

# Leadership and Succession Planning: Challenges and Strategies in Developing the Future Workforce

JAMES VILLELLA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As counties within the State of California face an ongoing economic downturn and prepare for the challenges of a large segment of the workforce retiring, local governments search for new and innovative ways to attract and train a new generation of leaders. Some of those challenges organizations face include generational differences in the workforce and knowledge transfer from current leaders.

The definition of succession planning as defined by William J. Rothwell “is a “deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future and encourage individual advancement.”

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**James Villella**, Public Health Program Manager,  
Marin County Health and Human Services



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## Background

Having worked in the Public Health Division for Marin County over the last 10 years and participated in labor group committees, I was asked to join in a series of focus groups with Marin County Human Resources. The goal of the focus groups was to bring together key stakeholders from management, line staff and labor group employees to determine what are the challenges and opportunities faced by the workforce as counties all over the state prepare for the retirement of baby boomers.

A key area of concern was the “transfer of knowledge” and the continuity of community services as the workforce evolves and tries to keep up with the changes in technology and the challenges faced by different generations who will be using that technology.

A 2010 survey of global C-suite executives, *Company of the Future*, found that C-suite executives believe the two biggest challenges facing human resources over the next 10 years will be:

1. Retaining and rewarding the best people, and
2. Attracting the best people to the organization.

Marin County developed these focus groups to begin the planning of a strategic workforce initiative. Some of the challenges identified included:

1. 55% of the workforce eligible to retire within the next five years;
2. Impacts of the new economy and long term restructuring,
3. The significantly younger workforce by 2018, and
4. Increased competition for talent.

As we learn more about the challenges that face our organizations we must take a look at how the workforce is evolving. First, we should identify and attempt to understand the differences between our retiring workforce and the workforce of the future.

Many organizations are beginning to study those differences as they plan what the future workforce will look like and how to attract a new generation of leaders. A key component of this analysis is staying in tune with the fast paced changes in technology. As we look towards long-term restructuring and a new way of doing business, we must also look backward so we fully understand the potential needs of this new workforce and how they fit into our organizations. The era of a 30 year career with a single organization no longer necessarily meets the needs of a younger workforce.

In a review of those generational differences, Marin County staff met with Barbara Miller from Artemis Consulting Management and discussed some of the likely differences between the past and future workforce. Different generations see their work and how they fit into the organization differently. While these are just generalizations, here are some of the differences in generational values which were highlighted at a recent Marin Leadership Council:

1. **Traditionalist (born 1922-1945):** Security, loyalty, respects hierarchy, self-sacrifice
2. **Boomer (born 1946-1964):** Live to work—identity is work, job titles and status are important, women in the workplace (flex-time), focus on vision, desire to climb the

ladder for self-fulfillment, willingness to work long hours and judging personal success by position/title.

3. **Gen X (born 1965-1980):** Work to live (time for family & friends), work anytime or anywhere, focus on learning skills (portable career), question decisions, willing to change, like immediate gratification.
4. **Gen Y or Millennial (born 1980-2000):** Collaboration, networking, multi-tasking, work anytime or anywhere, challenge existing ideas or policies, desires coaching, tech is integrated into Marin County life, willing to leave jobs at a whim and diversity and tolerance.

As Marin County organizations continue to understand the needs of the future workforce, Marin County focus groups will help to develop key areas that the “organization of the future” can continue to develop, including:

- Increasing the use of technology,
- Developing modern and efficient business practices,
- Preparing the next generation of leaders,
- Provide employees with clear career paths,
- Appealing to the future labor market and workforce

These same focus groups also developed the potential barriers to succession planning. Some of the key highlights are:

- County’s fiscal goals, hiring freezes and elimination of positions/budget challenges,
- Time constraints that prohibit management from being able to build succession plans,
- Competition for employees increasing with private sector in future years,
- Flexible benefit options for employees,
- Doing the same thing over and over, not changing; time to move away from tradition,
- Resistance on the part of employees in the sharing of knowledge, and
- Union/labor issues to be considered, including regulatory issues that can present barriers.

So how does an organization continue to develop existing employees while adapting to the demands of new generations who have differing needs and expectations? First we need to identify key changes needed within our current organizational structure. Employees identified their top recommendations:

- 360 Degree evaluations for supervisors and managers at all levels,
- Developing future supervisors; provide pre-supervisory training open to anyone,
- Consistency of messages among supervisors and equal application of rules among departments;
- Credibility and vetting issues in hiring supervisors and stopping perceived pre-selection,
- Creating space in supervisory positions by delegating and shifting technical work away from supervisory roles, making room for other important work (coaching and supervision), and
- Revamping the disciplinary system since currently, employees have to demonstrate extraordinarily poor conduct or performance deficiencies over a long period of time, which lowers morale.

## Introduction

As a result of my participation in the Marin County focus groups, I chose Leadership & Succession Planning with Contra Costa County for my BASSC 15 day internship. I felt this would be an excellent opportunity to learn about shared success, challenges and the potential for collaborating on new ideas. My goal was to learn what other counties were doing and if I would be able to bring back information that would help Marin County in planning for the future. I was assigned to Mickey Williams, Division Manager for the Leadership Development Program in the Department of Employment & Human Services for Contra Costa County. All counties face similar challenges although the size and scope of those challenges vary by county. We also share increasing fiscal challenges due to the current economic climate as well as changing workforce demands as we prepare for the retirement of the baby boomer generation. Contra Costa County has also been forced to look at the current organization and determine ways of

restructuring to meet the demands of the public in a more efficient way. This would include utilizing resources more efficiently while reducing costs.

The main focus of my project was to determine what both Marin & Contra Costa Counties were doing in the areas of training and succession planning. Over several years Marin and Contra Costa Counties have developed classes to prepare both current and aspiring leaders:

#### *Introduction to Supervision (Marin County)*

This 2-day program is designed for new aspiring supervisors. Participants focus on the essential daily tasks required to maximize the productivity, motivation, and success of those under their leadership. They are encouraged to differentiate between “getting work done” and “getting work done through others.”

#### **Objectives:**

- Understand how your responsibilities change when you assume a supervisory role.
- Recognize the various styles of supervision as well as one’s own preferred style.
- Understand the components of communication necessary to effectively manage people.
- Understand the role of, and way to interface with the County Administrator’s Office and HR
- Deepen knowledge of county resources—what is available and where to find it.

#### *Management Academy (Marin County)*

This four-day program builds competence in the technical aspects of human resources management, including (1) performance planning and evaluation, (2) job design and class specification, (3) staffing, exam planning, and interviewing, (4) corrective and formal discipline, and (5) labor-management relations.

Each of these systems represents a different aspect of the supervisor’s job. The Academy covers only those areas of human resources for which the supervisor has responsibility. Participants learn how to write performance plans and performance evaluations, how to influence the quality of the applicant

pool with HR analysts to develop an effective exam plan, and how to address performance and conduct problems.

#### **Objectives:**

- Competence in performance planning, including goal setting, goal alignment, performance standards, and development.
- Awareness of key factors in employee motivation and engagement.
- Knowledge of effective staffing practices, including exam planning and selection interviewing.
- Awareness of the critical nature in building foundations for successful performance
- Understanding of county processes for addressing performance and conduct issues.
- Familiarity with the county’s unions and bargaining units and representational situations.
- Competence in operating ethically and effectively in a legal and labor environment.

Marin County has also continued yearly executive leadership trainings as well as new leadership trainings for leaders within our organization, such as:

#### *Dominican College Leadership Program (Marin County)*

This academy is an 11 session accredited program that will assist participants in building their leadership skills and increase the capacity for leadership throughout the organization. This educational experience includes a 360 degree assessment and action planning module as well as a collaborative class project.

The program curriculum includes:

- Building the 21st Century Leader—What Makes a Leader?
- Inspiring Vision and Being a Strategic Leader
- Engaging and Inspiring Others: Developing Effective Leadership Repertoire
- Leading Change and Transforming Organizations
- Using Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Strategies
- Driving Individual Performance: Coaching for Accountability

- Strategic Communications: Leading with Presence

This leadership training opportunity is currently being offered to 24 employees in two sessions in spring and fall. There is an application process in which employees from all levels, including line staff supervisors, managers and senior leaders, will be selected. The cost for this course is about \$3,100 per person.

*Bay Area Social Service Consortium (BASSC) U.C. Berkeley (Marin & Contra Costa Counties)*

The Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) operates as an agency-university foundation partnership that promotes social service research, training, and policy development. BASSC operates a multi-county training program on executive development. It is designed to meet the challenges of a changing organizational environment and to develop strategies to better serve client and community needs. Upper level managers from Bay Area counties are selected by top management to participate in this innovative training program that received the “Best Program in the Professions Award” by the University Continuing Education Association in 1999. The Executive Development Program is \$5,000 per person and is presented annually in three one-week modules with an internship from September to May. The three training modules include:

*MODULE ONE: LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT*

- Client-Centered Administration, Historical and Policy Overview of Human Services, Legislative Issues and Political Context
- Working with CBOs and Unions, Peer Learning and Support and Leadership Development

*MODULE TWO: CORE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS*

- Presentation Skills (workshop), Creating a Learning Organization, Public Relations and Personnel Issues

- Information Technology and State and County Budgeting Process

*MODULE THREE: THE INTEGRATION OF LEARNING AND PRACTICE*

- Case Presentations, Strategic Planning, Serving Diverse Populations and Community Organization
- Thinking like a Senior Manager and Critical Issues on the Horizon

In addition Contra Costa County has developed a unique approach to employee development by creating a series of leadership development programs for all levels within the organization. All of these programs are available to applicable groups through an application selection process for each class that requires supervisor approval:

- *Career Path Orientation* for entry level employees. This gives a new employee the chance to develop an overview of their career goals, opportunities within the organization and then begin planning a career path.
- *Preparing for Supervisor* for lead employees and employees transitioning to supervisor. This training provides an overview of performance management, team building skills and orienting the employee to county policies and procedures.
- *Supervisors Workshop* for new or first-time supervisors. This workshop orients new supervisors in practices for applying leadership skills, learning pitfalls for new supervisors, professional development opportunities for self and staff, communication skills and human resource training.
- *Supervisory Effectiveness* for experienced supervisors. In this course experienced supervisors receive training on the principles of supervision. These principles include developing job performance criteria, monitoring & evaluating performance, facilitating behavior and performance management.
- *Preparing for Division Manager* for experienced managers and above. In this course basic

curriculum includes ethics, leadership skills, policy development and budget/finance.

- *Executive Leadership Programs*, such as BASSC and Management Academy. Similar to Marin's Management Academy, Contra Costa has just started developing such a course with a main focus on building competence in the technical aspects of human resources management.

I see this "tiered" training approach as an area for potential collaboration between counties.

#### *Mentoring Pilot Program (Contra Costa County)*

Another area in which Contra Costa County has developed a unique approach to training is in their Mentoring Pilot training program designed for employees at all levels. So what is mentoring? Mentoring is a recognized and effective means for developing the skills and knowledge necessary to help prepare participants for increased leadership roles within their own job classification or to move in a different career path. Mentoring may also help to motivate, encourage and inspire employees who are interested in supervision, management or higher levels of responsibility. Mentoring is a partnership philosophy where successful leaders and managers can make an organizational difference and enhance leadership by serving as department role models.

In this program a mentee completes an application requesting a mentorship in a specific area or with a specific leader anywhere within their organization in which the mentee has an interest. A committee called the Mentor Advisory Group, which consists of supervisors, managers and retiree volunteers, conducts the selection process and makes recommendations matching a mentee with a mentor. The mentee and mentor then meet to complete an agreement between both parties. This agreement clarifies the expectations of each person's role, desired outcomes, as well as agreed time commitments from both parties. The learning process may include project time, attendance with mentor in meetings, and job shadowing. This experience also provides both parties with a unique perspective in each others job responsibilities which serves to enhance

employees' understanding of how they fit within the organization and how their work roles tie together. This program does require a commitment from the departments to allocate time for the employees to spend on this program. Upon conclusion of the mentorship both mentor and mentee complete a report on their learning experience. Here are the programs defined purpose and goals:

#### **Program Purpose:**

- To provide mentoring to employees interested in professional growth within the department as part of long-term and short-term succession planning and Leadership Enrichment Programs.
- To help establish a workplace atmosphere and environment that will foster job mentoring partnerships where employees can benefit from learning opportunities offered through a one-on-one mentor and mentee relationship.
- To help participants prepare themselves to pursue their personal and professional career goals while providing an expanded applicant pool of available, highly skilled employees.
- To enhance positive behaviors to create a department-wide support and value system where employees can be encouraged to grow and continue progressing in their career goals with county government.

#### **Program Goals:**

- To help mentees identify their career aspirations and provide the necessary guidance that will promote the attainment of goals.
- To encourage employee retention and satisfaction while improving relations and interpersonal communications.
- To enhance opportunities for advancement into management and leadership positions.
- To provide a learning program that will develop the skills and knowledge necessary for career advancement and leadership.
- To facilitate departmental goals of meeting the need for short- and long-term succession planning.

- To prepare existing managers for greater levels of responsibility.

### *Mentoring Pilot Program Report*

The Mentor Advisory Group developed a report upon completion of the first pilot program to review lessons learned. Here are some of the areas identified that worked well and areas that require additional attention:

#### *Worked Well:*

- Pairing of mentors and mentees, and utilizing retirees to enhance mentor resources.
- Departmental support of the program and pilot.
- Flexibility in the program to allow for individual goals to be identified.
- Composition of the Mentor Advisory Group.
- Overall pilot structure supports roll out of an ongoing program.
- Investment of time which proved to be necessary to obtain a successful outcome.

#### *Did Not Work:*

- Lack of permanent dedicated coordinator for the program.
- Two mentees assigned to one mentor and all roles were not clearly defined.

#### *Requiring Further Attention:*

- Separate program orientation and training sessions and reducing the number of required monthly progress reports.
- Schedule meetings for mentees & other department staff to obtain information on common interests.
- Review, oversight and follow up, when appropriate on Monthly Progress Reports.

There are always challenges with staff perception of favoritism during the selection process. However, employees with continued interest are given priority for the next round of classes or mentorships.

## **Recommendations**

I see a few key areas for potential collaboration between our two counties. Marin County has successfully operated its own Management Academy for many years which would be of great benefit to Contra Costa County as it begins planning for its own. I also recommend that Marin review Contra Costa County's "tier level training" structure where employees at all levels can work towards career advancement whether they are entry level, aspiring supervisors, new supervisors or experienced leaders. The most significant recommendation is that Marin County adopts a mentoring program. As the County faces significant fiscal challenges and the potential retirement of 55% of the workforce it is critical to plan now. The best way to ensure the transfer of knowledge is by such a program. This method also helps identify potential leaders within our existing workforce as we plan for the workforce of the future. While the costs involved in such a program are not fully realized, the benefit in inspiring our workforce with strong and experienced leaders can greatly help the county with this transition. As mentioned above, the use of volunteer retirees was also a great addition to this program.

## **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to thank Mickey Williams for hosting and providing me with the ability to learn about the challenges faced by her county as well as shared strategies for preparing the workforce of the future during a very difficult economic period.

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