

# **SUCCESSION PLANNING**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

Fire Departments across the nation face many dynamic challenges. One of the most important is the development of personnel to assume leadership positions within the organization. It is to this end the leadership gaps that exist in many fire service organizations must be addressed. (Fleming, 2002)

Current demographics show the baby boom generations are beginning to retire or will be eligible for early retirement, and with their departure they will take a tremendous amount of experience and leave vacancies in key top management positions. Organizations must be prepared for a mass flood of retirements as the largest group in the workforce approach the end of their careers.

Currently within the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department (BFRSD), 85% of the personnel have less than 20 years of service. The average number of years of service for the Fire Chiefs' administrative staff, which includes the Fire Chief, Deputy Chief and the Assistant Chiefs, is 23 years of service - ranging between 20 -31 years of service. These numbers are indicative of the trend that show a younger, less experienced workforce.

Without appropriate and adequate planning, a vacancy in a critical position can result in an organizational shakeup comparable to an earthquake and it can tear through the organization like a hurricane. Conversely, if a succession plan exists and employee development has been identified as a priority, a void in a critical leadership position will not last long. (Vouglas, 1998)

The problem was that the BFRSD did not have an aggressive, proactive plan to address the change in leadership in top management positions.

The purpose of this research project is to identify current concepts of effective succession planning that may be institutionalized within the BFRSD. A literature review, the action research method and a survey, were used to answer the following questions:

1. What is the need for succession planning?
2. What are the critical components of an effective succession plan?
3. What are other fire service organizations doing to address the need for succession planning?

The survey was mailed to approximately 100 urban, fully-paid fire departments throughout the United States. The fire departments had a minimum of 100 personnel and were selected from a list randomly arranged utilizing the WordPerfect 9, Quattro Pro programs. Approximately 52 of the surveys were returned to the researcher.

The research showed that an increase in discussions about succession planning has not inspired leaders to fully embrace the concept of succession planning. There has been expressed interest by some fire departments in succession planning, however, there is little found in the fire service. There are significant roadblocks that prevent implementation of succession planning. (Bouth, 2001) There are key components that make up a succession plan including replacement planning, human resource audit, high-potential employee identification, employee input and development. (Duncan, 2000)

The researcher recommended that the BFRSD and other fire service organizations develop a succession planning committee. The planning committees' goal would be the development of a comprehensive succession plan that addresses the identification and development of potential candidates to fill future vacancies in key leadership positions. The committee should network with other fire departments and private corporations seeking all available information pertaining to succession plan development, implementation, problems, barriers, benefits and creative ideas on training programs. The succession plan must be tailored to meet the needs of the organization and should be developed with flexibility to accommodate future changes and requirements.

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## INTRODUCTION

The terrorists' attacks on New York's World Trade Center decimated the executive management levels in many large and small financial firms, and large technological companies. These disasters have caused some serious rethinking by top management about business and contingency planning. However, expert suggests that a business leadership crisis existed long before terrorism brought it to the forefront. (Lee, 2001)

Today, many organizations face the reality of certain events - such as early retirement, disability, unexpected resignation or merely a normal transfer of power - that precipitates leadership changes are a part of doing businesses and must be anticipated. Today, succession planning is as important to the prosperity and survival of an organization as is strategic planning. (Buzzotta & Lefton, 1997)

Even when top level managers give advance notice of retirement, resignation or prolonged and/or terminal illness, the organization may not survive if a succession plan has not been implemented. (Ross, 2002)

Fire Departments everywhere are beginning to recognize that establishing a direction and a goal for their members starting with the officers is an important and necessary element of departmental professional growth. The greatest contribution a Fire Chief can make to the organization during his or her tenure is the development of the people under their command. (Gardiner, 2002)

Coleman (1998) contended that succession planning is nothing more than Fire Chiefs working with their staff so that if one of them succeeds them, they will believe that they can carry the organization in the same established direction, or they will be able to smoothly integrate themselves into the team of a new Fire Chief.

The lack of a succession plan in an organization can leave it unstable, fragile, and subject to internal conflict that could lead to dysfunctional competition and gridlock that threaten

management systems and cause mistrust, misconceptions and employee turnover. (Zamour, 2000)

The problem was that the BFRSD did not have an aggressive, proactive plan to address the change in leadership in top management positions.

The purpose of this research project was to identify current concepts of effective succession planning that may be institutionalized within the BFRSD. A literature review, the action research method and a survey, were used to answer the following questions:

1. What is the need for succession planning?
2. What are the critical components of an effective succession plan?
3. What are other fire service organizations doing to address the need for succession planning?

Coleman (1998) characterized the fire service for being like a continuous relay race in which the finish line has not and will not be reached in the foreseeable future. As the baton is passed, our department should be in the lead, and as the baton is received, we should do everything possible to keep that competitive edge.

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The City of Birmingham is the largest city in the State of Alabama and the 58th largest city in the United States. It covers 163 square miles, has a population of approximately 265,000 people, and contains a wide variety of residential, industrial, commercial, and undeveloped areas within the city boundaries. Since its inception on March 23, 1873, the Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department (BFRSD) has evolved just like other fire departments across the country. New technology, new management concepts, and changing community expectations represent just a few of the factors that illustrate the dynamic nature of the fire service. The key to managing the ever changing fire service arena is taking a proactive and aggressive approach toward organizational planning to help chart the course for future activities leading well into the twenty-first century. (Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department [BFRSD], 2000)

The BFRSD has approximately 670 sworn and civilian employees which include more than 360 firefighters, 100 Lieutenants, 38 Captains, 20 Battalion Chiefs, 4 Assistant Chiefs, 1 Deputy Chief and 1 Fire Chief. All positions up to the Deputy Chief's position are filled by promotion through a competitive testing process that uses assessment centers. The Personnel Board of Jefferson County, a countywide merit system responsible for recruitment and testing of job applicants, is also responsible for this promotional testing process.

The Deputy Chief is appointed by the Fire Chief pending approval by the Mayor. The Fire Chief is appointed by the Mayor. Both of these positions may be filled by someone inside the department or by an external candidate. The last three vacancies in the Deputy Chief position were filled by an external candidate and then two internal candidates. The last three Fire Chiefs' positions were filled by an external candidate and the two internal candidates - with the first internal candidate actually being the previously appointed external Deputy Chief. The current Fire Chief has 20 years of service with the department and 13 months in the position - including eight months as Acting Fire Chief. The average tenure of the two previous Fire Chiefs was four years. Within the BFRSD, personal development and self motivation are the primary avenues to promotional opportunities and advancement. There are no formal professional development programs or succession plans in place at this time.

Fire Department across the nation face many dynamic challenges. One of the most important challenges is the development of personnel to assume leadership positions within the organization. It is to this end the leadership gaps that exist in many fire service organizations must be addressed. (Fleming, 2002)

Current demographics show the baby boom generation, which represent the largest single group, have begun retiring or will be eligible for early retirement. Many of these employees occupy positions of great responsibility and will take a tremendous amount of experience with them when they leave the organization. Organizations must be prepared for a massive flood of

retirements within their organization as the largest group in the workforce approach the end of their careers.

Conversely, filling leadership positions will not be easy, due to a smaller resource of young talented candidates. Today's competitive market for senior executives, is making it harder to attract and keep talented candidates, alone exacerbates this problem of filling key vacancies in organizations. (Christiansen, 2001)

Currently within the BFRSD, 85% of the personnel have less than 20 years of service. The average age of the Fire Chief 's administrative staff, which includes the Fire Chief, Deputy Chief and the Assistant Chiefs, is 23 years of service - ranging between 20 -31 years of service. These numbers are indicative of the trend that show a younger less experienced workforce.

This research directly relates to the Executive Leadership course of the Executive Fire Officer Program because its focus is on succession planning which is one of the course modules. Other course subject areas including employee training, employee development and self-development are referenced and/or discussed in the research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Research Question 1-What is the need for succession planning?**

Succession Planning is becoming more of a focal topic between leaders and managers in all aspects of private industry, business and public service organizations. However, this increase in discussions about succession planning has not inspired business executives and government leaders to fully embrace this concept. In fact, the drive to meet current demands causes succession planning to be phased into the background. (Bouth, 2001) While most people will agree about what succession is and why planning for it is important, few agree about the components of a succession plan and who is responsible for its implementation. (Zamour, 2000)

The lack of a succession plan in an organization can leave it unstable, fragile, and subject internal conflict that could lead to dysfunctional competition and gridlock that threaten



management systems and cause mistrust, misconceptions and employee turnover. (Zamour, 2000)

The lack of a succession plan in the wake of a top executive vacancy crisis, could lead to organizational chaos, low employee moral, loss of customers, potential loss of market shares and negative press. (Ross, 2002)

In his research, Howes (2000) found that one-fifth of the country's larger companies will lose 40% of their senior managers in the next five years. Many of these companies had not done any form of succession planning. Additionally, those companies that had done succession planning were perplexed to find that the pool of qualified candidates was dried up. The problem is that in the past, companies simply recruited talent away from other companies - that talent pool no longer exists.

Vouglas (1998) compared the implications and effects of succession planning in several major companies. AT&T did not plan for the succession of its CEO and as a result lost major portions of their stock market share in telecommunications - ultimately causing their stock prices to plummet. With the departure of Disney's president, Michael Ovitz, the lack of succession planning created a public relations dilemma and expensive lawsuits by stockholders who lost money when Ovitz received 93 million in cash and stocks when he left. In contrast, Coca-Cola's stock prices were not affected upon the departure of its CEO because of effective succession planning.

Without appropriate and adequate planning, a vacancy in a critical management position can result in an organizational shakeup comparable to an earthquake and it can tear through the organization like a hurricane. Conversely, if a succession plan exists and employee development has been identified as a priority, a void in a critical leadership position will not last long. (Vouglas, 1998)

There is a distinct relationship between the lack of effective succession planning and problems within an organization Succession planning is a critical component in the retention and

promotion of top talent as more people reach retirement age. (Howes, 2000)

Bouth (2001) revealed that there are significant roadblocks that prevent organizations from embracing and incorporating succession planning such as lack of management support, corporate politics, quick fix attitudes, low visibility or perceived need, the rapid pace of organizational change, too much paperwork and too many meeting. Most organizations do not have the necessary time or resources to dedicate to succession planning.

### **Research Question 2-What are the critical components of an effective succession plan?**

The traditional succession plan focuses on the individual. Typically, the executive or manager would identify their successor from the top candidates and groom them as their replacement. Traditional succession planning is predicated on a consistent organizational structure, strategies, fixed jobs, and the ability to move vertically. However, due to the accelerated rate of change that organizations face and future uncertainties (something could happen to the successor), traditional succession planning is no longer enough. (Zamor, 2000)

Howes (2000) revealed that traditional succession planning fail because it simply focuses on identifying future leaders/managers - not developing them.

Bouth (2001) revealed that although most executives and managers do not have the time or resources to pursue succession planning, there are still many successful stories with effective succession planning. Although the basic succession plan must be tailored to meet the needs of the organization, there are some elements that are common to all plans:

1. Just Do It - once succession planning is agreeing upon it must happen. Do not get sidetracked.
2. Driven by Top Management - without their support the plan will not succeed.
3. Tailored to the organization - must be a custom fit for the uniqueness of each organization.

4. Employee Ownership - the plan must involve and gain buy-in from the employees who must make it happen.
5. The Future - the succession plan must be developed with flexibility to change with future trends.

The best way to build an effective succession plan is to start by matching the organization's position, mission and vision with the individuals best prepared to carry out those activities for today and tomorrow. (Ross, 2002)

Duncan (2000) identified several key components that make up a succession plan. The components are:

1. Replacement Planning - identifying the person or pool of candidates, who will fill the vacant position.
2. Human Resource Audit- Assessing candidates' performance and potential and categorizing them in terms of being ready, future successor and long term successor.
3. High-Potential Employee Identification - further evaluation of potential candidates denoting those with potential to progress, be promoted and assume the leadership role.
4. Employee Input - candidates will be asked to complete a personalized assessment of their goals and a learning plan on how they will reach their goals.
5. Development - the succession plan is transformed into a process where the organization determines, develops and implements the type of training and development program that is appropriate for the position.

In his research, Moody (2001) revealed a six-step process of a succession plan:

1. Identification of key positions
2. Job descriptions and identification of specifications
3. A replacement plan for each position

4. Forecast promotability
5. Evaluate training/development needs
6. Review the program, revise if necessary, and develop strategies for furthering the process.

According to Zamor (2002), succession planning should incorporate personnel throughout the organization extending beyond top level executives or managers. Future leaders should be identified, pooled and steered toward advancement. This will aid in the retention of talented personnel and develop leadership competencies that will be required in the future.

Duncan (2000) implied that for succession planning to be successful, the support from top management is essential. Top management must be committed to the plan and willing to allocate the resources necessary for its success.

Leaders charged with the continuity in their organization must first seek to minimize turnover and then implement strong leadership development programs to prepare for future executive-level openings. Effective succession planning involves getting leaders and potential leaders to stay, and thereby developing their leadership skills and long-term vision for the organization. (Morris-Lee, 2001)

The results of seminars on succession planning with several major companies like General Electric, Dell Computer and Colgate-Palmolive, revealed a clear link between succession planning and the retention of senior executives. The companies identified people for future advancement and put them in assignments that forced them out of their comfort zones. This action developed the skills and abilities to prepare them for more responsibilities. (Howes, 2000)

Computer software is now available that make succession planning easier for organizations. This software helps the Human Resource Department within an organization to develop an in-house pool of promotable employees utilizing activities that attract and reward employees who are active in the organization. (Duncan, 2000)

Career development plans in conjunction with a well-coordinated, comprehensive training plan need to be in place to develop the necessary skills and competencies of current employees. Career development programs offer a variety of personal improvement activities such as individual development plans, ongoing training, performance reviews, simulation exercises, role-playing, behavior modeling, job rotation, coaching and mentoring. (Duncan, 2000)

**Research Question 3-What is other fire service organization doing to address the need for succession planning?**

Howes (2000) stated that fire departments are using company officer development programs to develop members' management skills and abilities as they promote through the ranks. The Alexandria Fire Department in Virginia created the Leadership, Education and Development Institute (LEDI). LEDI's goal is to ensure that all fire department members are trained to the same competency level. Courses included professional growth, communication, time management, team building, leadership, conflict management, emergency response and customer service.

Officer development programs that are used by fire departments must be thorough, relevant and incorporate all management levels from the new probationary officer to the Chief of the Department. (Gardiner, 2002)

Minneapolis Fire Chief Rocco Forte developed a staffing plan that used a systematic approach to promotional qualifications and examinations. The two main goals of the plan were to prepare personnel for management positions in the future (succession planning) and to retain quality employees within the department. (Clack, 2002)

Once a Fire Chief has decided to move on, either by retirement or to another department, one of the most important duties is to prepare the department for a smooth transition. This may be accomplished by documenting and institutionalizing the decision-making process, keeping employees informed and sharing information on an open basis. In addition, introducing and providing his or her successor with network contacts is probably the biggest gift a Fire Chief can

give to help facilitate a smooth transition. (Coleman, 2000)

The Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) developed the Leadership Institute in August of 1998 when they realized that they had a leadership deficiency within their organization. The program emphasis was in the areas of leadership development, personal growth, communication, problem solving, decision making, empowerment, delegation, conflict management, team building and ethics. The curriculum focused on the concepts that 1) personal and professional growth is the result of a partnership between the individual and the organization, 2) the program embraces the concept that leaders are found throughout the organization not just those of rank, and 3) to change the organization, you must change one person at a time; and 4) a deep level of personal commitment is required if the organization is going to succeed. (Martin, 2001)

Pernick (2002) raised a basic question on how to ensure that the organization is prepared to fill leadership voids. Buy or build? Under the buy approach the organization depends on recruiting and selecting talented leaders from outside the organization. This is a fast way to get skilled people and eliminates the need for implementing an expensive internal development program. However there are major disadvantages to this approach such as a potential decrease in moral, a temporary drop in productivity while the new leaders learn the job environment, and possible resistance from unionized labor forces.

The primary advantages of developing leadership talent from within include eliminating the disadvantages of going outside the organization, the organization gets to groom the next generation in conjunction with its culture and strategic agenda, and there is greater control over the pool of leaders with the required skills which makes strategic implementation faster. (Pernick, 2002)

However, there are times when organizations should go outside the organization for leaders such as when organizational change is necessary, and there are no qualified or interested internal candidates. In today's competitive environment, organizations cannot afford to take the

chance that an internal candidate is not ready to assume the leadership position. (Christiansen, 2001).

Some fire departments offer a variety of incentives and approaches to leadership development such as giving promotional points for training, college credits to encourage self development, provide annual career assessment and coaching, instituting a mentoring program and stretch assignments. (Moody, 2001)

In his research, Bouth (2001) concluded that while there is an expressed interest by some fire departments in succession planning, there is very little found in the fire service.

### **Literature Summary**

The information provided by the research revealed that although organizations have begun to discuss succession planning more, many have yet to embrace the concept. There are many potential barriers to succession planning that must be overcome or organizations may be left unstable and subject to internal conflict that cripple success. Most organizations do not have the necessary time or resources to dedicate to succession planning. Even with successful succession planning, many of these companies were perplexed to find that the pool of qualified candidates was dried up.

There is a distinct relationship between the lack of effective succession planning and problems within an organization. Succession planning is a critical component in the retention and promotion of top talent as more people reach retirement age.

There are some elements that are common to all succession plans including the plan must happen, it must have top management support, it must fit each organization, it must have employee buy-in, and it must be flexible for the future.

There are several key components that make up a succession plan including replacement planning, human resource audit, high-potential employee identification, employee input and development. Succession planning should incorporate personnel throughout the organization with

a main focus on getting leaders and potential leaders to stay with the organization.

There are major disadvantages when leaders are recruited and selected from outside the organization as there are advantages for developing leadership talent from within. However, there are times when organizations must go outside the organization for leaders.

While there is an expressed interest by some fire departments in succession planning, there is very little found in the fire service.

## **PROCEDURES**

The researcher used a two-step methodology to collect information to answer the research questions. The desired outcome of this research effort was to identify relative concepts of succession planning that may be institutionalized and address potential problems that may hinder effective leadership development of future fire service managers

A literature review, the descriptive research method and a survey (see Appendix), were used to answer the following questions:

1. What is the need for succession planning?
2. What are the critical components of an effective succession plan?
3. What are other fire service organizations doing to address the need for succession planning?

Several resource materials that were pertinent to the research questions asked were reviewed for applicability and cited. Research information was obtained from the National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center, the Birmingham Public Library, and the University of Alabama at Birmingham Library.

The action research method included a survey instrument as part of the research process. A survey was compiled and mailed to approximately 100 fire departments (see Appendix) throughout the United States. The mailed surveys included self-addressed, prepaid postage envelopes to facilitate the return of the completed survey. BFRSD staff personnel were utilized in



selecting more than 200 fire departments using the *National Directory of Fire Chiefs 2001, 10th edition*. The fire departments represented urban, fully-paid departments with a minimum of 100 personnel. The departments were assigned numbers and randomly arranged utilizing the WordPerfect 9, Quattro Pro programs. The first 100 departments were included in the survey with only 52 of the organizations completing and returning the survey instrument.

The survey included seven general items and was designed to evaluate the percentage of departments that have a succession plan and an officer development program currently in place, have considered succession planning, have a plan to implement succession planning in their department, and see a need for succession planning. Specific information was requested to determine what fire service organizations viewed as possible benefits and potential barriers to successful succession planning. The information compiled a provided general overview of fire service organizations' actual ideals, knowledge and use of the concept of succession planning.

### **Limitations**

The literature research was limited to the number of resources available which provided comprehensive data to answer the research questions asked. The survey instrument was limited to providing general data due to only approximately 50 percent of the surveys being returned. Due to time limitations and budgetary constraints, no additional attempts were initiated to contact those departments that did not respond to the survey. The departments surveyed varied in size which helped to obtain a broader perspective of the use of succession planning by fire executives with different organizational, financial and political structures. In addition, many of the surveys returned contained incomplete information and some answers to specific questions were generalized. It can only be assumed that the surveys' instruments were in fact answered by the fire chiefs themselves.

The results of the survey revealed normal comparative responses to the questions according to the size of the department, however, these trends were inconsistent at time and could

lead only to some subjective analysis or personal interpretation of this correlation. The analysis of the survey results is the opinion of the researcher and must be viewed in that context only.

Time limitations and budgetary constraints also contributed to this limited number of surveys distributed. As a result, the information gathered was very helpful and informative, but must be viewed cautiously in terms of quantitative analysis. Also, the accuracy of information provided should always be questioned.

### **Definition**

#### 1. Succession Planning:

An organized and systematic way to ensure that employees in an organization are capable, competent, and willing to assume strategic leadership positions.

## **RESULTS**

### **Succession Planning Survey**

A survey was compiled and distributed to fire departments throughout the United States. A total of 100 surveys was distributed with 52 organizations completing and returning the survey instrument. The survey included seven general items and was designed to evaluate the percentage of departments that have a succession plan and an officer development program currently in place, have considered succession planning, have a plan to implement succession planning in their department, and see a need for succession planning. Specific information was requested to determine what fire service organizations viewed as possible benefits and potential barriers to successful succession planning. The information compiled a provided general overview of fire service organizations' actual ideals, knowledge and use of the concept of succession planning.

The information obtained from the survey was evaluated in quantitative percentages of responses to the survey questions and is denoted as such. The results of the survey instrument are as follows:

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Departments/ with Succession Plan	5%	95%
Departments/ with Officer Development Programs	23%	76%
Departments/ considered Succession Planning	11%	89%
Departments/ plan to implement Succession Planning	10%	90%
Departments/ see a need for Succession Planning	58%	42%

% of Departments that felt benefit of succession planning included the following:

Organizational Stability -	58%	Continuity -	58%
Personnel Retention -	52%	Improved Morale -	48%
Officers' Development -	50%		

% of Departments that felt potential barriers to succession planning included the following:

Time Constraints -	78%	Unnecessary -	65%
Budget Constraints -	79%	Not Thought About -	63%
Political Constraints -	77%	Personal Commitment-	77%

Analysis of the survey instrument revealed the following information:

1. A very small percentage (5%) of the respondents indicated that they currently use succession planning which may be correlated with the low percentage (11%) of respondents who indicated they have considered the concept of succession planning.
2. Only 10% of the respondents indicated that they had plans to implement succession planning which may be correlated to the high percentage (approximately 70%) of respondents who felt there were many prohibiting factors or barriers to implementing succession planning.
1. Close to one-half of the respondents indicated they saw a real need for succession planning which is consistent to approximately the same percentage (approximately 50%) of respondents indicating they felt there were important organizational benefits

to succession planning.

2. The high percentage (approximately 70%) of respondents who felt there are many prohibiting factors or barriers to implementing succession planning, many were interpreted as mitigating factors for the high percentages of respondents who:
  - a. Did not currently use succession planning.
  - b. Had not considered succession planning.
  - c. Had no plans to implement succession planning.

The survey also revealed that several of the survey participants who indicated having a succession plan actually described a form of an officer development program.

### **Research Question 1-What is the need for succession planning?**

An increase in discussions about succession planning between leaders and managers in all aspects of private industry, business and public service organizations have not inspired them to fully embrace this concept. (Bouth, 2001)

The lack of a succession plan in an organization can leave it unstable, fragile, and subject internal conflict that could threaten management systems and cause mistrust, misconceptions and employee turnover. (Zamour, 2000)

In his research, Howes (2000) found that one-fifth of the country's larger companies will lose 40 percent of their senior managers in the next five years. Many of these companies had not done any form of succession planning and those companies that had done succession planning were perplexed to find that the pool of qualified candidates was dried up.

Vouglas (1998) compared the implications and effects of succession planning for several major companies. AT&T and Disney did not plan for the succession of their CEOs and as a result was hit hard financially. In contrast, Coca-Cola's stock prices were not affected upon the departure of its CEO because of effective succession planning.

There is a distinct relationship between the lack of effective succession planning and problems within an organization. Succession planning is a critical component in the retention and promotion of top talent as more people reach retirement age. (Howes, 2000)

Bouth (2001) revealed that there are significant roadblocks that prevent succession planning such as lack of management support, corporate politics, quick fix attitudes, low visibility or perceived need, the rapid pace of organizational change, too much paperwork and too many meetings. Most organizations do not have the necessary time or resources to dedicate to succession planning.

### **Research Question 2-What are the critical components of an effective succession plan?**

Howes (2000) revealed that traditional succession planning fails because it simply focuses on identifying future leaders/managers - not developing them.

Due to an accelerated rate of change that organizations face and future uncertainties (something could happen to the successor), traditional succession plans are no longer enough. (Zamor, 2000)

Bouth (2001) revealed that there are some elements that are common to all plans:

1. Just Do It - once succession planning is agreed upon it must happen.
2. Driven by Top Management - without this support the plan will not succeed.
3. Tailored to the organization - must be a custom fit for each organization.
4. Employee Ownership - the plan must involve and gain buy-in from the employees
5. The Future - the succession plan must be flexible in order to change with future trends.

The best way to build an effective succession plan is to start by matching the organization's position, mission and vision with the individuals who are best prepared to carry out those activities for today and tomorrow. (Ross, 2002)

Duncan (2000) identified several key component that make up a succession plan. The components are:

1. Replacement Planning
2. Human Resource Audit
3. High-Potential Employee Identification
4. Employee Input
5. Development

According to Zamor (2002), succession planning should incorporate personnel throughout the organization extending beyond top level executives or managers.

Duncan (2000) implied that for succession planning to be successful, top management must be committed to the plan and willing to allocate the resources necessary for its success.

Effective succession planning involves getting leaders and potential leaders to stay, and thereby developing their leadership skills and long-term vision for the organization. (Morris-Lee, 2001)

### **Research Question 3-What is other fire service organization doing to address the need for succession planning?**

Howes (2000) stated that fire departments are using company officer development programs to develop members management skills and abilities as they promote through the ranks. The Alexandria Fire Department in Virginia created the Leadership, Education and Development Institute (LEDI). LEDI's goal is to ensure that all fire department members are trained to the same competency level. Courses include professional growth, communication, time management, team building, leadership, conflict management, emergency response and customer service.

Similarly, the Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) developed the Leadership Institute in August of 1998 whose program courses covered the same general areas of emphasis as LEDI.

Officer development programs that are used by fire departments must be thorough,

relevant and incorporates all management levels from the new probationary officer to the Chief of the Department. (Gardiner, 2002)

Pernick (2002) raised a basic question on how to ensure that the organization is prepared to fill leadership voids. Buy or build? There are major disadvantages when leaders are recruited and selected from outside the organization such as a potential decrease in moral, a temporary drop in productivity, and possible resistance from unionized labor forces.

The primary advantages of developing leadership talent from within include eliminating the disadvantages of going outside the organization, the organization gets to groom the next generation with its culture and strategic agenda, and there is greater control over the pool of skilled leaders. (Pernick, 2002)

However, there are times when organizations should go outside the organization for leaders such as when organizational change is necessary, and there are no qualified or interested internal candidates.

In his research, Bouth (2001) concluded that while there is an expressed interest by some fire departments in succession planning, there is very little found in the fire service.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Research Question 1-What is the need for succession planning?**

The review of current available literature and information derived from the survey instrument revealed that the concept of succession planning has not been institutionalized within the fire service. A very small percentage of the fire departments responding to the survey actually have implemented succession planning in their organizations. Although more than 50% of the survey participants saw a need for succession planning, a much lower percentage revealed that they have plans to implement succession planning. Approximately 11% of the survey participant respondents have considered the concept of succession planning.

These survey results would indicate that most fire departments either are unfamiliar with succession planning or do not see succession planning as a vital component of organizational success. This coincides with Bouth (2001) when he revealed that increase in discussions about succession planning among organization leaders has not inspired business and government executives to fully embrace the concept of succession planning.

Bouth (2001) revealed that there are significant barriers that prevent organizations from implementing succession planning. Most organizations do not have the time or the resources to dedicate to succession planning. Results of the survey revealed that a high percentage of the departments surveyed indicated they felt there were many barriers to succession planning. These potential barriers may represent reasons why there is not more widespread use of succession planning in the fire service.

Fire Departments across the nation must soon come to the realization that the potential for organizational instability in the wake of a void in key leadership positions is a reality that may soon hit home. As Vouglas (1998) revealed, without adequate planning this void can result in an organizational shakeup comparable to an earthquake and tear through the organization like a hurricane.

The BFRSD, like other fire departments across the country, has begun to feel the impact of the exodus of may have its senior leaders - the results of which will eventually manifest in a younger, less experienced workforce. Howes (2000) stated that there is a distinct relationship between the lack of succession planning and problems within an organization. Succession planning is a critical component in the retention and promotion of top talent as more people reach retirement age.

### **Research Question 2-What are the critical components of an effective succession plan?**

Research of available literature revealed that there are many versions and different definitions of succession planning. The old traditional succession plan which focused on



executives simply identifying and grooming their replacements is no longer enough to ensure organizational continuity and success. The rapid pace of organizational change renders this form of succession plans are outdated and obsolete. However, this form of succession planning can still be found in use in many organizations, perhaps due to tradition alone. As Howes (2000) contended, traditional succession planning has failed because it only identifies, and does not develop future leaders.

Today's succession planning is a process that encompasses a broad spectrum of activities designed to evaluate an organization's talent pool and to develop and implement the necessary management training programs to augment their development.

Succession planning is not a "one size fit all" process and as such it must be custom fitted to each organization. Many variables affect the type and complexity of programs that organizations may be able to implement with their succession plan. However, there are some elements of succession planning that are common to all plans including identifying replacement positions within the organization, identifying potential candidates, assessing the candidates' potentials, involving the candidates in development planning, and implementing development programs appropriate for the positions that may require replacement.

The success of succession planning, as with any program to be implemented by an organization requires the support of top management and the involvement of the personnel who will be a part of the process.

Career development programs are a key component of a well-designed succession plan. Career development programs should include programs that are designed to develop needed management skills and competencies. Morris-Lee (2001) revealed that identifying and developing future leaders from within the organization positively affects retention of personnel who share the vision and goals of the organization and is essential for effective succession planning.

**Research Question 3-What is other fire service organizations doing to address the need for succession planning?**

Fire Departments nationwide are using a variety of officer development programs to develop members as they are promoted. These programs only constitute a part of the overall planning needed to ensure replacement of key executive leadership vacancies that are anticipated well into the future. Clack (2002) described the staffing plan developed by the Minneapolis Fire Department which used a systematic approach to promotional qualifications and examinations. The two main goals of their plan are to prepare personnel for management positions and to retain qualified leaders. These two goals are the basic components that make up a succession plan.

The Alexandria Fire Department and the Orange County Fire Authority have developed similar comprehensive educational and development programs that emphasize leadership development, personal growth, communications, decision making, team building, conflict management and customer service. The program agendas were based on the concepts that for organizations to succeed, there must be a partnership between the individual(s) and the organization, there must be a personal commitment, and there must be a realization that leaders may be found throughout the organization.

When organizations plan to fill anticipated vacancies in key leadership positions, they must evaluate and determine if this will be done internally or externally. The overall benefits of developing potential candidates from within the organization far exceed the noted benefits of bringing in an outside candidate. However, if there are no qualified internal candidates or the organization needs to move in new and different direction, then it is necessary to bring in a qualified candidate from outside the organization.

The literature research revealed several comprehensive programs that the BFRSD and other fire departments can use as models for succession planning. However, as Bouth (2001) concluded, there is an expressed interest by some fire departments in succession planning but very

little is found in the fire service. The survey information corroborates this statement as it revealed that very few responding departments currently use succession planning, have plans to implement succession planning, and have considered the concept of succession planning. In addition, there was a high percentage of fire departments' response to the potential barriers to succession planning which may indicate these areas represent a significant hindrance to organizations embracing and institutionalizing succession planning.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researcher recommends that the BFRSD and other fire service organizations create a succession plan committee. This succession plan committee's overall goal would be to develop a comprehensive plan to address the need for identifying and developing highly potential candidates to fill future vacancies in key leadership positions. The committee should familiarize itself with the major barriers that have hindered or impeded other fire departments from implementing succession planning within their organization.

The recruitment committee should create a network with other fire service organizations. Information that can be obtained through the network would include currently used succession plans, ideas for future succession plans, ideas and creative solutions that other fire departments are using to bridge the potential barriers to succession planning. The recruitment committee should be proactive and aggressive in seeking out any information available on succession planning methods, potential barriers, implementation procedures and benefits/costs' analysis.

The committee should research and seek information and assistance from the many private corporations that have implemented successful succession plans. The information obtained may be edited or modified into a format that is custom fitted for the department.

The committee should identify and evaluate the many programs that other fire departments utilize to address and positively affect the professional development of their personnel. The committee should carefully select and implement the succession plan that is right for the

organization - every program will not work for all organizations.

The committee should thoroughly evaluate the actual cost, time, and any additional resources that will be needed to implement the succession plan. The plan should be designed to facilitate modification of its component programs in order to be conforming to any political, budgetary or resource constraints.

The committee should lobby the appropriate governing entities to gain support for its succession program to include anticipated financial and other resource needs.

The committee should seek total support from top management for the succession plan and should keep them continuously updated on the progress and success of the plan. Conversely, the committee should also include the personnel who will be involved in the development and implementation of the plan.

The committee should develop a basic succession plan strategy that encompasses the following core components:

1. Organizational Analysis - identifying key management positions that are critical to organizational congruency and stability.
2. Position Analysis - providing thorough job descriptions and specifications for the position(s).
3. Replacement Planning - identifying a pool of candidates, who may fill the vacant position(s).
4. High-Potential Employee Audit - assessing candidates' performance and potential and categorizing candidates denoting those with high potential to progress, be promoted and assume the leadership role.
5. Candidate Self Assessment - candidates are involved in planning their development programs. Candidates also will be asked to complete a personalized assessment of their goals and a learning plan on how they will reach their goals.

6. Program planning - evaluating the training and development needs of the candidates in relation to the position(s) to be filled.
7. Development - determining, developing and implementing the type of training and development programs that are appropriate for the position.
8. Plan Evaluation - establishing plan evaluation procedures to review the plan and associated program(s), to revise if necessary and develop strategies for improvements to the plan.

This basic succession plan must be tailored to meet the needs of the organization and should be developed with flexibility to accommodate future changes and requirements.

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## Appendix

### Succession Planning Survey

#### Cover Letter

November 20, 2002  
Mr. John Doe, Fire Chief  
XXX Fire Department  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Dear Chief Doe

I am contacting you to ask for your assistance with an important research endeavor. I am currently enrolled in the Executive Fire Officer Program course conducted at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. In an effort to complete the Applied Research Project requirements for the Executive Leadership curriculum, I am conducting a survey on succession planning in the fire service. This survey will provide a variety of valuable information. It will also provide knowledgeable contacts, such as you, for future information. If you would, please complete (or your designee) the attached survey form and return it to me by December 20th. I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience.

The information that you provide is intended to be used for general compilation of data that reflects overall fire service trends. It will not be used for any other purposes except as stated above and by me. Individual department information will not be referenced or revealed.

Your assistance in this endeavor is greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for any future assistance that you may provide. If I can be of any reciprocal assistance, or you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (205) 933-4161.

Sincerely,

Reginald E. Anderson, Battalion Chief  
Birmingham Fire and Rescue Service Department  
1808 7th Avenue North  
Birmingham, Alabama, 35203



**Survey**

**Succession Planning**

**An Applied Research Project Survey for the Executive Leadership Course - 2002.**  
*(Please complete and return to Reginald E. Anderson - BFRSD)*

1. Does your Departments have a formal Succession Plan in place? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_  
 Briefly describe your plan \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Does your Department have Officer Development programs? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_  
 Briefly describe this program(s) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Have you considered the concept of succession planning? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

4. Do you have plans to implement a succession plan in the near future? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

5. Do you think there is an actual need for succession planning? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_  
 Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What do you are the benefits of succession planning? Please check all that apply:

- Organizational stability \_\_\_\_\_ Continuity \_\_\_\_\_
- Personnel retention \_\_\_\_\_ Improved morale \_\_\_\_\_
- Others - (please list) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_

7. What do you think are potential barriers to succession planning? Please check all that apply:

- Time constraints' \_\_\_\_\_ Unnecessary \_\_\_\_\_
- Budget constraints \_\_\_\_\_ Have not thought about it \_\_\_\_\_
- Political constraints' \_\_\_\_\_ Personnel commitment \_\_\_\_\_
- Others (please list) \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_

**Fire Departments****ALABAMA:**

Adamsville Fire Dept.  
Montgomery Fire Dept.

**ALASKA:**

Anchorage Fire Dept.  
Capital City Fire & Rescue

**ARIZONA:**

Tucson Fire Dept.  
White Mountain Apache Fire & Rescue

**ARKANSAS:**

Little Rock Fire Dept.  
Walker Creek Fire Dept.

**CALIFORNIA:**

Anaheim Fire Dept.  
Los Angeles City Fire Dept.

**COLORADO:**

Boulder Fire Dept.  
Colorado Fire Dept.

**CONNECTICUT:**

Bridgeport Fire Dept.  
Danbury Fire Dept.

**DELAWARE:**

Harrington Fire Co., Inc.  
Wilmington Fire Dept.

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA:**

District of Columbia Fire & EMS  
Walter Reed Army Medical Center Fire Dept.

**FLORIDA:**

Orange County Fire & Rescue Division  
Jacksonville Fire & Rescue Dept.

**GEORGIA:**

Savannah Fire Dept.  
Cobb County Fire & EMS Services

**HAWAII:**

Honolulu Fire Dept.  
Maui County Fire Dept.

## IDAHO:

Boise Fire Dept.  
Idaho City Fire Dept.

## ILLINOIS:

Chicago Fire Dept.  
Marion Fire Dept.

## INDIANA:

Evansville Fire Dept.  
Richmond Fire Dept.

## IOWA:

Cedar Rapids Fire Dept.  
Davenport Fire Dept.

## KANSAS:

Kansas City Kansas Fire Dept.  
Topeka Fire Dept.

## KENTUCKY:

Lexington LFUCG - Division of Fire & EMS Services  
Louisville Fire Dept.

## LOUISIANA:

New Orleans Fire Dept.  
Saint Landry Fire District #3

## MAINE:

Gorham Fire Dept.  
Waterville Fire & Rescue

## MARYLAND:

Baltimore City Fire Dept.  
Baltimore County Fire Dept.

## MASSACHUSETTS:

Fall River Fire Dept.  
Well Fleet Fire Dept.

## MICHIGAN:

Detroit Fire Dept.  
Van Buren Fire & Rescue Dept.

## MINNESOTA:

Minneapolis Fire Dept.  
Virginia Fire & Ambulance Dept.

## MISSISSIPPI:

Gulfport Fire Dept.  
Jackson Fire Dept.

## MISSOURI:

Saint Louis Fire Dept.  
Summersville Fire Dept.

## MONTANA:

Missoula Fire Dept. - Station #4  
Melstone Fire Dept.

## NEBRASKA:

Bellevue Volunteer Fire Dept.  
Weston Fire & Rescue Dept.

## NEVADA:

Henderson Fire Dept.  
Reno Fire Dept.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE:

Atlanta County Fire Dept.  
Marlow Fire Dept.

## NEW JERSEY:

Atlantic City Fire Dept.  
Jersey City Fire Dept.

## NEW MEXICO:

Bernalillo County Fire Dept - Headquarters  
Maxwell Fire Dept.

## NEW YORK:

New York City Fire Dept.  
Ridge Fire Department & Rescue

## NORTH CAROLINA:

Parkwood Fire Dept.  
Providence Fire & Rescue

## NORTH DAKOTA:

Winston-Salem Fire Dept.  
Underwood Volunteer Fire, Ambulance & Rescue

## OHIO:

Akron Fire Dept.  
Cincinnati Fire Dept.

## OKLAHOMA:

Forest Park Fire Dept.  
Oklahoma City Fire Dept.

## OREGON:

Portland Bureau of Fire-Rescue-EMS  
Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue

## PENNSYLVANIA:

Pittsburgh Bureau of Fire  
Wilksburg Fire Dept.

## RHODE ISLAND:

Kingston Fire Dept.  
Pawtucket Fire Dept.

## SOUTH CAROLINA:

Columbia-Richland Fire Service  
York Fire Dept.

## SOUTH DAKOTA:

Marion Fire Dept.  
Webster Fire Dept.

## TENNESSEE:

Knoxville Fire Dept.  
Memphis Fire & EMS Dept.

## TEXAS:

Dallas Fire Dept.  
Red Oak Fire Dept.

## UTAH:

Teasdale Fire Dept.  
Wales Fire Dept.

## VERMONT:

Springfield Fire Dept.  
Sheburne Volunteer Fire Dept.

## VIRGINIA:

Fairfax County Fire Dept - Sta. #3-#33  
Fort Valley Volunteer Fire Dept.

## WASHINGTON:

Everett Fire Dept.  
Kind County Fire District #16

## WEST VIRGINIA:

Bethlehem Fire Dept.  
Kenova Volunteer Fire Dept.

## WISCONSIN:

Neehan Fire Dept.  
Wisconsin Rapids Fire Dept.

## WYOMING:

Sheridan County Fire Dept.  
Riverton Volunteer Fire Dept.