Leadership Development and Succession Planning in Contra Costa County— Implications for the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study takes a look at the concept of succession planning and leadership development. Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department's leadership programs. It suggests some useful ideas and strategies for developing a similar program in Santa Clara County. Informational background is provided on successful programs throughout the United States on how public agencies are addressing this need. This study also describes Contra Costa County's Social Services Agency's programs and workforce factors, and makes recommendations for Leadership Development Program in Santa Clara County.

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The concept of succession planning has not been a major focus of attention in public agencies until recently. Succession planning is the means by which organizations prepare for and replace supervisors, managers, and executives to ensure an agency's continued and future success. Quite often public agencies overly focus on developing an individual employee's skills around job functions and not always provide opportunities for leadership development within the agency that are necessary for succession into supervision or management roles. The focus of this case study is to examine Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD) Leadership Development Program. It looks at the way the agency has dealt with revenue cuts, tremendous layoffs and the need to plan for the loss of critical positions. The goal of this case study is to learn from the EHSD Leadership Program and to assess the need for a leadership development and succession planning program in Santa Clara County's Social Services Agency (SSA).

This case study will briefly provide findings from Contra Costa County and then look at implications for the Santa Clara County SSA. Finally, it will provide strategies and recommendations based on research findings gathered from how other public agencies throughout the United States are addressing leadership development and succession planning.

What does Succession Planning and Leadership Development look like?

According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management: *"a succession plan begins with a thorough understanding of the structure of functions the organization needs to reach strategic goals which includes agency mission. Positions that fill the organizational design can then be determined. Once the positions are clarified, then the determination about critical positions can be assessed. Important to this concept is that strategic succession planning is not about talents the organization needs now; rather, it is projecting the talent, knowledge, skills and competencies needed for the future of an agency/organization"* (2005).

The U.S Office of Personnel Management identified the following success factors found in succession planning (see *Figure 1*, next page):

- Senior leaders are personally involved.
- Senior leaders hold themselves accountable for growing leaders.
- Employees are committed to their own self-development.
- Success is based on a business case for long-term needs.
- Succession is linked to strategic planning and investment in the future.
- Workforce data and analysis inform the process.
- Leadership competencies are identified and used for selection and development.
- A pool of talent is identified and developed early for long-term needs.

FIGURE 1
Effective Succession Planning: A Six Step Process
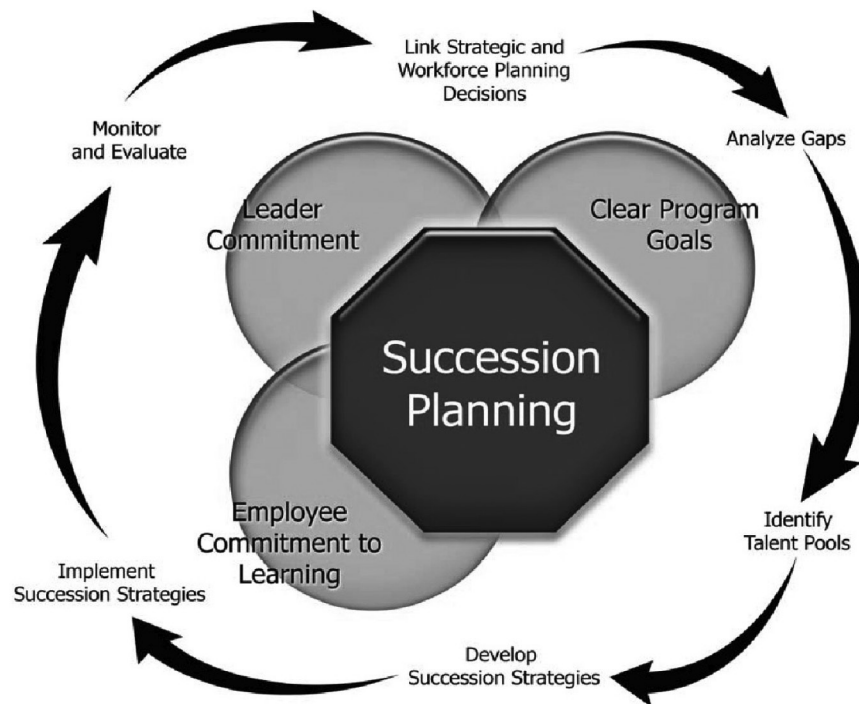
U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), September 2005. *http://www.opm.gov/hcaaf_resource_center/assets/Lead_tool1.pdf*

- Development is based on challenging and varied job-based experiences.
- Senior leaders form a partnership with human resources.
- Succession planning addresses challenges such as diversity, recruitment, and retention.

Studies show there are four essential elements that public agencies should keep in mind when approaching succession planning; a) using an open and competitive process for participants, b) participation is strictly voluntarily, c) program activities take place outside of work or with supervisor and management approval, and, finally, d) when a leadership position opens up, a standard personnel procedure is followed to fill it without special consideration to program participants (Wilkerson, 2007).

Case Study Findings

Over the last three years Contra Costa County EHSD has experienced overwhelming budget cuts. As the agency director, Joe Valentine said, *"we (EHSD) are going through enormous turnover in the workforce. Over a third, almost half of senior managers have retired in the last couple of years...this presenting a challenge of moving ahead with large projects while also looking at the workforce and trying to train new people has been challenging."* In 2010, 100 clerical staff were laid off, followed by over 90 professional staff retiring in 2011. Eighteen of those were managers and supervisors from an agency of about 1,600 employees. It became a central challenge for leadership to look at what to do in spite of the challenges it faced. Due to the declining economy there was a growing need for services that this agency's declining

resources needed to meet. EHSD leadership was able to overcome this crisis situation and turn it into an opportunity to transform the agency by being innovative in the way they do business.

After having had the opportunity to observe the EHSD Employee Development Programs, I found them very impressive. The rationale that *"we just don't have the resources"* was not an option for Contra Costa County. This agency's leadership has significantly raised the bar by finding creative ways to address the public need for services, looking at cost-efficient ways of doing business while at the same time investing resources in developing their staff's leadership skills.

EHSD Leadership Programs consist of the following components:

- Career Path Orientation (4 hour workshop)
- Preparing for Supervisor (40 hour workshop)
- Supervising in Human Services Agencies (52 hour workshop)
- The Supervisor Effectiveness (72 hour workshop)
- Preparing for Division Manager (40 hour workshop)
- Management Skills Seminar (40 hour)
- Manager CORE for Child Welfare Managers (through Bay Area Academy)
- The Leadership Development Program -16 days (through UC Davis)
- Project Management Training
- Mentoring Project—Pilot 2011

EHSD staff can attend and participate in these programs during working hours. The training is provided by different instructors, including current and retired staff from the agency, other county departments, the Bay Area Academy, UC Davis, and CSU East Bay. Since 2009, the agency has provided three series of each including Career Path, Introducing Supervisors in Human Services, Preparing for Supervisors, and Preparing for Division Manager. In 2010-11 there was one Leadership Development Program for Division Managers. The success of the program is seen by the number of staff that have completed the series which is about 25-32 employees for each series. ESHD leadership continues to invest

in their leadership development and is currently looking at more comprehensive programs and tools for evaluating their success. The development of core competencies, a tracking and monitoring system for required training, eLearning leadership modules, and an online leadership development library.

Santa Clara County SSA, on the other hand, is in the process of looking at the need for a comprehensive leadership development program. SSA has also suffered budget cuts during the past two years, and, as a result, human capital and resources have become scarce. Unfortunately, due to revenue cuts the agency has had to cut back its leadership development efforts. The planning phase that began in 2010 has ceased since staff were allocated to deal with more pressing priorities like meeting state mandates and other business needs, such as the eligibility Central Client Services (CCS) redesign and an upcoming IHSS redesign. The Mentoring Program that had been in place for several years and ran from 9-12 months at a time was stopped. Currently, there is little training around employee development and leadership. Although there seems to be elements and modules being offered by SSA Staff Development and Training, including Change Management, Coaching, Leading and Motivating, a Performance Management series, Child Welfare Manager Core, eLearning Leadership Essentials, and an eLearning Communication series, a comprehensive program like Contra Costa County's has yet to be fully developed.

SSA Leadership Workforce and Potential Gaps

SSA is one of the largest public agencies in Santa Clara County. Currently it employs over 2,500 staff and has an annual operating budget of $600 million. It consists of four agency departments, three of which provide direct services, the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS), the Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), the Department of Employment and Benefit Services (DEBS), and the Agency Office (AO/DOS). As with many other public agencies throughout the United States, SSA is facing losses of experienced management and supervisory

TABLE 1
SSA Supervisors and Managers of Retirement Age Within 5 Years

Current Numbers by Department			Numbers Age 50 + Currently (55 within the next 5 years)	
Agency Dept	Supervisors	Managers	Supervisors	Managers
AO/DOS	40	42	16	13
DEBS	103	22	58	17
DFCS	56	12	31	9
DAAS	14	8	7	5
SSA Totals	213	84	112	44

classifications because of an aging workforce who are retiring at a fast rate. *Table 1* shows the number of supervisors and managers who will be of retirement age within the next five years for each department. *Table 2* shows the numbers of supervisors and managers that have retired within the last three years from 2009 to 2011 in each SSA department.

Budget implications for SSA as staff retires can be alarming if the agency is poorly prepared to handle these changes in the workforce. The loss of knowledge as positions become vacant without a plan for

TABLE 2
SSA Supervisors and Managers Retired Within the Laat 3 Years

Agency Dept	Supervisors	Managers
AO/DOS	3	9
DEBS	24	6
DFCS	11	5
DAAS	3	4
SSA Totals	41	24

TABLE 3
SSA supervisory and managerial classifications in this data report include the following:

Supervisory	Managerial
Clerical Office Supv	Admin Services Mgr I
Eligibility Work Supv	Dir Adult and Aging Services
Employment Program Supv	Dir of Employment & Benefits Srv
HR Support Supv	Dir of Info Systems-SSA
OMC	Dir Social Services Agency
Social Services Prog Control Supv	Employment Prog Mgr
Social Work Supv	Info Systems Mgr I, Info Systems Mgr II
Sr Account Clerk	MAPM I, MAPM II, MAPM III
Sr Accountant	Nutrition Services Mgr
Sr Mgmt Analyst	Program Coord
Sr Revenue Collections Officer	Program Mgr I, Program Mgr II
SSA Application Dec Support Mgr	Program Mgr II-ACE
Supv Welfare Fraud Invest	Project Mgr
Supv Account Clerk I	Public Administration/Guard
Supv Account Clerk II	Social Services Fiscal Officer
Supv Deputy Pub Guardian	SSPM I, SSPM II, SSPM III
Supv Estate Admin	SSA Application Dec Supp Mgr
Supv Storekeeper	SSA Dep Director, Operations
	SSA Deputy Director, Administration

staff that are prepared to take on those roles can mean the difference between success and malfunction in the agency.

Summary

Developing strong leadership in public agencies by having a comprehensive leadership development program is one key factor to ensure a continued high level of performance. The process of succession planning can be a sensitive one, especially in public agencies as was noted by Contra Costa EHSD staff concerns. Although commonly called *"succession planning,"* the more appropriate label for this process is *"leadership development"* since the focus is on building leadership skills rather than planning for staff replacement. One thing to keep in mind is that this is not about *"selecting employees"* or choosing *"favorites,"* but, in fact, is about increasing the likelihood that staff within the agency will be successful when promotional opportunities arise, and to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills and abilities that makes them well qualified to take on those roles (Wilkerson, 2007).

This case study highlights the implications for public agencies that are not prepared to deal with vacancies as experts retire. The aging U.S. workforce will be retiring at an enormous rate in the next few years as seen by labor trends. More than half of Santa Clara SSA managers and supervisors are eligible to retire within the next five years. Public agencies throughout the U.S. have begun looking at strategies for succession planning as studies by U.S. Office of Personnel Management have shown. Case findings show that there are strong public agency leaders who can manage change during a crisis and take it as an opportunity to be innovative like Contra Costa County's EHSD. Public agencies that do not have strategies in place to deal with the challenging U.S. workforce changes will certainly face difficulties with current and future success. A key question to answer is whether an agency will be prepared to fill upcoming leadership vacancies with qualified candidates?

Recommendations

The following suggestions are made to Santa Clara SSA to effectively develop strategies for a leadership development program:

- Define and clarify SSA's vision for its future workforce and the type of leadership skills this will require.
- Start by implementing the following "Ten Elements of Effective Succession Planning" strategies from *Succession Planning—The Essentials* by Patrick Ibarra (2007):
  1. Provide visible support and advocacy from top leadership for developing future leaders and simultaneously model this process;
  2. Use a strategic planning tool that focuses on current and future needs;
  3. Collect and analyze data for positions needing succession planning by doing a needs driven assessment;
  4. Identify and groom high performing employees from all levels early on which can help ensure accountability for participation;
  5. Review HR policies to reflect current reality of the workforce;
  6. Develop a plan to recruit human capital that looks internally and externally;
  7. Identify internal candidates based on objective, job related assessments, and ratings of promotability or readiness for future positions;
  8. Train beyond technical and compliance that is based on competency development;
  9. Emphasize developmental assignments in addition to formal training that places staff in new unfamiliar roles and broadens their expertise; and
  10. Engage managers at all levels in all departments by communicating the leadership development plan throughout the agency.
- Form a committee with members from each agency department to begin the process and conduct a needs assessment for their respective departments. Look at KSAs (Knowledge, Skills

and Abilities) of critical positions in departments and provide a succession plan risk level for each. Provide input on learning competencies for key leadership positions. Propose a plan to executive management for a leadership development program and provide action steps.

- Budget implications for a SSA leadership program can be addressed as observed in Contra Costa County's EHSD by using experts from within the agency, accessing training funding, utilizing existing programs from other county departments like the Employee Services Agency and Mental Health, the Bay Area Academy, and obtaining funding from the Title IV-E collaborative.

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