

Rethinking Leadership Development and Succession Planning in a Lean Government

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Leadership development refers to the activities involved in enhancing one’s ability to establish vision and goals, and motivate and guide others to achieve the vision and goals. Leadership development is critical at almost any level in the organization—not just the executive level.”

—*Basics: Definitions (and Misconceptions) About Management*
by Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC

“Succession planning is a process for identifying and developing internal people with the potential to fill key business leadership positions in the company. Succession planning increases the availability of experienced and capable employees that are prepared to assume these roles as they become available.”

—Wikipedia

Leadership Development and Succession Planning (LDSP) means different things to different people. Is it an individual *luxury* or an organizational *necessity*? What criteria should be used in a cost-benefit analysis of LDSP? Is LDSP really just a waste of time? While the execution of LDSP varies between the public and private sector, the costs and benefits in supporting LDSP are the same. By hiring from within, there is a gain of efficiencies by not losing expertise and institutional knowledge and by requiring less training time. A proactive approach to LDSP may foster increased morale and job satisfaction, as

well as less attrition and leaves of absences. Despite these benefits, the costs of training, planning, productivity, and staff coverage can be deterrents to LDSP.

While the City and County of San Francisco values and supports LDSP, a rethinking of our approach and allocation of resources may help improve our LDSP efforts. A study of Contra Costa County’s LDSP efforts shows that an organizational culture fostering LDSP with a multi-level approach is in a better position to survive budgetary fluctuations, as it is not dependent purely on fiscal year training budgets.

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A Background of LDSP in San Francisco

During tough budget times, it is a challenge to prioritize Leadership Development and Succession Planning (LDSP) as the focus is placed on core functions and mandatory services. However, as with any growing and evolving organization, there is always an interest in workforce trends, the retention of qualified staff, and the overall organizational health. The City and County of San Francisco continues to seek ways to be innovative and to achieve LDSP goals in an effective and efficient manner.

San Francisco has supported various incarnations of LDSP including a Management Academy for both current and future managers, BASSC, Mentoring Program, Tuition Reimbursement Program for professional development and continuing education, and various specific trainings. Employees can also take classes at the City University for further professional development. In addition, supervisors informally mentor their staff to develop their skills and encourage professional growth.

Staff Development also plans to spearhead significant changes in county LDSP efforts. Currently, classes are announced quarterly online via HSA intranet, including mandatory trainings, skills development, career planning classes, and special trainings as needed. Priority is given to all mandatory trainings such as harassment prevention, induction trainings, and Management Academy I and II. Additional leadership and special projects are given next priority, while trainings requiring special expertise are contracted out. Current identified gaps are accessibility, marketing, and ongoing professional development at all levels.

Contra Costa County's Approach to LDSP

HISTORY AND KEY ELEMENTS OF LDSP

Contra Costa County (CCC) was not immune from recent budget cuts and significant losses in their workforce. Additionally, with the large number of employees retiring in the past few years and the anticipation of a third of their employees' retirement in the next five years, CCC has an ongoing investment in the LDSP programs in order to replace vacancies quickly with qualified and competent employees. CCC approaches LDSP on multiple levels with their Leadership Development Programs, a strong intranet resource, and a supportive environment. In 2009, their trainings were restructured and formalized to the "Employment and Human Services Department Leadership Development Programs" which included training modules at every classification level. (See *Figure A*.) Due to budget issues, training priorities

FIGURE A
EHSD Leadership Development Programs
for 2009-2010

- Career Path Orientation for new hires
- Preparing for Supervisor Workshops for experienced line and lead staff
- Supervising in HSA for new supervisors
- The Supervisory Effectiveness Training for additional supervisor training
- Preparing for Division Manager for experienced supervisors seeking promotional opportunity
- Management Skills Seminar for current division manager training
- Manager CORE specifically for Child Welfare Managers

FIGURE B
EHSD Leadership Development Programs for 2011

- The Supervisory Effectiveness Training
- Leadership Development Program for division managers
- Project Management Training for division managers and analysts
- Mentoring Program Pilot with 20 mentees graduating in 1/2012

changed from the supervisors in 2009-10 to the division managers in 2011. (See *Figure B*.)

In conjunction with the above formal process, CCC also uses an informal process for LDSP by maximizing the use of technology. CCC employees can access several interactive intranet resources to obtain information regarding trainings and learning opportunities. First, the Staff Development website functions as a “*Learning Management System*” with several features that make training opportunities easily accessible. The links include an “Online Catalogue,” “Meet the Trainers,” “Course Evaluation,” “Training Schedules” by location, site and bureau, “Supervisor Report,” and “Your Transcript”. Supervisors get automated notifications of employee training requests, and employees receive notifications of supervisor approval and subsequent enrollment status. Second, the Leadership Development link has *fact sheets* about specific subject matters and a *learning library* with topics including ethics, career planning, and oral interviews. Third, there are *online tutorials* with both video or PDF files depending on how employees prefer to learn. Tutorials included topics such as “How to Create an Appointment in Microsoft Outlook” or “How to Use Dual Monitors”. Employees who prefer a classroom environment can enroll for a scheduled class. Fourth, employees receive email notifications or can proactively search previous and current job and training announcements through *Shared Text Automated Retrieval System (STARS)* which is a communication system used to track department-wide announcements.

This multi-level approach with formal and informal processes offers greater consistency and accessibility to LDSP opportunities. There is also less dependence on ad hoc notification via bulletin boards or specific supervisor-to-staff emails, and less vulnerability to marketing gaps, or missed email notifications. Dedicated IT staff keeps the data and system updated and can troubleshoot problems as they arise.

Evaluating LDSP Successes and Obstacles

Measuring outcomes helps to evaluate whether the intended LDSP goals were accomplished effectively and efficiently. Qualitative measures such as post-training evaluations and supervisor feedback were easily obtained in CCC. Unfortunately, as LDSP indicators do not have linear cause-effect relationships (for example, the completion of trainings does not result in a promotion), quantifiable data were not as easily attainable or regularly captured as outcomes.

Qualitative data such as training evaluations capture individual feedback and can be useful to measure overall training satisfaction. All courses for the Supervisory Effectiveness for both Series #1 in 2009-10 and Series #2 in 2010-11 scored consistently high marks above 80% for “highly agree” that the courses met their stated goals and learning objectives. The Division Manager Training in 2009 also consistently scored high to show that participants learned “some” to “a lot” on a 4-point Likert scale. A post-training evaluation with two trainees’ supervisors’ feedback indicated a “great improvement” and a “small improvement” in their respective employees—both based on a 4-point Likert scale. Ideally, there would be more than two supervisor responses for more comprehensive feedback targeting future training needs.

In addition to the evaluations, two CCC employees were interviewed about their participation either in “The Supervisory Effectiveness” or “Preparing for Division Manager” training modules. There was a consistent message that CCC displayed a strong commitment to LDSP despite budget issues, and that the employees received direct and indirect encouragement

in their career paths. The first interviewee stated that she was recognized for her strengths and was encouraged to apply for specific jobs at various junctures of her career. The second interviewee proactively utilized all the intranet resources for career planning and trainings. Her various supervisors supported her on her aspirations throughout her career. Both employees engaged in different, but equally effective LDSP processes to advance and grow in their career advancement despite the budget climate.

Quantitative data are more difficult to identify due to validity and reliability issues. A promotion following a training module does not necessarily mean that the training was the cause of the promotion. For example, CCC personnel records show that twelve percent (or 4 out of the 34 participants) were subsequently promoted after taking the “Supervisor Effectiveness Training” in 2009-10 (*Figure C*). Other possible factors include new funding, new positions, or increased retirements. Using the number of promotions in conjunction with other quantifiable data may be helpful indicators.

In reviewing both the qualitative and the quantitative outcomes attained, CCC has been successful using complementary formal and informal processes in cultivating a strong LDSP culture. What is notable is that even with some changes from the original LDSP program in 2009, CCC was able to trim down to essential trainings without compromising its LDSP goals. Thus, a strong LDSP culture can be a protective factor despite training budget cuts.

Implications of LDSP for the City and County of San Francisco

Maximizing technological capabilities would help spearhead a culture shift in the City and County of San Francisco LDSP goals. While the county has always supported LDSP efforts, there have been gaps, including accessibility, marketing, and ongoing professional development at all levels. Based on the above research, a three-pronged approach is recommended:

1. Ongoing development of a LDSP plan and curriculum

FIGURE C
Promotions after “Supervisor Effectiveness Training”
in 2009-2010

• Social Worker Supervisor I	to	Division Manager
• Eligibility Worker Supervisor	to	Program Analyst
• Eligibility Worker Supervisor	to	Temporary Upgrade Program Analyst
• Clerical Supervisor	to	Program Analyst

2. Ongoing development of a comprehensive LDSP online resource
3. Ongoing evaluation of LDSP outcomes

First, the ongoing development of LDSP goals, plan, and curriculum is necessary as the workforce and its needs change. Working closely with management staff to project for training needs, Staff Development already has a multi-level plan for LDSP as follows:

- Improve marketing and accessibility for existing courses
- Create a course catalogue including core competencies goals
- Create workshops such as evaluating resumes, building skills, and planning career paths.
- Create trainings for specific skills such as hand-book training for writers
- Create a mentorship program where employees can be either asked or invited to participate
- Create multiple levels of evaluation; including post-training evaluation several months later to assess sustained learning and a multi-source 360-degree feedback.

Having sufficient resources to implement these LDSP goals will take time and creative juggling of existing resources. However, in the interim, there can be a concurrent path to build up online content on the intranet.

Second, the ongoing development of a comprehensive LDSP intranet resource will increase accessibility and employee participation in LDSP efforts.

While spending quality time in the planning stages with IT is vital in creating a thoughtful and smart interactive online resource, it is also possible to build up the content incrementally until IT can fully dedicate resources to this project. The existing intranet already has links to job and training announcements and some pre-training documents. Some additional online content may need initial staff resources to create them, but will have minimal ongoing maintenance. As Staff Development reaches its own LDSP milestones, the content can be added to the intranet. A Learning Library for oral interviews, career planning, resume building and fact sheets can be added to further help employees who need a refresher, but may not have time to attend a class. Existing trainings can be filmed for online training videos in both hard and soft skills, with training materials accessible via PowerPoint slides or PDF files. Employees who prefer not to watch an online training video can still attend an in-person class. As the number of in-person trainings is reduced, this would significantly free up staff time to do other needed tasks. Trained Extranet and Internet Content Authors can add and format their intranet pages to reduce IT staff time and resources needed. Eventually, as the budget allows, IT can use the content to create an interactive, user-friendly way for employees to interface with a true comprehensive LDSP resource.

Third, the ongoing evaluation of the execution of LDSP efforts can help show whether the county actually achieves its target goals. Measuring outcomes is a challenge as “success” outcomes are not always immediate and measurable. LDSP assists with a process of change that occurs within an individual during the course of employment and in relationships within the organization. With these considerations, here are some potential indicators that may be used to collectively measure LDSP goals:

- Track employee satisfaction as measured by training or promotional opportunities

- Track employee participation and completion rates in trainings and/or the mentoring program
- Track the number/percent of promotions over time after specific trainings or programs are completed
- Compare employee retention or attrition rates of those who do and do not participate in trainings
- Compare employees who do and do not participate in training by performance evaluation, promotion, attendance, and seniority
- Compare the percentage of internal promotions and external new hires for specific vacancies
- Compare organizations that do and do not actively support LDSP by promotion, attrition, and staff morale, for a more global comparison.

In theory, the desired consequences of an organizational culture that supports LDSP are:

- Better performance evaluations that reflect improved work performance towards individual potential, not just doing the minimum required
- Higher employee retention rates hopefully means satisfied and happy employees
- Improved delivery and continuity of services to clients from satisfied and happy employees

This three-pronged approach would help promote the county’s LDSP goals, but the burden almost entirely rests on Staff Development. Presuming that existing responsibilities could be shifted to prioritize ongoing LDSP development, staff may need additional skills and training to implement the plan. As LDSP affects all departments, perhaps other programs can also “loan” interested staff with specific skills (such as content authors for the intranet/extranet or video-editing experience) to make time-limited contributions in order to benefit the entire agency. The collaboration of existing agency-wide resources and strategic planning is essential for all stakeholders and shared ownership of an LDSP culture.

Summary

An organizational culture that fosters LDSP with a multi-level approach is in a much better position to survive budgetary fluctuations over time, as it is not dependent purely on fiscal year training budgets. In theory, if leadership development is continually cultivated, employees will have opportunities to seek advancement in positions of leadership with the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed. With thoughtful LDSP planning and corresponding trainings, Contra Costa County has been an example of this success. The LDSP culture is maintained through their sophisticated online presence even as the training budget is reduced. While LDSP has always been valued, a rethinking of LDSP will help the City and County of San Francisco change the way it accesses and interacts with LDSP efforts. Incremental changes and reasonable milestones shared by agency-wide resources can help everyone in the county work towards building a stronger LDSP culture. The sustainability of LDSP over time and relative immunity from budget issues may be a lofty goal, but it is essential for overall organizational health.

“Success is not measured by what you accomplish. Success is measured by whether or not you leave what you’ve accomplished in capable hands.”

—Anonymous

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