leaders and administrators is the development of future leaders. Leadership should develop a program beginning with recruitment continuing throughout the employee’s career to identify those with the type of character the organization values and also to identify leadership potential.

Succession Program Model

Agency leaders should come to a consensus on the need to create a program to meet the individual agency needs. Determining performance, training, and education for line level staff and incorporating it into the assessment process for first line supervisor promotion and command staff positions. Senior leaders have a responsibility to leave their organization better when they leave than when they began, to ensure the organization moves forward without difficulty when they retire. “Succession planning is a constant process and it takes a minimum of five years to develop a robust plan” (Steltor, 2015, para 3).

Agency administrators should take time to form a committee to develop training for all levels in the agency. The committee should consist of first line supervisors and command staff who are committed to succession planning. Identifying committee members who have displayed the character to help others succeed and have a willingness to put themselves and their egos aside to help develop people who can replace them is key. Other traits to consider when forming a succession development team include the ability to be trusted and have others best interests in mind, active listening and willingness to listen to others' views, the natural inclination to give away credit, accept blame and be accountable, big picture and environmental awareness, eternal optimism, humility, constant focus on service orientation towards the community, department and those they work for and with, personal integrity, leaders with competence, reliability and professionalism (Scott, 2019).

A comprehensive personnel development plan may include the following training and proficiency criteria for public safety personnel progressing and developing from one level to the next:

Line Level (officer, deputy, or firefighter off probation)

- Train-the-Trainer Course-Instructor Development
- Collateral Assignment as skills instructor (emergency vehicle operation, engine boss, firearms instructor, or sawyer).
- Become a Field Training Officer (FTO).
- Magnus OVEA Leadership Seminar.
- Books: *Every Officer is a Leader* Dr. Terry Anderson
Seven Habits of Highly Effective People Steven Covey
Moral Compass For Law Enforcement Professionals Anthony H. Normore, Mitch Javidi
- Encourage beginning higher education journey (If applicable).
- Promote to First Line Supervisor.

First Line Supervisor (Corporal/Sergeant, Squad Boss)

- County Sheriff's of Colorado (CSOC) First-line Supervisor School.
- At least 2-years of experience as a collateral duty instructor
- Become lead instructor for agency
- Take CSOC Institute for Credible Leadership Development Course
- Books: *Extreme Ownership* by Jocko Willink and Leif Babin,
Shackelton's Way by Margot Morrell,
- Continue Higher Education (Associates Degree/Bachelors Degree)

Mid-Level Manager (Sergeant/Lieutenant/Commander/Director)

- 3 years' experience as a first line supervisor
- Attend National Staff and Command School (or lesser equivalent Northwestern School of Staff and Command, or FBI National Academy).

- Lead collateral duty units (SWAT, K9, Driving Program, Firearms Team)
- Books: *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek, *Good to Great* by Jim Collins, *Boundaries for Leaders* by Henry Cloud, *Deliberate Leadership* By Dr. Andy Normore and Dr. Mitch Javidi, *Dichotomy of Leadership* by Jocko Willink, and *Speed of Trust* by Stephen Covey
- Continue Higher Education (Bachelor Completion, work towards Masters)

The succession development team should consider identifying and assessing key talent and key positions, individualized development plans, regular check ins, including a variety of skill enhancement tools, mentoring the best suited personnel, and developing the rest of their personnel (Reynolds, 2016).

Identification and Assessment

Identifying and assessing personnel should begin during the recruiting and hiring process. The process should not only consider competency and a thorough background but also indicators of the candidate's values and character to determine if they are consistent with the organization.

Individual Development Plans

Once key talent has been identified the Succession Development Team should work on individualized development plan for the candidate. The use of S.M.A.R.T. goals can be utilized and applied to the training plan (Normore, 2019). Developing a plan that has specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and timely objectives can be helpful in ensuring the employee is progressing and allow for the plan to be modified or adapted to the individuals needs. Regularly scheduled meetings to assess the goals and allow for feedback should be a priority for the development team.

Coaching and Mentoring

Coaching can be accomplished by all qualified people in the organization. Individuals who show talent can be expected to move up in the agency should be mentored by a senior leader who embodies the values of the organization and exhibits excellent character. The mentor should utilize the prior assessments of the employee and concentrate on mentoring in areas of weakness to assist in employee development. Mentoring can also assist in reinforcing strengths already developed.

Utilizing opportunities to delegate job duties to help those identified build their skills and become familiar with some of the job duties associated with the positions they may be required to fill in the future can also be helpful. Combining delegation and opportunities for the employee to shadow senior leaders and their responsibilities can also broaden their perspective and help them prepare personally for the different and often demanding requirements of command. Leaders should be willing to share their experiences both good and bad with those they are mentoring to help them not fall prey to the same mistakes they have made and also provide insight into possible solutions and issues. Leadership should be invested in developing all levels of the agency, including those who at the present time haven't exhibited readiness for promotion. Employee development is critical to ensure the agency has a base of employees who can step up when unexpected vacancies occur.

Leadership and Character Considerations in the Promotional Process

Organizations should commit to a process of promoting based upon leadership qualities and character. Agencies have relied on the traditions of para-military concepts when promoting personnel in the past. Personnel who do not exhibit the character or competency required by the

organization have been promoted based upon time with the agency rather than leadership potential or character. A paradigm shift in law enforcement and public service is needed to be implemented to transform traditional agency culture. Changing the promotional assessment process to have an emphasis on leadership and character, rather than on skills and abilities can strengthen the organization and provide for the long term health and success of the organization. Continuing education and leadership development should be emphasized and supported as part of the agency norm.

Conclusion

Public safety leaders have a responsibility to their communities, organizations, personnel, and ultimately to themselves to provide quality people who are prepared to be successful, and who are motivated to provide the highest levels of service and leadership when vacancies occur within their respective organizations. Leaders must commit to looking forward, use the experiences from the past, and embrace new ideas and change to make our organization the best they can be by investing in our most valuable asset, our people.

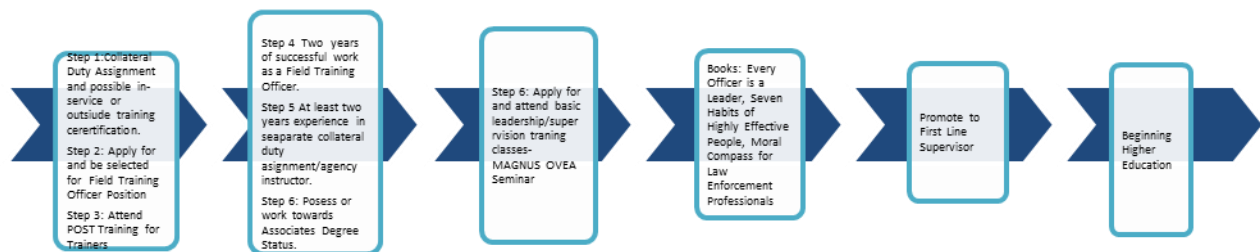
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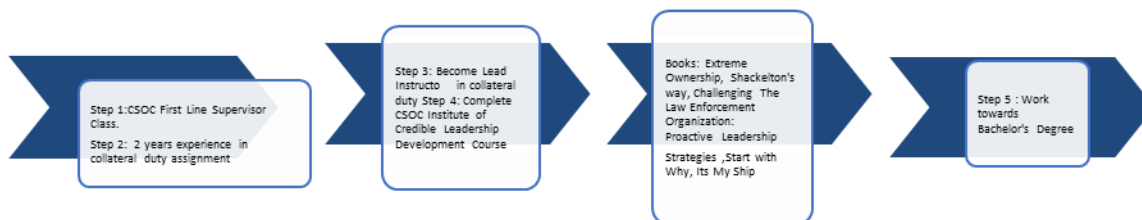
Figure 1

NATIONAL STAFF AND COMMAND COLLEGE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MATTRIX

Line Level Leadership Development



First Line Supervisor Leadership Development



Mid-level Leadership Development

GROWING FUTURE LEADERS THROUGH SUCCESSION PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

