

Developing a Comprehensive Leadership Development Program for the Sonoma County Human Services Department

KIERGAN PEGG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the impending retirement of many of its managers, the Sonoma County Human Services Department formed a Leadership Development Workgroup in June 2008. The workgroup was aware at the time of the work being done in the area of leadership development by Contra Costa County's Employment & Human Services Department. In fact, Contra Costa County shared a wealth of information on their programs with Sonoma County's staff in early 2009. The workgroup analyzed the benefits of various program ideas and recommended to begin with a program called Leadership

Enhancement and Development Discussion Groups (LEAD). This first phase was implemented in August of 2009 and the final discussion group meeting was held in early 2011. The workgroup was then reconvened and recommended the department move forward with the next phase of programs originally identified as Group Mentoring. This report represents the information gathering, analysis, and advance planning phase for what may become the third phase in Sonoma's Leadership Development Program, to be implemented after the Mentor Project pilot is completed in January 2013.

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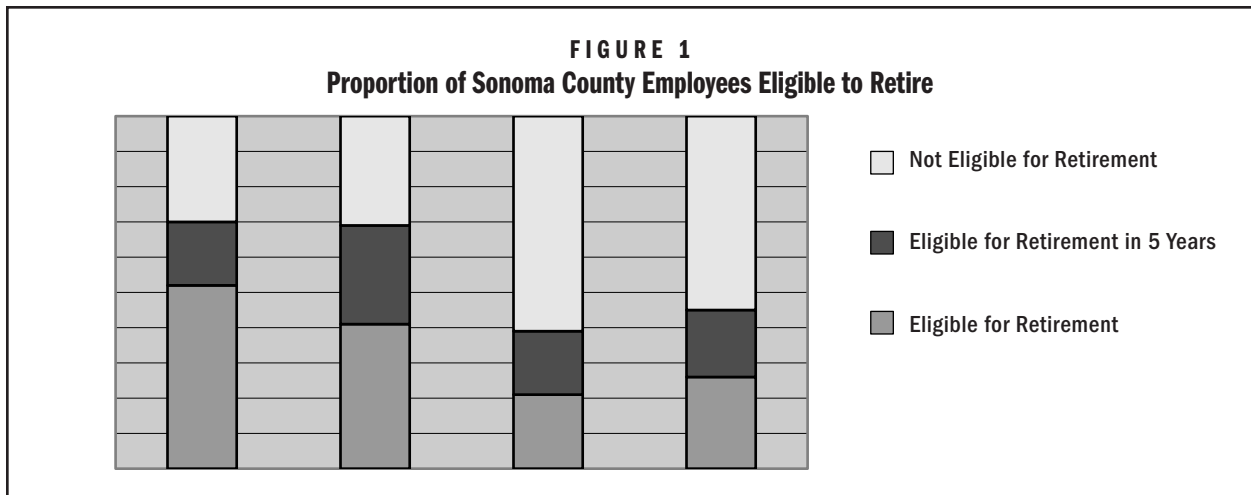
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Background

Given the large number of retirements that have occurred since the dramatic economic downturn beginning in 2006 and accompanying early retirement incentives offered, it was imperative that the Department re-evaluate if conditions had changed over the previous three years and whether retirements would continue at the rate recently experienced. Data was gathered on the number of department employees who are currently, or will be, eligible to retire within the next five years. Overall, 26 percent of Sonoma County’s staff is currently eligible to retire, and this number rises to 52 percent among managers. *Figure 1* below illustrates the proportions of each employee group eligible to retire. Given the large number eligible to retire and potential changes to public sector pension benefits in the near future, it can be expected that retirement rates will continue at relatively high levels for several years to come.

While the focus of succession planning programs has traditionally been on developing internal candidates to fill management positions, vacancies in management and executive-level positions often result in a cascade of vacancies down through the organization as staff at lower levels move up the career ladder. Additionally, the high percentage of line staff and supervisors eligible to retire now or in the near term indicates that vacancies will continue to occur at lower levels of the organization, requiring development of qualified candidates at all levels of the organization.

While institutional knowledge is believed to be a key contributor to higher performing organizations, structured programs for transferring knowledge are not fully in place in most modern organizations. The mentoring programs currently underway in the two agencies are a good start in this direction. However, the primary way to ensure that institutional



knowledge is retained is through staff retention and providing opportunities for internal staff to promote up through the organization. Promotion from within helps to maintain higher staff morale as staff identify ways to remain with their employer and achieve higher levels of job mastery.

The civil service system that guides recruitment and promotion decisions in local government as well as the strong presence of organized labor point decision-makers away from grooming individuals with high potential and toward offering opportunities to all employees who wish to develop themselves for promotion opportunities. This more equitable method of preparing staff has multiple benefits, including further improving morale and helping staff to be more accountable for their own preparation.

Overview of Contra Costa County's Programs

The Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department has developed a robust leadership development program over many years that includes training and development opportunities for staff from the entry-level employee to those preparing for executive-level positions. While the program has a number of unique and creative elements, this report will focus on two aspects currently of special interest to Sonoma County. These include the program's creative use of subject-matter experts from within the department to supplement contracted training from organizations like the UC Davis Center for Human Services, and the provision of training for pre-supervisory and mid-management employees, for which Sonoma County has not yet developed significant training resources.

Using Internal Staff as Trainers

Contra Costa County's current program differs most significantly from Sonoma County's in that Contra Costa has developed internal staff to serve as trainers. The courses taught by internal trainers include the *Preparing for Supervisor and Preparing for Division Manager Workshops*. These workshops each offer opportunities for staff to earn college credit through

an agreement Contra Costa has developed with California State University, East Bay. This agreement requires that internally-sourced trainers either possess a Master's degree in the subject area they teach or are supervised in their instruction by a Master's level staff member. These workshops are described in greater detail in the following section.

In-house trainers are normally self-motivated and have a strong interest in not only developing their own careers but also enjoy teaching and helping prepare others to advance in their careers. While these trainers are required to prepare for training during work time, many of the course materials are prepared in advance. These materials have been provided to Sonoma County as resource materials to assist in the development of its own future programs. Contra Costa County acknowledged it can be challenging to get commitments from qualified staff to serve as trainers due to the extra workload this adds to their already full schedules. It was also noted that subject matter experts may not have adequate presentation or group facilitation skills. Contra Costa has addressed this by viewing the role of trainer as a development opportunity for the trainer. In order to identify a potential trainer's skill levels in these areas, a potential trainer may be asked to provide a presentation or short training module to a smaller group in advance of being scheduled to train an entire course or large group.

Courses for Pre-supervisory and Mid-management Staff

A summary comparison of courses offered by Contra Costa and Sonoma Counties during Fiscal Year (FY) 2011-12 is provided in *Figure 2 (next page)*. The most notable difference is Contra Costa's well-balanced suite of courses offered throughout the range from entry-level employee through executive-level management. As noted above, both agencies are testing mentoring programs, with Contra Costa having recently completed a pilot and Sonoma scheduled to launch its pilot in July 2012.

FIGURE 2
Summary Comparison of Courses Offered by Contra Costa and Sonoma Counties, FY 2011-12

STAFF LEVEL	ENTRY	EXPERIENCED LINE STAFF & LEADS	NEW SUPERVISORS	EXPERIENCED SUPERVISORS	EXPERIENCED SUPERVISORS & ABOVE	DIVISION MANAGERS & ABOVE
CONTRA COSTA	Career Path Orientation (4 hours) Additional Career Planning (12 hours)	Preparing for Supervisor Workshop (40 hours)	Supervisor's Workshop (52 hours)	The Supervisory Effectiveness Series 1 & 2 (72 hours)	Preparing for Division Manager (40 hours)	BASSC Executive Development
SONOMA	Managing Your Career (6 hours) Interviewing for Career Advancement (3.5 hours)	Do You Want to be a Supervisor? (3.5 hours)	None Offered	The Supervisory Effectiveness Series 1 & 2 (79 hours)	The Manager's Role in the Transfer of Learning (6 hours)	BASSC Executive Development

Figure 2 shows that Sonoma County currently lacks substantial course offerings for two important groups of employees—those line staff considering promotion to supervisory positions and mid-level managers preparing for division management.

Figure 3 (next page) shows the topics covered within each of Contra Costa County's three staff-taught courses.

Contra Costa offers a Supervisor's Workshop that covers many topics not addressed in the UC Davis Supervisory Effectiveness Series. As can be gleaned from the topics listed, these staff-led courses allow the trainer to cover more agency-specific topics and integrate the teaching with organizational culture and specific programs.

Readiness Assessment

Sonoma County sees many advantages to offering a full spectrum of training for developing leaders at all levels of the organization. There also appears to be real value in developing in-house subject-matter experts as trainers, both in terms of leveraging contract training services with staff and for providing

development opportunities for subject-matter experts wishing to perfect their knowledge of a topic.

Due to the time required to identify in-house trainers, develop curriculum, and verify training skills, an interim solution to offering the expanded levels of course offerings will be necessary. Fortunately, Sonoma County is currently developing its FY 2012-13 course schedule and has the ability to better balance resources between the various levels of contract training. Since most supervisors have recently completed the Supervisor Effectiveness Series, which has required most of Sonoma's contract training resources, some of these resources can now be reallocated to areas where deficits exist.

As mentioned earlier in this report, Sonoma County's Mentor Project pilot will be completed in January 2013, at which time the Leadership Development Workgroup may be ready to begin working on a new initiative. This could include a project to develop in-house trainers through an approach similar to how mentors were identified for the Mentor Project. Due to the nature of such an initiative, the Leadership Development Workgroup might be an

FIGURE 3
Topics Covered in Contra Costa County's Staff-taught Courses

Introducing Supervision in Human Service Agencies (Preparing for Supervisor Workshop) 40 Hours	Supervising in Human Service Agencies (Supervisor's Workshop) 52 Hours	Managing in Human Service Agencies (Preparing for Division Manager) 40 Hours
CSUB—SOC 7000/EXSP 8026 4 Units	CSUEB—SOC 7001/EXSP 8027 4 Units	SCUEB—SOC 7002/EXSP 8028 4 Units
<p>Basic Curriculum (20 hours):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning to Supervisor • Overview of Performance Management • Overview of Motivation • Overview Adapting to Change • Overview of Building a Team • Career and Professional Development <p>Optional Curriculum for CSUEB Credit (20 hours):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History & Evolution of Human Services Systems • Public vs. Private Non-profit and For-Profit • Political Aspects of Human Services • How an Idea becomes a Law/Regulation • Primary Human Service Programs in the Public Sector • Current Issues and Challenges facing Human Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Service Agencies—America's Response to Need • Mission and Values of EHSD • Applying Leadership Skills Transition Pitfalls for New Supervisors • Professional Development Opportunities for Self and Staff • Promoting Professional, Program and Systems Integrity • Supervisors' Role in Professional Customer Service • Understanding Human Services Finances 101 • Managing Change • Managing Time • Motivating & Retaining Staff • Developing and Maintaining a Team • Understanding the Multi-Generation Workplace • Communication Skills • Performance Management: unit meetings, conferences, coaching, counseling, and evaluating performance • Progressive Discipline Weingarten and Rights of Probationers • Recruitment, Filling Vacancies, Hiring and Interviewing • Workplace Conflict and Violence in the Workplace • Health Issues/ADA Accommodations • Workplace Safety • Employee Assistance Programs • Knowledge Management <p>For CSUEB Credit: Same curriculum, Additional text readings, report, and Presentation.</p>	<p>Basic Curriculum (20 hours):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics • Leadership Skills • Expectations of Mid-Managers • Mid-Managers Survival Tips • Policy Development • Overview of IT • Overview of Budget & Finance, Allocations, Grants, Matches, etc. • Managing Staffing Resources • Strategic Planning • Public Presentations <p>Optional Curriculum for SCUEB Credit (20 hours):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Services Organizational Structures • Professionalism • Management Change Agents • Situational Leadership • Labor Relations, Arbitrations, Grievances, Mediations, Investigations, etc. • Legislative Review • Demographic and Trend Analysis • Internal/External Collaborations and Partnerships • Introduction to Critical Thinking • Overview of Project Management

ideal vehicle to help develop interest from staff in stepping up to be trainers.

Trainers could be identified based on their mastery of the entire body of knowledge for the level below their current position. For example, a section manager might be asked to teach the course for supervisors, having had both the perspective of being a supervisor and managing a group of supervisors. Alternatively, in-house trainers could form a team in order to divide the workload into manageable sections and/or to focus on a particular area of strength, consistent with the department's focus on identifying and capitalizing on people's strengths¹.

Sonoma County's Organizational Development Manager, Tom Richardson, formerly Training Manager for Sonoma County, developed considerable experience in his former position by developing the county's Supervisors Academy, Managers Academy and Executive Development programs. Further, during the early part of the economic downturn, when the county reduced its funding for county-wide training programs, Richardson developed a number of internal subject-matter experts to provide training on a series of topics. He has identified and worked through some of the same challenges experienced by Contra Costa County in working with this type of internal training resource.

Conclusions

There appears to be significant value to utilizing internal subject matter experts to provide training. Not only will staff get to develop their own expertise

in a specific area where they have a strength and passion for the topic, but other staff will benefit from the ability of trainers to blend their knowledge of organizational culture and operations with the training topic. Due to limited staff resources and the time required to identify and prepare subject matter experts as trainers, it may be more advantageous to use a blended approach that starts by shifting contract training resources to a more balanced distribution of course topics across the various positions levels. This would accommodate balancing course offerings based on perceived need and allow a more paced, thoughtful approach to developing internal staff trainers. Initially, internal trainers would be used to supplement the course offerings and over time could become an integral part of the course offerings. Once built out, this resource could be especially valuable during periods of cost reduction when in-service training budgets for contract trainers might be cut.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the support of Contra Costa County's recently-retired Director, Joe Valentine, for his unwavering commitment to leadership development during very difficult economic times and Division Manager, Mickey Williams, for sharing a wealth of information on Contra Costa County's Leadership Development Program, which she administers.

¹ Sonoma County Human Services Department leadership has encouraged most supervisory and management staff to read "Now, Discover Your Strengths" by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D.

