Passing the Baton: Creating an Effective Succession Plan for the Fayetteville Fire Department

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November 2009
Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/ to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.
Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that the appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of others.

Signed: __________________________________________
Abstract

Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department (FFD) is an organization comprised of 326. The department has grown rapidly over the past 5 years. Currently, FFD’s roster shows 41% of it members have less than five years of experience on the department. Records also reveal that within the next five years, 36 employees will be eligible for retirement. This includes each of the top 4 positions and 5 of the 11 in the next level of management in the department. Data show personnel spend an average of 4 years in critical positions within the department. With this in mind, FFD must prepare persons to step in to these positions.

The purpose of this project is to examine FFD’s current Career Development Program (CDP) and Officer Development Program (ODP) and gaps that exist as they relate to establishing an effective succession planning. A descriptive research method was to answer the following questions.

a.) What are the basic elements of an effective succession plan?

b.) What gaps exists between Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department’s officer and career development plans and an effective succession plan?

c.) What successful succession plans models are currently used by fire departments of a comparable size?

d.) How can an effective succession plan be implemented within Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department?

Questionnaires were used to survey members of F.F.D. as well as other fire departments to determine effective components of succession planning. A literary review included research to understand how the business and corporate worlds have approached the topic. The results show...
that most organizations understand the benefits of succession planning and although limited in formal use, recognize components that help ensure effective plans.

Recommendations as a result of this project include delivery of a clear message of management’s embrace of succession planning. The department’s CDP and ODP should be revised to further support a formalized succession plan. Lastly, the department must implement evaluation measures to ensure program objectives and the department’s needs are being met.
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Introduction

Many organizations and their leaders understand that “change is inevitable”, as quoted by the well-known British politician and writer, Benjamin Disraeli. Change occurs in every aspect of an organization. (Quotation Page, n.d.) Some of the biggest changes that many organizations, including the Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department (FFD), are facing today is the aging of the baby boomers and the exiting of knowledgeable leaders and key talent from the organization. Overall, baby boomers are considered to be those citizens born between 1946 and 1964. During 2009, the first group of that section of the population began turning 63 years old. According to a 2007 CBS News report by correspondent Nancy Cordes, even though a large percentage of baby boomers will work part-time beyond the age of 63, the average baby boomer plans to retire from a full time job at that age. (Grace, 2007)

Understanding that as an organization, FFD is not immune to losing talented leaders in key positions, the department must begin to prepare employees to step in to these positions. Although the FFD currently has an officer development program, there is a limited pool of qualified personnel to fill key positions within the department as the positions become vacant. With the lack of a defined succession plan to develop personnel, the department faces the risk of losing focus on its vision and its mission and goals. This will ultimately impact the quality of the delivery of services to the community.

The purpose of this project is to examine Fayetteville Fire Department’s current Officer Development and its Career Development programs and the gaps that exist as they relate to establishing an effective succession planning system for the department. The project will use a descriptive research method to answer the following questions:

a.) What are the basic elements of an effective succession plan?
b.) What gaps exist between Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department’s officer and career development plans and an effective succession plan?

c.) What successful succession plans models are currently used by fire departments of a comparable size?

d.) How can an effective succession plan be implemented within Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department?

**Background and Significance**

The City of Fayetteville sits adjacent to Ft. Bragg Military Post in the southeastern region of North Carolina. Currently, it the sixth largest city in the state of North Carolina and it continues to grow. Over the past five years the City of Fayetteville has grown from an area of 92 square miles with a population of 174,000 people to a city comprised of 147 square miles and a population of close to 210,000 citizens. While much of the growth has been through voluntary and strategic involuntary annexation of surrounding developing areas, the City of Fayetteville has also experienced growth within its existing borders. This is partly a result of new businesses, industries and residential occupancies beginning to spring up in anticipation of a population boom as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) initiative.

As the city continues to grow, so does the Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department. Similarly to the City of Fayetteville the department has doubled in size in just over a decade. In 1996, 156 personnel operating out of 7 fire stations protected the city and its citizens. Today the department consists of 326 personnel that operate from the administration offices, 16 stations and the department’s regional training facility. A third battalion was created in 2004, requiring the addition of 3 battalion commanders, one for each shift. Three additional
battalion commander positions were created to work in the administrative side of the department. An Emergency Management Officer (EMO) position was also established. The EMO is the equivalent of a battalion commander’s rank on the department. A Planning and Research Division was established to guide the department as it began its quest for accreditation through the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI). With the increase of divisions, stations, companies, and personnel there has been an increase in officer and other key positions within the department. Each of the positions plays important roles in the future direction of the department.

Like many fire departments of today, FFD faces several challenges in its efforts to fill key positions that impact the direction and vision of the department. More challenges are foreseeable as FFD continues to look forward and anticipate future growth and future vacancies. Incumbents currently in key positions will continue to move through their careers, whether by promoting to different ranks, seeking transfers to other positions, pursuing other goals and interests, or retiring after their years of service requirement have been met. An example of this movement can be seen in the training officer position. The position can be considered as a key position. Within FFD, the training officer has averaged less than 4 years in the division before moving into another position and away from the training division. In another example, a look at the top four position of FFD reveals that the Fire Chief and one of three Assistant Chiefs are currently eligible to retire. Both have over 35 years of service with the department. The remaining two Assistant Chiefs each has 26 years of service and will be eligible to retire in 4 years.

FFD has taken steps over the years to help personnel develop themselves for their career goals. In 1999, a Career Development Program (CDP) was implemented. The goal of the
program was to guide personnel towards specific classes and certifications in an effort to enhance their technical skills and knowledge. Training required early in the program includes classes such as response to hazardous materials releases and technical rescue response. Personnel are directed towards officer development types of courses and certifications around year six of the program. An Officer Development Program (ODP) was implemented three years later as part of the CDP. The 66-hour program further exposes participants to areas in which they are expected to have some knowledge in order to function as a company officer. A lot of the focus is on response and scene management. Although both the CDP and ODP, are good starts to developing company officers, they fall short of developing personnel to immediately step into key and other leadership positions. Johnson states “There is a fundamental difference between training and developing personnel in task-related competencies and developing leadership and management skills to effectively direct an organization into the future.” (2004)

The challenges of filling anticipated vacancies of key position within FFD only becomes more magnified when the department considers that 41% of the personnel on its roster has less than 5 years of service with FFD, while about 10% has more than 25 years of service. It is imperative that the department begins to identify and develop talent that will be able to continue to strategically move the department. The EFOP 4th year course Executive Leadership manual states, “Succession planning is a critical element of organizational strategy.” (NFA, 2005, p. SM 7-3). It is through succession planning that the FFD will ensure that talent is developed to fill key positions and manage change as necessary to lead the department in its mission. This Applied Research Paper is related to the Executive Leadership course and two of the 2009 objectives of the U.S. Fire Administration, in that succession planning is an emerging issue, improving the fire and emergency services’ professional status and it is a means in which FFD can ensure
continuity of its strategic plans and goals which directly impacts its capability for response to and recovery from all hazards.

**Literature Review**

For this project a literature review was conducted to: (1) further define and understand the benefits of succession planning; (2) determine what are considered to be elements of effective succession planning; and (3) how other organizations and agencies have approached succession planning. The review included a search of literary works and reports discussing succession planning as it relates to the corporate world, and as well as articles written in fire service professional and trade journals. Sources for this literary review was obtained from the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy located in Emmitsburg, MD, from the local library and during internet searches of the subject.

Succession planning is a resource to help manage change. Not only is change inevitable, but also as Kurjan explains it is pervasive in society and necessary for the survival of organizations and individuals. For a company to grow and succeed it has to experience change. (Kurjan, n.d.)

By no means is succession planning considered a new concept in the world of business. In past years, some businesses leaders looked at succession planning as method of preparing for the transition of the CEO of an organization. As explained by Hellbusch “planning for the inevitable turnover in top management has been an essential management issue since public and private organizations evolved.” (2004) Steele explains that succession planning has been used as a tool of managing changes at the top levels of leadership in organizations for over 50 years. It has since evolved, becoming more looked upon as a process in which organizations consider the development of personnel for key positions. She goes on to say, “While operational definitions
vary, the core meaning has remained the same throughout the decades as the process of succession planning has evolved.” (Steele, 2006)

The Executive Leadership course manual defines succession planning as “an organized and systematic way to ensure that employees in a particular organization are capable, competent and willing to replace and/or succeed to strategic roles within the organization.” (NFA, 2000, p. SM 7-3). In more detail, Wolf shares that succession planning includes “identifying and preparing, through mentoring training, education and development, appropriate candidates” as part of the process to replace key persons within the organization. (2004) Rothwell defined succession planning “as a means of identifying critical management positions, starting at the position of project manager and extending up to the highest position in the organization.” (2005) With some variation, Heathfield describes succession planning as “a process whereby an organization ensures that employees are recruited and developed to fill each key role within the company.” (n.d.) Many of the authors that wrote on the subject of succession planning commonly describe it in terms of a system or a process in which personnel with the potential for filling key positions are identified and further developed.

It is important to understand the components that lead to effective succession planning programs. Rothwell lists Four Key Best Practices according the Chief Executive Magazine as:

1. Identifying candidates with high potential by using consistent and objective criteria.
2. Diagnose candidates strength and weaknesses in comparison to organizational needs
3. Prescribe by providing a development process to build competencies.
4. Monitor to ensure that the succession process is developing leaders (2005)

Similarly Shroeder lists four components that typify many succession programs as:

1. Creating an infrastructure for the program
2. Identifying talent
3. Offering developmental programming

In a comparative resource, components of effective succession planning were list as:

1. Identifying and analyzing key positions
2. Creating and assessing candidates
3. Selecting the individuals. (Bucker & Savenski, Hicks, Peterson, 2000)

Although all three lists slightly differ, each of the listed components is considered significant aspects of succession planning.

Ensuring an infrastructure of support has not always been mentioned in discussions of succession planning in the fire service. In many cases it is implied that executive management support succession planning efforts. Executive management support is critical to success of any succession planning program and it is essential that the top leaders are clear with their support. (Shroeder, 2006) In his article, Effective Succession Planning Tropiano states, “commitment and involvement of the CEO and organizational leadership are the heart and soul of the succession planning organism.” (Tropiano, 2004) Through management’s support the strategic direction of the plan is set.

The identification of what positions in an organization should be considered critical or key positions are vital in succession planning. At one point, when discussing succession planning, the concentration was on the top executives positions of an organization. The thought process has since evolved to now be inclusive of all key or strategic positions. (Steel, 2006) For the most part, a key position may be defined as any position that is critical to the operations of an organization and will be difficult to fill due to the required skill, experience and/or seniority
possibly required in the position. (HR Council, n.d.) An absence of talented and capable people
in these positions impacts an organization’s ability to move towards its mission. A failure to
develop personnel to fill these positions may make them feel less valued creating a tendency for
them to jump ship.

Every resource reviewed during the literary review discussed the identification of talent
as critical component of any succession plan. Organizations are challenged to fill key positions
with the right human resource. It is essential that key tasks, along with the attributes and
responsibilities of the future leaders are defined as organizations consider succession planning.
(Cherry, Bekaert & Holland, 2009) An organization should anticipate what types of knowledge,
skills, and abilities will be required as it looks towards the future of key positions and potential
candidates for those positions. As organizations identify the competencies required for key
positions, they should begin to identify pools of personnel with the talent and desire to
potentially fill the positions. It is not uncommon for an employee to show an interest in assuming
additional responsibility and some organizations may view this as a first step towards identifying
talent. However, Shroeder wrote, “It is important to note that not everyone who wants to be a
manager has what it takes to be one. That’s where talent assessment comes into play.” (2006)
Gorman provides such an example when she explains that although employees at Federal
Express identify themselves as candidates for leadership positions, the CEO Fred Smith quickly
notes that not all have the traits needed to succeed in his company. Approximately 70 percent of
the participants drop out of the program after learning the demands and requirements as
explained in the company’s evaluation program. (Gorman, n.d.)

When identifying talent, critical competencies should be analyzed. Talented employees
with critical competencies should be identified early and frequently in their career. There are
various methods used by organizations that may help to assess identified competencies. Leading
the way are performance appraisals, assessment centers and tests, and 360-degree feedback.
Also, a review of education and experience provides valuable feedback of background
information. (Lindemann, n.d.)

Developing employees is a fourth critical component of succession planning as discussed
by authors whose works were reviewed. Gorman writes, “Corporations can't just wait for leaders
to arrive, fully developed. Organizations must actively seek out people with leadership potential
and find ways to nurture and develop that potential.” (n.d.) There are many methods of providing
nurturing. Succession planning activities should grant opportunities to develop personnel through
education, exposure, and projects lends experience. (Dye, 2005) In the text book Managing Fire
and Rescue Services, Forsman further explains a need to diversify the avenues of training as
opposed to relying primarily on internal resources. Providing a wider range of input from outside
agencies helps introduce potential leaders and managers to different philosophies and approaches
used in the private and in the public organizations. Fire departments should consider higher
education and utilize state and national programs and training available through private sector.
(Forsman, 2002, p. 275)

Organizations must also understand competencies that are currently needed in identified
positions, but they must also have a vision of where the organization is headed and what the
same and additional key positions will look like in the future. Then they must anticipate what
additional competencies need to be developed as the position evolves or the new ones are
created. (Tropiano, 2004)

As potential candidates and the required competencies are identified for future positions,
measures should be taken to close the gaps. Personnel development should be based on long-
term needs and not on position replacement. (Lindemann, n.d.) The literature review revealed that there are various resources, methods and opportunities available to help develop personnel for leadership and critical roles in organizations. Edwards believes that “creating an environment in which everyone can realize their potential while being included and valued is the ultimate goal.” (2000)

Coaching and mentoring are common components of the development process. In the textbook *Managing Fire and Rescue Services*, Forsman observes that many departments have added a formal mentoring program to staff development. “It is important that potential leaders learn not only from external sources but also from the people who currently lead within an organization.” (Forsman, 2002 p. 276) Referring to the fire service, Johnson touts “implementing coaching, mentoring, recruitment and training requirements that are consistent with the department’s operational needs and its mission, vision and core values of the department” as development tools. (2004) Hellbusch discusses “coaching, mentoring, shadowing, training and challenging assignments for the rising stars” as key components of a succession plan within a public works department. (2004) Shroeder also includes mentoring and coaching along with classroom-based training, rotational work assignments and individual development plans as a means of developing personnel. (2006)

Aside from individual plans, many organizations have implemented internal career development programs. These types of programs have become of the essence in the succession planning process. Career development and succession planning compliments each other. Together they provide for the organization by ensuring capable and competent persons, who will be capable of continuing to move the department. They will help to create more satisfied and productive personnel in more of a growth oriented organization. (Gaffney, 2005)
Many of the larger organizations in the private sector have implemented a type of leadership or career development program. A survey conducted by the Institute for Corporate Productivity revealed that 60% of the 382 companies surveyed had a career development program in place. Forty-one percent of the respondents also utilized in-house coaching and mentoring. In addition, the survey showed 53% of the organizations with a career development program select candidates through manager referral. Seventy-six percent of the companies support their program with talent management goals, while 81% show their program is incorporated into their business objectives. (HMR Guide, 2007)

In the article *How Personal Is Your Leadership Development?*, he explains that FedEx, Macy’s and Baker & McKenzie corporations’ leadership development programs can be divided into pre-interviews, assessments, mentoring/coaching, actual work time and review phases. Baker & McKenzie utilizes a customized 360 degree evaluation which is based on the qualities the company considers necessary to be an effective leader. (Warden, n.d.)

A search on the internet revealed that many fire departments have implemented either a career development program or an officer development program or both. While the programs differed somewhat from department to department, most were based on competencies included in recognized fire service standards and publications such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 1021, Standard for Fire Officer Professional Qualifications. Many also included mentoring and coaching, as well formal education components in the program.

Finally, as with all programs, monitoring and evaluating succession planning is paramount. One of the better measuring tools is the ability of an organization to actually fill key positions with internal candidates through their succession planning efforts. Not only should the
organization measure whether or not they have the capacity to fill the position from within, but once filled is the employee effectively performing in the new role.

Procedures

To complete this research, a literary review was conducted focusing on the definition and benefits of succession planning, identifying elements of successful plans and how various organizations have approached succession planning. A goal of the literary search was to begin to identify gaps in development methods already in place at the Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Department and a true succession plan. The literary search included research to obtain a perspective from the private sector organizations as well as from fire service organizations. Literature was researched at the Learning Resource Center of the National Fire Academy, at the local library and through an extensive internet search.

For this project, data was also collected from the department’s hiring and personnel statistics. The percentage of personnel with less than 5 years of service was computed as well as the number of personnel who could potentially retire within the next 5 years. From the data, a breakdown of the age ranges of personnel was also determined. Lastly, the information was used to determine the average time span personnel on the department spend in key positions. The analysis of all of the data helped to provide an understanding of changing demographics of the department.

As a part of research, two questionnaires were conducted using an internet based survey program. The first questionnaire was sent out to over 400 fire departments of various sizes. (See Appendix A) Many departments were randomly selected while others were selected based on knowledge of the department and their programs. The intent of the first questionnaire was to identify successful succession plan models in use by any of the fire departments surveyed and to
establish common components of those programs. Secondly, the questionnaire was designed to identify departments of a similar size to FFD who had been successful in establishing succession plans.

The second questionnaire was designed and conducted using the same internet based program. (See Appendix B) However the questionnaire was limited to members of the Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department. Personnel were asked to provide their rank and years of service on the department, but were not required to provide their names. This questionnaire was designed to determine:

a.) If personnel of the FFD felt the department utilized succession planning;

b.) What do personnel view as important components of an effective succession plan;

c.) If either the department’s Career Development Program (CDP) or the Officer Development Program (ODP) were effective succession planning tools;

d.) Establish gaps between the CDP, ODP and an effective succession plan.

A review of the CDP and ODP was also conducted to evaluate the true objectives of each program and to determine how the objectives relate to succession planning.

Limitations

Limitations to this research surrounds the assumption that personnel responding to the FFD Succession Planning questionnaire were knowledgeable of the department’s Career Development and Officer Development programs. It also assumes that respondents understood the concept of succession planning. Some questions were based on the feelings and attitude of the respondents. The respondents may not have had an opportunity to participate or train in the programs. The same limitations apply to the questionnaire sent abroad and the individuals that responded. In addition, the first survey was sent to individuals with involvement in the fire
service and to many enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program. A more global view of succession planning may have been realized through gaining responses from members of private organizations.

Also an assumption must be made that the questionnaire was completed only once for each responding department or by individuals. Lastly, the design of the questionnaires could have contributed to vague responses or specific questions left unanswered. Some of the questions could have possibly been too general, which may have resulted in some respondents providing less than specific responses. This is particularly true under the comment sections.

Results

The results for this research project were sifted from a review of data collected from FFD personnel statistical information, from information received through written questionnaires, from the review of FFD’s career development and officer development plans, as well as through literature reviewed. The information gained helped to understand the need for effective succession planning in the FFD and to answer 3 of 4 of the project’s research questions.

The need for effective succession planning within FFD

Review of department data confirmed that 41% of the department’s personnel has less than 5 years of service with the department. It also revealed that of the top 4 positions on the department, the Fire Chief and the three Assistant Fire Chiefs are eligible to retire in the next 4 years. Actually the top two, the Fire Chief and the most senior Assistant Chief are eligible to immediately retire. At the next rank, that of Battalion Commander, one person out of the 11 positions is immediately eligible for retirement. Two others are eligible to retire within the next year and another 2 will be eligible within the following 2 years. Data shows that even at the office staff level, the Administrative Office Supervisor will be eligible to retire within 18
Of the three office assistants that she supervises, two have only 5 years of service while the other has less than a year of service. Overall the data revealed that 36 department employees across all ranks and positions will be eligible for retirement within the next 5 years.

It is also worthy to note that as the department has grown, other critical positions and divisions have been created. Within the last 5 years positions have been created for an Emergency Management Officer, a Logistics Officer, and an Administrative Battalion. The Fire Marshals position was upgraded and a Public Fire & Life Safety Educator position was added to the Prevention Division. In addition a Planning and Research Division was created. Although not enough data exist to determine the turnover rate of these positions, an assumption can be made that the rate will be similar to the turnover rate within the department’s Training Division. On average personnel spend approximately 4 years in position of Training Officer or Assistant Training Officer in the department. The data highlighted the need for succession planning as a means identifying capable personnel, preparing them for upward mobility, and for replacing key personnel within the department to ensure the continuity of progress towards established plans and a changing future.

What are the basic elements of effective succession plan?

Dye appropriately wrote, “If you have seen 10 succession plans, you have seen 10 different succession plans. There is simply not a standard format.” (2005) These may be true statements, however the research showed that while there are no recognized standards that dictate any required elements of a succession plan, there are some common elements that have been employed by organizations and are discussed by authors researching the subject. Those of note includes management commitment, identifying talented personnel, identifying key competencies, and closing the gap between the two through personnel developmental process. It
also includes establishing a type of monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that the process is effective for employee and the department.

Both questionnaires employed were designed to understand what personnel in the fire service considers as important features of an effective succession plan. The first questionnaire was sent out to 400 personnel with fire service experience, but who were not employed by FFD. One hundred thirty people responded. Question #11 asked them to rank a list of components of a succession plan. Of the nine elements listed, “Leadership commitment and buy-in” was ranked #1 by 63 (52.5 %) of the respondents. One hundred three (86%) of the respondents ranked it in the top 3 of the elements. Forty (33%) people responding ranked “Identification of core competencies” as the 2nd most important element and 37 (30.6 %) chose “Professional & Personal Development” as the 3rd most important. However, when the top 3 elements are analyzed, 90 (75%) placed “Identification of core competencies” in their top 3 elements while 101 (83.5%) of the respondents placed professional & personal development in their top 3 components. Below Chart 1 shows the breakdown of this specific question.
Under comments one respondent posted “there must be buy-in from all personnel throughout the organization, up and down the organizational structure.” Another respondent stated, “Future FD leaders need exposure and opportunities to learn about all aspects of FD operations and programs. They need to have opportunities to lead and be taught by leaders. This learning should also include FD program management functions for them to understand what it takes to run a FD.” One other respondent wrote “projection of vacancies is more important to keep the personnel interested in development.”

Sixty-four of the FFD’s 326 personnel responded to the FFD Succession Plan Survey. In relation to personnel development, FFD personnel were asked in question #6, “Which of the following (if any) do you view as important components of an effective departmental succession plan?” Sixty-one of the 65 respondents answered the question. Three people skipped the question. According to those responding, the top components in terms of importance are: #1 - “defined objectives” chosen by 45 (73.8%) of the respondents, #2 - “identification of talent”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership commitment and buy-in</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
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<td>Cross-training/job rotation</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal education</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of core competencies</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; personal development</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
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<td>5.8%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
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<td>Mentoring</td>
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<td>1.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identification of talent</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projection of key vacancies/openings</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
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Table 1 – Succession Planning Survey, Question 11.
picked by (62.3%), and tied at #3 in responses were “specific training within the department” and “an evaluation program”, each chosen by 37 (60.7%) of those responding. See chart 2 below.

Table 2 - FFD Succession Plan Survey – Question 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defined objectives</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce analysis</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of talent</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific required training within the department</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific required certifications</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific required outside training</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal education requirements</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career counseling</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and coaching avenues</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted job rotations assignments</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A contingency plan to assign roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual assessment and self development avenues</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An evaluating program</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please list any other specific components that you view as important or add comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under comments, two people stated that targeted rotations should be included. One of the respondents expressed that rotation should encompass assigning personnel to the training division, prevention division and other upper management/administrative positions for a period of time. The respondent explained that individuals would be exposed to different positions and specific roles, responsibilities and the affects they have on the department’s overall planning. “This will help prepare them for future positions with less of a learning curve.” One other person commented that a mandatory formal education of a bachelor’s degree for assistant chief positions and a master’s degree for chief position should be required.
The information reveals that even among those with fire service experience, opinions vary somewhat as to what components should be included in succession planning. But support and buy-in from the management level, as well has personnel development towards required competencies and through various methods tends to be paramount according to works and research of others who have written about the subject. As with any program, evaluation measures are required to be in place.

*What gaps exists between Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department’s officer and career development plans and an effective succession plan?*

To determine if gaps exists between FFD’s development programs and an effective succession program, the departments Career Development Plan (CDP) and the Officer Development Plan (ODP) were reviewed and compared with information gained from the literature review and through the questionnaires. The CDP was developed and implemented in 1999. (See Appendix C) The initial objective of the program was to offer more career opportunities for firefighters while providing an opportunity for more to advance to a higher pay in a shorter time. The focus was on the personnel who actually performed the work for which the department was exists. The development aspects of the program centered around technical courses and certifications early, followed by more officer level certifications later in the program.

The plan defined monetary increases and the requirements, including a minimum time in grade for the different levels within the positions. Completion of the City’s Effective Supervisory Course and the department’s ODP was required before advancing to the rank of captain. At the various levels of the program, personnel had a choice of limited courses that he/she could
complete before advancing to the next level. Missing from the CDP where specific written objectives and a method of evaluating the program.

The plan was reviewed and revised in 2007. (Appendix D) The major changes included assigning a point value to listed classes. Personnel were required to obtain set amount of points to advance through the plan. Also the supervisory classes and the ODP were made available earlier in the plan. The time in grade requirements remained the same. The overall goal of the plan was included in the written program. However, a monitoring and evaluation tool still had not been developed. Neither version of the CDP addressed identifying personnel or talent that could potentially be developed in key areas or for critical positions within the department.

The question #7 in the questionnaire made available to FFD personnel asked, “Do you feel that the FFD Career Development Program aids the department in succession planning?” Of the employees that responded, 42.9% feel that the program does, 33.3% feel that it does not and 23.8% were unsure. One responded commented that the plan is “too specific and does not address individuals other talents” and another one said, “It doesn't point out any type of attributes that one person has over the other.” On the same note, another respondent wrote, “It gives some indication of an individual's talent, but only if that's looked at.”

One person felt that “It appears that the plan is more of a vehicle for personnel to gain certifications for advancing a step in grade for more money rather than aiding in succession planning.” Similarly another stated, “Most of the firefighters utilize the points system in a manner in which they can obtain points in the easiest and quickest manner for advancement.”

Other comments included “Some individuals sit in class for a certificate…while on the other hand those who strive to be future leaders listen, learn and are motivated and the CDP is
Just another motivator.” Lastly, several responses included that “The CDP is a good start on succession planning” but higher education should be a part of the program.”

Referring back to question #6 of the survey, three of the top components that respondents think an effective succession planning program should contain (defined objectives, identification of talent and an evaluation program) are missing or not well defined in the department’s CDP. Although mentoring of personnel was not discussed in the comments in the survey, mentoring is addressed as an important element in the literature review. In the CDP it not addressed in any type of specifics or formal format.

The FFD Officer Development Program (ODP) was implemented in 2001 as a part of the CDP. The program was based on the Officer I course developed by the Maryland Fire & Rescue Institute. Additional components particular to FFD and the City of Fayetteville was added. Basically the 66-hour course provided training based on the NFPA Standard 1021, Fire Officer Professional Qualifications. The course introduces personnel to the roles of a company office and includes topics such as fire department administration and organization, budgeting, planning, reporting writing, community relations, emergency services delivery and the officer’s role in supervising company operations, public education, fire inspection, investigations and safety. More specifically to FFD it covered types of forms used by the department, the record management system, accreditation and ISO inspections. Since its inception the program has been expanded to 100 hours.

Although the ODP introduces personnel to some areas to which they have little familiarity, it is more designed to develop personnel for the role of company officer as the name implies. Reviewing the comments section of the questionnaire, several personnel alluded to the fact that neither the CDP nor ODP offered much in developing personnel after the rank of
captain. This supports the premise that the programs are more geared at developing personnel to promote to company officer.

*What successful succession plans models are currently used by fire departments of a comparable size?*

The literature reviewed showed that there were no standardized succession plans whether in the private sector or in the fire service. Organizations have established effective plans based on common themes and components. The questionnaire sent to members of various fire departments revealed even less use of succession plans in the queried departments. There were 130 responses to the Officer Development and Succession Planning Questionnaire. Ninety-one responses were from individuals affiliated with an all-paid career department and 39 were from members of combination departments. No responses were received from an all-volunteer organization. A vast majority of respondents, 60.2%, served a population of 99,000 or less. Thirty-four percent, served a population of 50,000 or less. A majority, 77.7% were from organizations with 250 or less personnel. Out of the 130 responses to the questionnaire, only 12 individuals stated that their department has a succession plan. In the comments section 29 of the 37 persons who provided comments stated that their organization did not have any type of succession plan. One person commented that his/her department had a formal mentoring program but it is not used. The remaining 7 alluded to informal succession activities such as specific training classes or certifications. Sixty-five people responded that their organization had an officer development plan and 31 stated theirs had a career development plan. It was difficult to ascertain from the data, which of the 12 departments with established succession plans were of a comparable to FFD.
Question #9 asked, “Do you feel your current Succession plan identify likely successors and determine the gap between their current level of readiness and that required by the key position filled?” Even though only 12 people responded that their organization had a succession plan, 106 people responded to the question. Of those, 20 people felt that their plan identified people to fill the key positions and the gap between what was required for the position and the individual. The other 86 individuals responded no to the question.

Question #7 asked, “If your department has a type of Succession Plan, which of the following components are included in your organization’s plan?” Again, even though 12 respondents said their organization had a succession plan, 16 people responded to the question. Twelve said their department’s program included specific education and training requirements. Eleven stated their program included a mentoring and coaching system. Table 3 breaks down the responses by the most included components.

Table 3 Succession Planning Survey, Question 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Included</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific education and training requirements</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and coaching avenues</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined objectives</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of talent</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual assessment and self development avenues</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A contingency plan to assign roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted job rotations assignments</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An evaluating program</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting a workforce analysis</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question | 16
skipped question  | 114
Discussion

Virtually every organization, whether it’s private or in the public sector will have to face change as executive leaders and personnel in critical positions retire or otherwise move on. These organizations have no choice but to deal with these types of changes. How well they deal with them may depend upon how they have approached succession planning. Lindermann believes that “having the right people with the right skills in the right place is non-negotiable.” (n.d.) Finding the right people with the right skills or capacity to develop them is a part of what succession planning is about.

Succession planning is not a new concept in the private sector. But even with that said, a Harvard Business Review reports that two-thirds of the larger companies in the United States do not have a formalized succession plan in place. (Forbes, 2008) Though several companies have not established a formal succession plan, many have taken steps to implement some type of career development or leadership plans. The survey conducted by the Institute for Corporate Productivity shows 60% of the 382 organizations completing the assessment had implemented a career development plan. (HMR Guide, 2007)

When it comes down to it, succession planning is not entirely a new idea in the fire service either. However, only a small percentage of departments have established a formal succession plan. A formal career development and/or an officer development plan are more likely to be found implemented in fire departments as opposed to a true succession plan. There is value in both, the career development and the officer development plans, but organizations may overlook the fact that the plans do not necessarily prepare personnel for specific positions or situations. In the succession planning questionnaire that was sent out, during this research, only 12 individuals responded that their department had established a career development plan. Sixty-
five people replied that their department had an officer development program and 31 replied that there was a career development program in place within their organization. Eighty-five out of 118 respondents did not feel that their development programs prepare people to fill critical or key positions.

Key or critical positions must be defined. The organization must ”identify critical roles and develop a clear understanding of the capabilities required for effectiveness and high performance in those roles.” (Tropiano, 2004) The capacities should be shared with personnel. Informed personnel will take more of an interest in other areas of the department if they have an understanding of the responsibilities of the position and the job.

To get those “right people with the right skills” as Lindermann puts it in the right positions, personnel with talent must be identified and nurtured. But organizations must remember that a plan that only identifies successors, characteristically fail to see an even more broader range of available talent. In essence, if one high achiever is identified and the organization commits a lot of resources getting that person in the “right position”, it can miss out on identifying others who may be equally as valuable. It is important to develop plan that invest in all personnel that are near ready or performing at high levels in specific areas and to allow them grow and develop. At the same time, the organization should realize that not all personnel who are close to developing as a high achiever or are talented enough to advance to the next level have a desire to do so. (Workforce, n.d.) For those who do, resources should be made available. But even so, the old adage “you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make them drink” applies. Individuals must also have a willingness and capacity for self-development as well.
What are the best approaches to developing identified talent? It depends. The first step is to gain an understanding of required and even desired competencies needed in various positions and in the organization as a whole. In virtually every article reviewed regarding succession planning, the author stressed the need for identifying required competencies. After acknowledging what is needed, more specific methods of training and developing personnel can be implemented. The methods of training should include a form of mentoring and coaching and provide for experiential opportunities. Lamourex likens it to sports. She explains, “At the start of every sports season players participate in intensive training to practice skills and perfect plays. But it isn’t until the team actually scrimmage that the coaches can see the talent of each player.”

(2009) The same applies in the corporate world, as in the fire service. In the fire service firefighters are taught skills in classroom and then have an opportunity to apply those skill in practical applications. Talented players must also be afforded opportunities to “scrimmage” in the role of key positions.

**Recommendations**

Research during this project reveals that career development, officer development and succession planning compliment each other. Succession planning requires mutual efforts by the department and individuals. The department must reach out to help develop identified talent and high performers. Individuals must understand that although the department has resources in place to develop employees, self-development is an important part of any succession program.

*How can an effective succession plan be implemented within Fayetteville Fire/Emergency Management Department?*

The F.F.D. has taken the first steps towards developing an effective succession plan. First, it has the support, commitment and willingness to be involved by top leadership and the
executive staff. To add to this, it is important for the upper management to continually communicate that succession planning is a clear focus of the department and to share how the department will develop future leaders and potential replacement for key positions. Care should be taken to ensure that the message is not directed towards any one particular person or group of personnel within the department. A written plan should be developed and management must also share how the program relates to the department’s strategic plan.

Support for the message and plan must show through the department’s training programs. The department has already begun laying the groundwork by establishing its career development plan and officer development plan. Although both are sound, neither plan specify for training and development after the company officer position. Neither of the plans provide for coaching, mentoring, job shadowing or job rotations, which have been identified important components of succession plans. They also unintentionally stir personnel toward training as opposed to education.

Recommendations include a maintaining a balance of training and education in the plans. In addition, a second phase of the ODP or an ODP II should be considered. In this phase, in conjunction to course work, rotations should be incorporated to specifically provide opportunities for personnel to work with the Administrative, Research & Planning, Prevention, Emergency Management and Logistic battalion commanders and their divisions as well as rotate as a fill-in Battalion Commander in the operations division.

The programs must be further reviewed to ensure a workable marriage into a more comprehensive succession plan that meets the needs of the department as well as personnel. Specific considerations to be made in the plans includes identifying what are the true objectives of each plan, what competencies are they attempting to build and are those competencies
indicative of what is required to be effective in identified critical positions. Employee evaluation tools should be utilized more. Research for the project touted the positives of using multi-rater tools such as 360-degree evaluations. The feedback will provide valuable information about the skills and behavior desired to help accomplish the department’s mission and vision.

Finally the department must place more emphasis on implementing evaluation components for programs. One of the goals should be to substantiate that development and succession planning programs are in fact doing what they are designed to do. Currently employees are required to complete specific requirements of the CDP and ODP. The department currently utilizes personnel performance evaluations. Personnel are required be evaluated at least annually and in some instances bi-annually. There have been no efforts to tie the evaluations back to training to gauge the training’s effectiveness. In terms of succession planning the evaluation process should also include the departments ability to fill vacant key positions with effective personnel.

Based on the findings of this report it is apparent that Fayetteville Fire Department invested significant effort in its steps towards developing personnel to advance to the company officer level. Informally, it has attempted to ensure its ability to fill all key vacant positions as they occur. The research has shown that there are critical components of succession planned that should be implemented. It is apparent that no one component alone will enable the department to accomplish it goals. These steps may yield advantages of a changing workforce, and provide opportunities to members. Engaging in a systematic approach to succession planning will lead to a successful formula for ensuring continuity of the departments mission to serve the community.
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