

Creating a Leadership Plan

By Teresa Comey, M.A. candidate
Influencing Leadership
604-760-7686
www.influencingleadership.com

Max De Pree (1989) author of *Leadership is an Art*, wrote "Leaders are responsible for future leadership. They need to identify, develop and nurture future leaders (pg. 14)." This statement holds true even more so today. Today's leaders need to prepare for their successors and for the development of other leaders in their organization.

Traditionally companies practiced replacement planning, which concentrated on pre-selecting backup people for key positions (Byham et. al, 2002). This type of planning was ideal for relief scheduling and for emergency coverage if someone was suddenly unable to work. This worked when organizations were stable, large and hierarchical.

Today the business environment is very different. There is less stability in organizations, organizations are flatter, there are few middle managers, changes occur rapidly in all sectors, business units are decentralized resulting in fragmentation of HR initiatives and top executives have little time to spend on leadership development and succession management (Byham, et. al., 2002). In this new environment, planning for future organizational leaders cannot be left to the traditional replacement model, but needs to be more purposeful and strategic to meet the needs of today's rapidly changing business climate.

Giving Long-Term Direction

A leadership plan can establish a strategy for existing resources and personnel. It can make it easier for an organization to meet changes and give it options for the future. Much current literature suggests that the role of a leadership plan is to give direction for long-term planning and ensure the best use of resources to achieve the objectives of the organization. It aligns with the values, missions and goals of the organization, while preparing individuals for growth, achievement and organizational success.

By looking in at its current talent pool, an organization can use a leadership plan to increase opportunities to develop its high potential performers, identify its replacement needs, and increase the talent pool of promotable employees (Byham, et.al., 2002). When looking at developing leaders from within, the organization will need to look at the current competencies of the organization and determine what training and development will be necessary to meet its future needs (Rothwell, 2001). Leadership planning builds on core competencies and turns leadership potential into practice.

A Competency Approach

Leadership planning calls for an assessment of the competencies that are needed for an organization's leadership positions. Each position will have job skills and knowledge for that role, but what are the ideal leadership competencies that are required for the

position? It is important for the organization to determine what competencies are required for the current position and for the future of the organization.

Initially members of the organization need to ask the following question: What values, personal traits and characteristics do they admire and look for in their leaders? While this question will develop an important list of desirable competencies, the competency model developed must also reflect the business requirements of the organization (Byham et.al, 2002; Cook & Bernthal, n.d.). Thus, competency models need to answer two questions: 1) What skills and characteristics are required to do the job? 2) What behaviours have the most direct impact on performance and success in the job? (Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999)

Before leadership candidates can be identified, the organization must clearly articulate their business requirements. Leadership competency assessments need to be designed around a clear understanding of the current and future needs of an organization (Barner, 2000).

The literature on succession and leadership planning clearly makes a strong case for the development of effective and strategic plans. The development of competencies and value-based systems are becoming the foundations for decision-making for future leaders. Leaders are not just responsible for what happens day to day, but also for the future. Leadership needs to be future focused and succession planning is imperative for today's leaders. "The art of leadership dwells a good deal in the future, in providing for the future of the organization, in planning and growing other leaders who will look to the future beyond their own" (DePree, 1989). Is your organization ready?

Teresa Comey, MA candidate, is the principal of Influencing Leadership, an organization committed to the facilitation of business and leadership development. Teresa is completing her thesis "Creating a Leadership Succession Plan Process" at Royal Roads University. She can be reached at comey@telus.net. Or visit www.influencingleadership.ca for more information.

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