State of Washington

Guide to Developing Succession Programs

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WSD Personnel

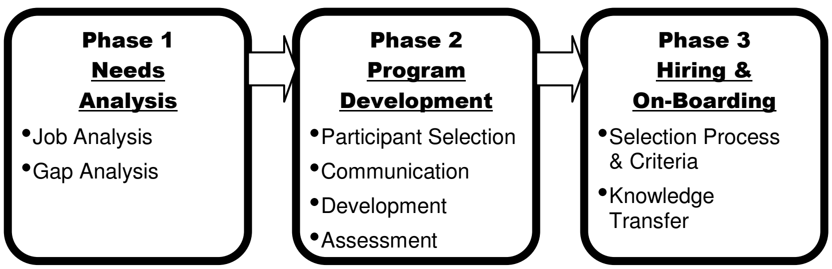
Introduction

The purpose of succession planning is to develop a pool of internal candidates for future vacancies. Typically, they are targeted at either management or senior staff positions. Combined with other staffing strategies, succession programs help address turnover and build your organization.

Model

There are many proven succession program models. The ideal approach will depend on the scale and scope of your turnover issues, and your organizational development goals. For example, if turnover analysis indicates that you have 100 positions to fill in the next three years, you may need a formal program with structured application, selection, and certification processes. In contrast, if you only have 10 positions to fill, you may choose an informal approach such as publishing desired competencies on your intranet.

Developing a succession program generally includes the following steps:



Phase 1: Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the cornerstone of a good succession program. The analysis includes two activities:

1. **Job Analysis** – What are the essential job functions of your target positions, and what competencies are required to be successful?
2. **Gap Analysis** – How many positions will you need to fill, and how many internal qualified or high potential employees do currently have?

1. Job Analysis

A solid job analysis includes identification of :

- The target position(s) essential job functions (the reasons for which the position exists).
- The competencies needed to perform those functions.

Competencies should include the required knowledge mastery, skill level, and critical behaviors.

For management positions, it is critical to identify behavioral competencies, including the behavioral standards that must be consistently demonstrated. Many managerial skills can be learned, but behaviors are often instinctive and difficult to teach.

More detailed information on conducting a job analysis is available on the Washington State Department of Personnel's Job Analysis and Metrics web page at http://www.dop.wa.gov/recruitment/AssessmentandSelection/Pages/JobOrganizationalAnalysisandMetrics.aspx.

2. Gap Analysis

A gap analysis consists of:

- Assessing how many positions you need to fill.
- Forecasting how many candidates you can bring into the organization.
- Determining how many internal candidates you can develop to make up the difference.

More detailed information on conducting a gap analysis is available on the Washington State Department of Personnel's Staffing Plans web page at http://www.dop.wa.gov/strategichr/WorkforcePlanning/Pages/StaffingPlans.aspx.

To determine how many internal candidates you can develop, you must examine your current workforce to identify employees who either currently demonstrate the required competencies, or have high development potential. This is a scanning process, not a selection process. Your goal is to determine the breadth and depth of your potential internal applicant pool (i.e., your 'bench-strength'). There are many ways to assess your organization's internal capacity. Some of the most common methods include:

- **Reviewing Evaluations** – If your organization has a solid performance planning and evaluation system, past evaluations should show which employees have demonstrated solid performance and competencies. If you do NOT have a solid performance system, you may want to work on developing it before creating a succession program.
- **Surveying Current Supervisors** – Supervisors often have insight into employee potential that isn't documented in performance evaluations. Surveying and interviewing supervisors provides good leads on prospective candidates.
- **Asking Employees** – While fairly obvious, management often forgets to ask employees whether they are interested in promoting. Consider using a number of venues to ask employees, including evaluation meetings, surveys, and public forums.

Phase 2: Program Development

There are four factors to consider when developing a succession program:

1. **Selection** – How will you target and select program participants?
2. **Communication** – How will you communicate with potential participants and their supervisors?
3. **Development Approach** – What development activities will you provide?
4. **Assessment** – How will you assess participants' growth?

1. Selection

As noted earlier, succession programs can be either informal or formal. The key difference is whether you use a selection process to narrow down the number of participants.

If you develop a formal program that limits how many and which employees may participate, you must carefully consider your selection process and criteria. Choosing who does or does not participate in your succession program carries the same liability and employee/labor relations issues as a hiring process. You should examine several factors including:

- **Equity** – Is there equal opportunity to participate in the program? Do the criteria meet State and Federal legal standards for non-discrimination and reasonable accommodation?
- **Transparency** – Are the process and criteria transparent to employees? Will they be perceived as fair and legitimate?
- **Validity** – Are the application requirements, interview questions, and evaluation standards valid indicators of ability to complete the program and be considered for promotion?

There are many approaches for targeting and selecting program participants. Some of the most common practices include:

<u>Targeting Approach</u>

- **Management Nomination** – Managers and/or supervisors nominate high performers and high potential employees.
- **HR Nomination** – Following the review of performance evaluations, Human Resources staff identify and forward the names of high performing and high potential employees.
- **Self Nomination** – Notices are sent to all employees, and interested staff apply.

<u>Selection Tools</u>

- **Education/Experience** – Nominations or applications are screened against education, training, and work experience criteria.
- **Questionnaire Response** – Nominations or applications are screened against responses to select questions.
- **Interview** – Nominees or applicants are screened in a formal interview process.

<u>Screening / Selection Criteria</u>

- **Results** – Nominees or applicants demonstrate ability to achieve or exceed expected performance targets, including the ability to succeed at higher level tasks.
- **Knowledge and Skill Mastery** – Nominees or applicants demonstrate full mastery of the knowledge and skills required for their current position, and demonstrate some or all of the knowledge and skills required for higher level or management positions.
- **Behavioral Competencies** – Nominees or applicants consistently demonstrate the behaviors required for higher level or managerial positions.

<u>Selection Decision</u>

- **Senior Leadership Decision** – Nominations or applications are reviewed by the organization's senior leadership team.

- **Management Review Committee** – Nominations or applications are reviewed by a cross-functional committee appointed by the organization's senior leadership.
- **First Come First Served** – Participants are allowed into the program as they are nominated or apply (similar to open-enrollment classes).

2. Communication

Participants and their current supervisors / managers should be informed about:

- What developmental opportunities will be provided through the program.
- What opportunities will open up as a result of program participation.
- What impact program participation will have on the employee's current duties.

If you choose a formal process where employees apply or are nominated for selection, you will also need to inform employees and supervisors about the application process and requirements.

Regardless of whether you develop a formal or informal program, supervisors should include the actual training and development activities in the employee's performance and development plan (PDP). Employees and supervisors should receive support and resources to identify what should be added to the employee's PDP.

3. Development Approach

Training and development activities are the core of a succession program. The goal is to provide participants with opportunities to learn and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and behaviors critical to being competitive when a promotion occurs. This requires that:

- The opportunities are tailored to the competencies in the job analysis.
- The experience gained through the program will be considered valuable when participants compete for a promotion.

When selecting the learning activities, first examine the training and experience profiles of successful incumbents when they applied. This creates an initial inventory of potential activities.

There are several types of learning activities to consider. Generally, activities fall into one or more of the following categories:

<u>Formal Training and Instruction</u>
Formal training and instruction includes all types of classroom, web-based, or other coursework. Coursework is generally most effective for teaching content-area and procedural knowledge. Classroom instruction may also be used for teaching decision making principles and other complex skills. However, this is usually only effective when participants are given structured opportunities to use the principles and skills inside or outside the classroom.

Behavioral competencies (e.g., diversity awareness and interpersonal skills) may also be discussed in formal training and instruction. However, behaviors are usually learned over a long period of time, and are less likely to change as a result of a class.

Developmental Job Assignments

Developmental job assignments include a wide range of on-the-job tasks, duties, and projects. Assignments may include work within the scope of the employee's current job, or partial to full-time rotation into another position for a designated time period.

While developmental assignments may help build content area knowledge, they are best used to cultivate complex skills that require extensive practical experience. For example:

- Staff targeted for senior-level positions may work on developing a new process or program.
- Staff targeted for supervisory / managerial positions may lead a project team or rotate into a leadership position during a supervisor's / manager's absence.

As noted earlier, behavioral competencies often cannot be trained. However, developmental job assignments may provide opportunities to assess whether participants naturally demonstrate certain behaviors. Additionally, assignments may also help participants build self-awareness and understanding of their personal styles and preferences.

Job Shadowing

Less formal than developmental job assignments, job shadowing involves short-term assignments where the participant attends meetings, client visits, hearings, and similar events with a senior staff person or manager.

Job shadowing may involve assisting senior staff or managers with specific assignments, but the primary focus is to observe higher level work performed by a successful incumbent. Rather than building specific knowledge and skills, the purpose of job shadowing is to build an awareness of what is required in the managerial or senior-level position. Participants should be encouraged to ask questions and discuss the job they are shadowing. Job shadowing is also a good introduction to a formal developmental job assignment.

Mentorship

Mentorship is about providing feedback and coaching to the participant. While a mentor may suggest specific learning opportunities, mentors and participants often discuss current work duties, assignments, and performance. Mentorship strategies are designed to help participants reflect on where they stand in their development, and provide guidance about where to go next.

Anyone with strong coaching and feedback skills can be a mentor. This includes experienced senior-level staff, senior leaders, managers, and HR specialists. At a minimum, participants' supervisors should provide feedback and coaching as part of employees' ongoing development.

4. Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to evaluate both participants' growth and their potential for promotion. Generally, there are three assessment stages:

- **Diagnostic Assessments** – Done at the start of the program, they are designed to both determine what the participant knows and to tailor the training program.
- **Formative Assessments** – Done during the program, they are designed to determine what the participant has learned, identify gaps, make course corrections, and/or determine whether the participant should proceed.
- **Summary Assessments** – Done at the end of the program, they are designed to determine what the participant has learned, their ability to transfer what they have learned to the work environment, and ultimately whether they 'passed'.

The following strategies provide some options for assessing participant learning:

<u>Course Completion</u>

Completion of program requirements is a surface-level gauge of growth and potential. Similar to using education and job experience to assess job candidates, completion shows that participants have followed a pattern of development that reflects ability to take on more responsibility.

<u>Participant Self-Assessment</u>

While not unbiased, participants' own assessments may indicate program impact. Self-assessment can help judge both attainment of knowledge and comfort using new skills.

<u>Peer Review</u>

Peer review involves getting feedback from other program participants about an individual. Since program peers know the program's development objectives, peer reviews are best for collecting informed observations about someone's knowledge and skill growth, and personal behaviors.

<u>Supervisor Assessment</u>

Just like peer reviews, supervisor assessments are best for collecting informed observations about someone's knowledge and skill growth, and personal behaviors. To be effective, the participant's supervisor needs to both know the program's development objectives, and be personally competent in the desired knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

<u>Program Manager Assessment</u>

While a program manager (second-line supervisor or above) may not regularly observe someone, he /she is in a unique position to assess the person against future selection criteria. To be effective, program managers also need to know the program's development objectives, and be personally competent in the desired knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

<u>360-Degree Reviews</u>

360-degree reviews use feedback from the participant's supervisor, professional peers, employees, and customers. While reviewers may not be aware of the program's learning objectives, they can provide objective observations about skill growth and personal behaviors.

Testing

Testing can range from standard exams to oral reviews. The most common tests compare participants' responses to correct answers or clear criteria. Tests are best for assessing knowledge or routine skills where a specific procedure must be followed. They are less effective for evaluating complex skills where judgment must be applied to find a 'best-fit' answer.

Capstone Projects

Capstone projects can be assigned to individuals or groups. Project topics and scope are typically defined and approved by an instructor, and then planned and self-directed by the participant(s). Instructors often require either progress reports or project milestone reviews at select stages. Final projects are then presented to a board of 'experts' such as instructors, organization leaders, and past program participants. While capstone projects are useful for evaluating knowledge and basic skills (e.g., communication and presentation skills), they are best for evaluating complex skills including planning, research and analysis, and project management. They are also effective for evaluating behaviors such as self-management and teamwork.

Phase 3: Hiring & Onboarding

The final phase focuses on integrating the program with agency hiring and onboarding practices.

Hiring

A succession strategy that isn't linked to agency recruitment and selection criteria is nothing more than a training program. For a succession program to add value, it must produce a pool of candidates who are competitive when positions come available. Consider the following:

- **Staying Current** – Are program participants staying current in their knowledge and skills? If what was learned becomes outdated, consider refresher programs.
- **Applicant Screening Criteria** – Are the knowledge, skills, and experience gained the same as those used to screen applicants for interview? Make sure the recruitment and selection standards and your training objectives are consistent.
- **Interview Questions and Selection Criteria** – Do the behaviors promoted in the program match the behaviors that supervisors screen against during interviews? This is particularly important if the organization uses behavioral interview techniques.
- **Program Participant Preference** – Will your organization give preference to program participants? You should consider whether you want to reinforce your training investment with a commitment to hire those who have successfully completed the program.

Onboarding

The final factor to consider is how you manage an employee's transition into their new role once they have been promoted. Consider the following:

- **Knowledge Transfer** – Do you have a strategy for transferring informal knowledge from the previous incumbent to the employee? If possible, provide overlap time for the incumbent to provide coaching on business processes, key stakeholders, and 'how things work'.

- **Mentorship** – Do you have formal or informal mentors who can work with the new hire? Mentors can provide coaching to help get the new employee up to speed.
- **Performance and Development Plan** – Is there a plan for the employee's continued growth and development? Does the employee clearly understand what success looks like in the new role? Growth and development don't end when the employee promotes. Emphasize their continued learning to reinforce your investment.

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