

**SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR THE
LANSING FIRE DEPARTMENT**

EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The Lansing Fire Department is faced with a leadership crisis in the next year. Over the next decade, this natural attrition will continue at a significant rate. Currently, as command officers at the Chief, Battalion Chief and Captains rank leave the organization; persons filling their positions have received little formal training in the job responsibilities of a modern, full service fire department. Succession at this time is primarily based on seniority.

The purpose of this applied research project was to examine Succession Planning in private, government, and fire service organizations, and to develop criteria for Succession Planning within the Lansing Fire Department. An appropriate Succession Plan will assist the Lansing Fire Department with meeting the objectives of its Mission Statement, to serve “the Lansing area with the highest levels of life & property protection. (LFD, 1996) In order to develop a Succession Plan, action research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are prevalent concepts and practices of Succession Planning?
2. What Succession Planning programs are currently in use in fire departments?
3. What constitutes a comprehensive Succession Plan for the Lansing Fire Department?

The procedures used in this research included a literature review, interviews with Chief officers, and a survey of Battalion Chiefs and selected Captains. Organizationally, the results of the data replicate the concern of the private sector and government for Succession Planning. Individually, the survey information collected provides a beginning for a comprehensive Succession Plan for the Lansing Fire Department.

Based on the data collected, a four-year, phase-in program has been suggested by this researcher as a starting point upon which to build a customized Succession Planning program for the Lansing Fire Department.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is facing a leadership crisis. (Rothwell,1994a). Today's leaders, predominantly the "baby boomers" of the 1940's and 1950's, are reaching retirement age and are leaving their employment at unprecedented rates. They will take with them untold hours of labor, skills and knowledge, and political acumen, leaving a vacuum in upper management that will be challenging to fill. This generation of workers has forgotten to prepare to replace themselves, and every level of private, public and governmental organization is equally threatened.

Continuity is becoming a watchword in many organizations. The concern over leadership loss is becoming noticeable, as younger employees are moved to the forefront of organizations and thrown into the caldron of politics, labor relations, and stock market crashes. Realization of this threat has come at a cost, and many organizations are scrambling to stem the tide leadership loss.

Coupled with leadership loss is the concern over the shrinking leadership pool. Throughout industry and private business, the trend has been to do more with less personnel. This especially applies to management positions as corporate boards move to "flatten" the organization. With less robustness in the leadership pool of an organization, a worker may tend to rise faster on the organizational ladder, leave less information about what they have accomplished, and have less information about what they should accomplish. As employees change jobs and organizations more frequently than ever before, a greater need for organizational continuity is realized.

In the United States, what appears to be a trend in leadership loss throughout business and industry, is likely to become a catastrophic avalanche in government. This

avalanche is driven by various facets of our culture and economy. It is clear the taxpayers want tax relief, and this topic is on the “front burner” of all newly elected officials. Social Security is endangered and resources are being re-channeled to buttress this essential service. Those issues, amplified by the current state of the stock market, oil prices, global unrest, the environment and economy, are having major impact on revenue sharing, grants and other commonly accessed resources, which permit government to function.

In the face of declining resources and escalating costs, governments, unlike the private sector, are reluctant to reduce line-level staffing. They regularly trade off infrastructure needs and improvement for jobs. During the past decade in the State of Michigan government, a budget crunch evoked a massive early retirement movement in management positions. The detrimental ramifications of losing that many leaders throughout the state organization are still felt.

In some municipalities today, with capital reserves now expended, significant layoffs are becoming the norm. Looking only at fire departments, which have been impacted in Michigan, the most current examples are Ann Arbor who have just lost 18 fire personnel, and Flint, where 61 of 220 firefighters and command officers have been laid off. Expedited early retirements will cover part of the 61-firefighter reduction, but the loss of leadership in these departments will be significant, and the impact felt for decades to come in the community.

The values, knowledge, and culture of well-run organizations within municipalities who have yet to be impacted must be preserved; both for the organization, and the community they serve. We must move proactively to insure the continuity of

leadership continues. One of the most positive ways of assuring continuity of leadership is through Succession Planning.

Problem Statement

The Lansing Fire Department does not have a comprehensive succession plan in place to insure continuity of leadership within the fire department. The department regularly loses its senior management staff composed of six Battalion Chiefs, every one to two years. In 2002, the department will see a turnover of all six Battalion Chiefs, 12 Captains and a Training Chief, at a minimum. In a department of 235 personnel, this represents a third of personnel in that rank. 2003 will be another banner year for employee retirements.

Along with the continuous turnover in Battalion Chiefs and Captains, the administrative ranks will soon be in jeopardy. The three administrators, one Chief and two Assistant Chiefs will probably retire within eight years. In the current situation, a mid-ranked Captain with no experience in departmental budgeting, labor relations, or department head responsibilities, will be the only possible replacements.

The City of Lansing, faced with a leadership deficit in a \$15 million dollar corporation known as their Fire Department, would once again have to go to the outside for this experience. The start-up costs and elapsed time for a new Chief in a department of this size to become orientated and operational is significant, and should be unnecessary.

The Lansing Fire Department is aware that significant experience, training and knowledge will be lost at all senior levels, and steps must be taken to reduce the impact of this loss.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Applied Research Project is to examine succession-planning initiatives in private, public and governmental organizations, and to develop criteria for a plan that will provide for continuity of leadership in the Lansing Fire Department.

Action research will be utilized to answer the following questions:

1. What are prevalent concepts and practices of Succession Planning?
2. What Succession Planning programs are currently in use in fire departments?
3. What constitutes a comprehensive Succession Plan for the Lansing Fire Department?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Lansing Fire Department is a small career department of 234 personnel operating out of nine stations, providing a full range of fire, emergency medical services, and specialized rescue services to the community. The department staffs 11 engine companies, three ladder companies, and four advanced-life-support ambulances with a minimum of 53 personnel on each shift.

The department serves the state capitol of Michigan, state government, business, industry, and a major college, along with 36 square miles of residential and mercantile properties. It serves a nighttime population of 100,000+, and a daytime population of over 200,000. The department responds to an estimated 15,000 calls for service per year, the majority of which are EMS related.

Supervision and management in the Lansing Fire Department consists of Lieutenants as company officers in each apparatus, Captains as station officers, and Battalion Chiefs as the top unionized managers within the department. Because of the

predominate seniority system within the department, Lieutenants move to Captains who later transition to the Battalion Chief rank in the last one or two years of their 25 year employment span.

It is reported that the jump from engineer to lieutenant is challenging, yet the move to captain, is relatively simple. The move from Captain to Battalion Chief, the first and only unionized management position, is reported to be extremely difficult for individuals involved. The responsibilities are totally different, and the one to two year productive span is far too short to become acclimated. Upon retirement, all the knowledge and skills they, as well as the Captains have gained, leave with them. As the retirement system is lucrative, there is little incentive to stay beyond 25 years. In the past five years as example, 25 personnel have moved through the rank of Battalion Chief, and an equal number have retired directly from the Captains position. Incoming personnel are faced with a “blank slate” of knowledge, and must start afresh with each turnover.

Past Impact

In the 1970's the federal government infused significant monies into local government to bolster their public safety ranks. Over the ensuing 30 years, this money has dried up, and subsequently, the Lansing Fire Department has been reducing the number of their employees gradually. Recently, increases in the rate of personnel retiring have been noted, and it anticipated that these increases will continue over the next several years, while the original group hired in the 1970's pensions out.

According to the David M Griffith & Associates study of the Lansing Fire Department, the “current organizational structure is extremely flat and greatly impacts the ability of the Chief to effectively manage the department”.(Griffith, 1995) Increasing

pension rates with an already flat organizational structure have effectively decreased the time a person spends in rank, leading to a decrease in overall continuity of operation, culture, and organization.

Present Impact

The Lansing Fire Department is currently attempting to prepare for rapid turn over in retiring personnel. In the Battalion Chief ranks alone, on January 1, 2002, all six current Chiefs are eligible to retire. Five of the six will retire, with the last of this group going in April. Six new Chiefs will be promoted, and they are eligible to retire by October 1, 2002. They will be replaced by another six Chiefs, and five of these six Chiefs will retire in August 2003. The Captains ranks are vacated more quickly, with people moving to Battalion Chiefs or retiring outright at a rapid rate. This continuous movement has led to significant confusion in roles and responsibilities, and has not allowed for on-the-job-development.

In summary, during a 19-month period that we are in at this time, 17 employees have been, or will be promoted to Battalion Chief, then leave employment by retirement. Along with them, go the education, knowledge, skill, and continuity, needed for the management of the fire department and the safety of our personnel and community. The turnover in Captains will be equally significant. The continuous turnover of personnel represents significant challenge to new employees who have to start "from scratch", assume the top command duties and leave as their time arrives. It also represents a significant challenge for the administration of the department who are responsible for meeting the needs of the community.

Future Impact

If allowed to continue without modification, the loss of education, knowledge and skill, will impede the Lansing Fire Department in the execution of its Mission Statement:

“The Lansing Fire Department is committed to serving the Lansing area community with the highest levels of life & property protection. We will achieve this by providing excellent and compassionate service in an atmosphere that encourages innovation, professional development and diversity.”(LFD, 1996)

In order for the Lansing Fire Department to continue to serve with the level of professionalism the community expects, we must find methods by which we can successfully address Succession Planning, and implement them in the near future.

Relevancy to the Executive Development Class

The topic of Succession Planning is related to the Executive Development course in the units discussing: Following and Leading, Labor Relations, Organizational Culture, and Outside Perspectives. Of these equally related topics, the issues raised in the Organizational Culture chapter will have significant impact. The evolution of the values of the organization, from a retirement focus to a continuity focus will come gradually. It will require labor negotiation, training, and education. Using the Framework For Analyzing Culture, we believe the collectively held values in the Lansing Fire Department for the welfare of the community and the safety of our firefighters are strong. This will have a positive impact on the anticipated changes, which in turn will have a positive impact on the fire departments service to the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

“Succession Planning is an issue of discussion permeating all levels of private industry and business, as well as all levels of government.”(Rothwell, 1994b) Yet, “Chief Executive Succession Planning is a job that incumbent CEO’s too often put off, and boards too often disregard.(Cornwell, 2001a) It is a task reluctantly performed in most organizations. “Although discussed frequently between Chief Executive Officers, Corporate Boards, and their counterparts in government, Succession Planning is often pushed to the back burner, as the pull to get consumed by the demands of the present is strong”.(Schall, 1997a) This problem is exacerbated in governmental organizations. “If agency heads are held accountable at all, it is for their management of day-to-day problem, not their investment in the future”.(Schall, 1997b)

The reluctance to be involved in Succession Planning is often increased by the concern of some CEO’s that succession planning sounds their personal “death knell”, and their time in the organization will be limited by the readiness of the person chosen to succeed them. Absent a catastrophe, Succession Planning has all too often been regarded as a replacement issue, not a strategic responsibility to be shared among the organizations stakeholders.

When therefore catastrophes do occur, such as the Air Force transport carrying U.S. Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, and 34 others crashed into a mountainside near Dubrovnik, Croatia, corporations could end up in dire consequences. In this tragic situation, three corporate presidents, one vice-president, two chairmen, and six CEO’s perished. “As their colleagues scrambled to fill the resulting leadership gaps, most would

quickly discover that like many American corporations, their had neither the “bench strength” nor the necessary succession plan to replace not only those at the top, but even leaders throughout the ranks”.(Buzzotta & Lefton, 1997)

This trend toward a leadership crisis will not be easily mitigated, whether the organization is dealing with a current emergency, or merely turnover as a natural part of the retirement process. “A study has found that 20% of the large established US firms will lose 40% or more of their top-level talent between 1999 and 2004. Further compounding the matter is that many younger executives are also retiring early because of earning for stock options and investments. Yet demand for executives is increasing. Since a 15% decline in the number of 35-44 year olds is projected between 1999 and 2014, there will also be fewer people available for top management positions”.(Caudron, 1999a).

A final issue is the corporate raiding of leadership from other disciplines, sectors or organizations. Some executives appear to be easy targets for acquisition by organizations seeking to enhance their executive pools. Although providing a quick and easy solution, if the organization has enough money, this tactic is not without its dangers. “The Center for Creative Leadership reveals that a staggering 66% of senior managers hired from the outside usually fail within the first 18 months”. (Caudron, 1999b) The ramifications of failure in the private sector can be significant; the ramifications in government can be horrific.

With that basis, the review of the literature moved into the second phase, to discover the current practices in Succession Planning relative to public and private organizations.

Current practices in Succession Planning.

Of the organizations actively involved in succession planning, the most often cited is the General Electric Corporation. Press coverage of the Jack Welch succession at General Electric shows what the extreme of director involvement could be, “with “thousands of hours” of interaction with potential successors over nearly six and one-half years”. (Cornwall, 2001b)

Most organizations or executives do not have that amount of time or resources to commit to Succession Planning. Fortunately, many successful experiences with Succession Planning have been documented. Although each planner has elements unique to their organization there are some commonalities. A synopsis of the literature reveals:

- Just Do It. There are numerous reasons to get sidetracked, but once succession planning is agreed upon, it must be done.
- Driven by top management. Without the support of Boards, Chairs, and Chief Executives, along with the needed resources, the process will fail.
- Tailored to the organization. Each organization is unique, and no one solution will “fit-all”. Once given the impetus, top management must craft a succession plan to fit the need of the specific organization.
- Employee Ownership. The only way to effectively tailor a plan for the organization is to involve the employees who will be responsible for making it happen. The only way to effectively operationalize a plan is insure each employee takes responsibility for his or her own development.

- The future. A succession plan must be made with the realization that tomorrow will change, and any successful plan must be developed with the flexibility to change with society, the economy, and the culture.

In a related perspective, the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD) established a Blue Ribbon Commission to study this issue and develop a set of guidelines for use by corporate entities seeking to establish Succession Planning within their organization. They enumerated the following concepts:

- Succession planning must be driven by a strategy
- The goal of the CEO succession planning is to bring in the right leader at the right time
- CEO succession planning is a board-driven, collaborative process
- CEO succession is a continuous process
- The board must ensure that the CEO develops and encourages a talent-rich organization. (Caudron, 1999c)

What Succession Planning programs are currently in use in fire departments?

Research of the Executive Fire Officer Paper cache at the National Fire Academy indicates there are a number of fire departments interested in some form of succession planning, but an analysis of current literature reveals little in the fire service. As an exception, Chief Ron Coleman appears to be one of the more prolific writers in this topical area. Beginning in 1988, Chief Coleman suggested five elements of a succession plan to include:

- A career development guide
- A performance evaluation system

- A challenging environment
- An opportunity to achieve
- The exposure of a prospective candidate to all aspects of the job, throughout their career. (Coleman, 1988)

Twelve years later, Coleman addressed the issue of transition management, one of the elements of succession planning, by admonishing the reader to “keep your subordinates adequately informed and share information on an open basis.....” (Coleman 2000). This year, Chief Coleman posited a new concern, which closely echoes the current downward trend in executive pools being experienced in private industry. “I’ve seen hard evidence that fewer and fewer people want to move up in the hierarchy. This directly contradicts the huge hiring pool at the fire service’s entry level.....”. Coleman continues, “Many of these highly motivated, extremely energetic and fiercely competitive people go professionally dormant.” (Coleman 2001)

Faced with such a dire warning and cognizant of potential consequences, further research into parallel issues are appropriate. Schall, in her article Public sector succession: a strategic approach to sustaining innovation, contrasted private sector versus public sector succession, positing that the organizational makeup of private sector succession planning has distinct advantages over public sector, especially in terms of longevity and sustained innovation. The longevity of public service leaders to carry forward ideas and concepts is impaired, “Because the public sector has more short-term leaders than institution builders....”. (Schall, 1997c) “Indeed, the importance of sustained innovation” – essentially keeping change alive – is an increasing challenge for public agencies”. (Schall, 1997d)

A number of agencies including the National Fire Academy and the National Fire Protection Association are engaged in multiple initiatives designed to enhance and assist an individual with advancement preparation. The current Executive Fire Officer Program is one example. But without that “institutional” philosophy and the needed strategies outlined by the National Associate of Corporate Directors, this researcher believes the initiatives will not be effective.

What is needed for a Succession Plan for the Lansing Fire Department?

Currently, there is no Succession Plan currently in place in the City of Lansing, or for the Lansing Fire Department. The Labor-Management Contract addresses promotion by time in grade, along with passing an written examination for promotion, but is silent concerning the other needs of persons aspiring to promotion.

Literature Review Summary

The literature review identified numerous components of possible succession plans accompanied by the clear message that succession plans are highly individual, and must be tailored to specific organizations. Private industry clearly leads in the area of Succession Planning, thus the majority of literature is to be found here, and extrapolated for the fire service.

There are no simple solutions offered, and there are numerous hurdles for those charged with developing succession plans. Among them are:

- A reduction of persons in the labor pool
- A reduction of persons willing to become leaders
- The questionable support of top officials to invest the significant resources needed to develop succession plans.

- The transient nature of Chief Executives in government

In the Fire Service, there are isolated pockets of Succession Planning with over a dozen papers developed in the Executive Fire Officer literature at the National Emergency Training Center, Resource Learning Center, in Emmitsburg, MD. Future researchers may focus on their success. In the greater Lansing area, Succession Planning is a matter contractual language and on-the-job training. There are no documentable methodologies known to those surveyed, to replace fire department Chief Executive Officers.

PROCEDURES

Action research was used to gather information for the development of a program of Succession Planning in the Lansing Fire Department. Information was gathered by this researcher from several different sources including:

- Various libraries in the Lansing area were queried for information related to current Succession Planning initiatives in the private sector, as well as the fire service.
- The National Emergency Training Center, Learning Resource Center was visited for access to Executive Fire Officer papers on subjects related to Succession Planning which included: Mentoring, training, education, and promotion
- The Internet, for searches of the professional journals and related web sites.
- Other local fire department Succession Plans within the Lansing area, through telephone contact for survey fulfillment.

- A survey of the Lansing Fire Department command personnel. A survey was given to six of the six Battalion Chief and 12 of the 24 Captains.

Limitations and Assumptions

This research represents a preliminary venture into Succession Planning for the Lansing Fire Department. It is designed to determine what elements are needed for a comprehensive plan, which other personnel will make a reality. It is assumed that all respondents answered accurately, and it is understood that a convenience sample was used for this study, given the time and resource constraints.

The Literature Review centered on public and private organizations, to the exclusion of a significant volume of information on family and estate based Succession Planning. One of the concerns evident to this researcher is the lack of definitive information concerning Succession Planning in fire departments throughout the nation.

After protracted consideration, it was decided to survey selected Lansing Fire Department personnel on their perceived needs. This is contrasted with the more generic needs of private corporations and similar information contained in the Literature Review. Unlike the replication factor inherent in the hard sciences, it is felt in this social science, the individual needs will be specific to the department, yet the global need of Succession Planning will remain universal to the departments.

In order to develop a plan of resolution, department specific information was integrated with trends in government and the more global perspective of the private sector. This resulted in a four-part phase-in program detailed in the Results section of this document.

Definition of Terms

Continuity – continuance of information and culture. The method by which an organization passes down to new generations, its formal and informal culture.

Mentoring – the process by which one individual coaches and prepares another individual to replace the first.

Political Acumen – the ability to move with professional grace, from the issues of the line to the issues of the boardroom.

RESULTS

Research Question #1 What are prevalent concepts and practices of Succession

Planning?

The prevalent concepts of Succession Planning focus upon obtaining the support and influence of top management and administrative boards. This support requires executives to recognize and prioritize Succession Planning as one of their most important responsibilities. In addition to conceptual support, executives must then obtain and provide resources for such a program, and provide appropriate guidance to outline practices tailored to the organization, and monitor the program for expected results.

The practice of Succession Planning involves extensive effort of top management to address the development of a pool of leadership potential, by active mentoring, sharing of responsibility, and evaluation. It is no longer enough to identify one individual to consider for replacement, especially in light of our highly transient society, but to work toward the development of leadership pools consisting of many qualified persons. In this

way, someone will be available to transition to the appropriate level when the need occurs.

It is abundantly clear that thorough Succession Planning is a significant draw on company resources, and the individual resources of mentors and leaders. It is not a plan or outline drawn from a book or “out of the box”, but a comprehensive roadmap of planning, achievement and evaluation, customized to the needs of the organization and the environment.

Research Question #2: What Succession Planning programs are currently in use in fire departments?

In the greater Lansing area, there are no Succession Planning programs currently in use, as determined by a telephone survey (Appendix A). A review of the Executive Fire Officer literature from the Resource Center revealed a dozen papers, interestingly, a majority from the State of Virginia, addressing the need for Succession Planning. This researcher could not identify a fire department Succession Planning in use in the current literature.

Research Question #3: What constitutes a comprehensive Succession Plan for the Lansing Fire Department?

To answer this question, a variety of input was used. This includes personal interviews with the Chief of Department and Assistant Chief of Administration; survey questions administered to all Battalion Chiefs and randomly selected Captains. The data was correlated and discussed in the next section.

Survey I – Chief Officers, with two respondents.

This survey was narrative and freewheeling in nature, with a general outline in the following format:

- A. What are the needs of the department for Succession Planning?
- B. What do you feel are the needs of the Battalion Chief to attain the level of excellence?
- C. What do you feel are the needs of the Captains to attain the level of excellence?
- D. What are the impediments to Succession Planning in the Lansing Fire Department?

Both Chief Officers were parallel in their thought processes. A synopsis of the answers follow. The needs of the department for Succession Planning are clear. The administration can retire in eight years, with no one currently trained or mentored to replace them. Battalion Chiefs rapidly turnover, leaving no information for their successors. A similar situation exists with Captains, although the position, important as it is, is not as critical as the Battalion Chief.

Excellence is determined by sense of direction and repetitive accomplishment. Currently, the tenure of the Battalion Chief is too short for repetition, and each Battalion Chief has to start from the beginning. Additionally, the Battalion Chiefs have not had a structured progression of education and training leading to the attainment of their position. Succession is by seniority. Succession Planning will provide, at least in part, some of this direction.

The needs of the Captains are essentially the same.

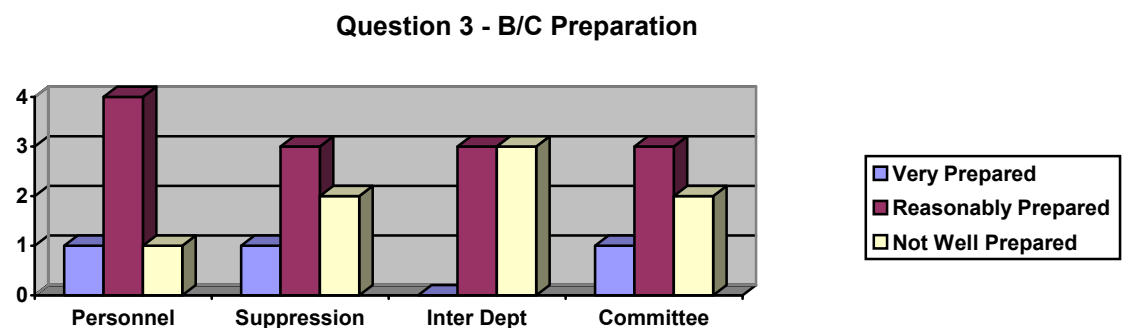
The impediments to accomplishing Succession Planning in the Lansing Fire Department are the same as indicated throughout the literature: Top management support, resource availability, individual and corporate responsibility, and programs customized to meet the needs of the organization, are all critical.

Survey II - Battalion Chiefs, with six respondents. APPENDIX B

Question 1. How long have you been a Battalion Chief? The average time in grade at the Battalion Chief level was a short one and one-third years.

Question 2. What was your preparation to become a Battalion Chief? Five of the respondents indicated some formal classes at Lansing Community College, a two-year institution offering an academic Fire Science Degree Associate level. Other preparation included “acting time” and some department-offered programs, in addition to contractual written test requirements.

Question 3. At the beginning of your promotion to Battalion Chief, what level did you feel prepared to undertake the following duties?



The purpose of this four-part question was to determine the level of comfort each Battalion Chief felt about their responsibilities, at the beginning of their undertaking. It includes: Personnel Management, which includes training, counseling and discipline; Suppression Management including the

incident command system; Interdepartmental issues which includes budget, communications and politics, and Committee Responsibilities, for which each Battalion Chief is responsible.

Question 4. What are the 3 major challenges the person replacing you will have?

This question asks the respondent to forecast the needs of their replacement. Synthesized by category, the most predominant answers included:

- Rapidly changing departmental environment
- Personnel management
- Field operations
- Protracted time to accomplish objectives
- Management operations

Question 5. If you could prepare someone before they were to take your place, what would you do with them?

Here, the Battalion Chief are asked how they would mentor a prospective replacement, if they had the opportunity. Responses included: work directly with the Battalion Chief for a time, a mentorship program, working the Incident Safety Officers position (a senior Captains position in the Lansing Fire Department) working in Operations, and everything we are doing now.

Question 6. Has anyone actively mentored you in your role as a Battalion Chief?

The responses included two Yes, two Limited, and two No answers.

Based on the answers of the Battalion Chiefs, it is apparent that Succession Planning in the Lansing Fire Department must address a specific plan by which prospective command officers can prepare for their next assignment. It is interesting to note that half of the Battalion Chiefs were not comfortable with their Interdepartmental role, which includes: Budget, communications and politics. Recognizing they spend a predominate share of their time in this role, this area must be addressed in the planning for Succession Planning.

Another area of concern is Suppression. Two of the six personnel felt they were not well prepared to assume this role. Based on follow-up interviews this concern is relative to running Incident Command and dealing with multiple company operations, another facet of future Succession Planning.

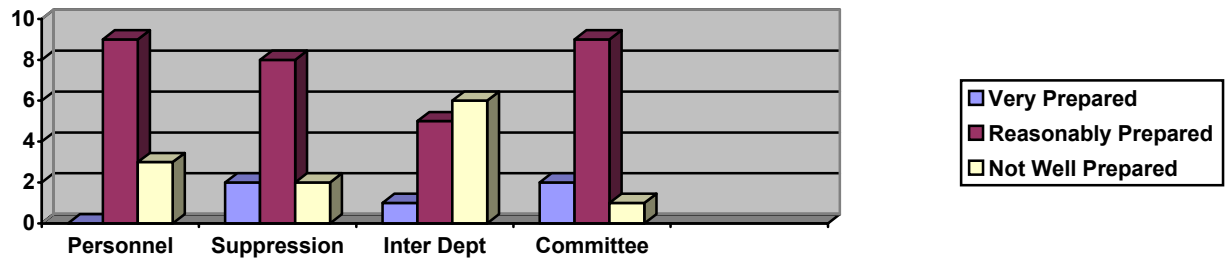
Survey III – Captains, with 12 respondents. APPENDIX B

Question 1. How long have you been a Captain? The average time in grade at the Captain level was slightly over two and one-half years.

Question 2. What was your preparation to become a Captain? Six of the 12 respondents indicated the “on-the-job-training was their primary source of preparation, which would include time in grade as a lieutenant, and mandatory classes offered at the Lansing Fire Department. Four respondents indicated formal classes at Lansing Community College, and other preparation included personal study, in addition to contractual written test requirements.

Question 3. At the beginning of your promotion to Captain, what level did you feel prepared to undertake the following duties?

Question 3 - Captains Preparation



The purpose of this four-part question was to determine the level of comfort each Captain felt about their responsibilities, at the beginning of their undertaking. It includes: Personnel Management, which includes training, counseling and discipline; Suppression Management including the incident command system; Interdepartmental issues which includes budget, communications and politics, and Committee Responsibilities, for which each Battalion Chief is responsible.

Question 4. What are the 3 major challenges the person replacing you will have?

This question asks the respondent to forecast the needs of their replacement. Synthesized by category, the most predominant answers reflected the Battalion Chief's answers, and included:

- Rapidly changing departmental environment
- Personnel management along with Discipline were the major concerns
- Field operations
- Morale
- Management operations

Question 5. If you could prepare someone before they were to take your place, what would you do with them?

In this question, the Captains are asked how they would mentor a prospective replacement, if they had the opportunity. Responses included: work directly with a Captain for a time, Fire Officer classes, training and getting back to the basics.

Question 6. Has anyone actively mentored you in your role as a Captain?

The responses included: one Yes, three Limited, and eight No answers.

It is clear by the results of these surveys and follow-up discussions with the Battalion Chief, there exists concern over the lack of mentoring, department continuity and the speed and abruptness of change, in technology, personnel, and job demands.

DISCUSSION

After a review of the literature, it became clear that the concept of Succession Planning is new only to this researcher. Succession Planning appears to be well researched in the private sector but its implementation is questionable. Succession Planning requires top management support, must be customized for the individual organization, and can be a significant drain on personnel and resources. It is a massive and unique undertaking. If an organization is not to be left without leadership today however, Succession Planning in some format is a mandatory undertaking.

There are some common impediments weaving through the fabric of Succession Planning. Seven of the most significant stumbling blocks preventing Succession Planning from becoming a reality in many organizations include:

- 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, round out the list.

(Rothwell, 1994)

In extended conversations with the Chief Officers of the Lansing Fire Department, along with survey results and other data, it is clear the impediments cited by Rothwell for private organizations, are faced by the Lansing Fire Department. Primary among these is the need to secure top management support.

The Mayor along with the City Council must be appraised of the project and strong “buy-in” established. The challenge here is not simply their support, but in a time of budget reductions, their approval to allocate sufficient resources to this project to make it a reality. The Chief Officers are ready to commit themselves to the mentoring and guidance needed to establish a leadership pool, but absent needed resources, will be called upon to provide innovative ways to accomplish the same thing.

Corporate politics, quick fix attitudes and perceived need are cultural, and represent a great challenge to change. The labor organization must be involved from the outset, and all of the employees must clearly understand the direction and purpose of this

project. Department-wide education for this project will be important and must not be overlooked.

Lastly, the rapid pace of the organization must be recognized and dealt with, while at the same time making room for, and participating in Succession Planning. Quoted previously, “The pull to get consumed by the demands of the present is strong”.(Schall, 1997) Those undertaking this project must be aware of this distraction and deal with it appropriately.

This researcher believes interested parties should meet to share ideas on the extent of the problem, “brainstorm”, and agree upon potential solutions. Because of the massiveness of the undertaking, based on the research, it should be “chunked” into sections. Conceivably, implementation of comprehensive Succession Planning could be phased in over a four or five year period.

The implications of Succession Planning for the Lansing Fire Department are numerous. Done properly, the department will realize a greater continuity of operation, increased levels of safety and enhanced job performance. It is critical to plan for the future. A leadership crisis is on the horizon. It must be dealt with now, before the storm crests the horizon and we reap the whirlwind. Our responsibility for Succession Planning is clear, therefore the following recommendations are suggested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that a Succession Planning program be developed and customized for Lansing Fire Department, in order to address the anticipated leadership loss over the next several years. After gaining support of top city and department leaders,

it is recommended that a focus group be initiated to assist with the implementation and address the specifics of a comprehensive Succession Planning program.

The purpose of a Succession Planning program in the Lansing Fire Department will be to enhance the opportunities for prospective command officers and administrators to gain a widespread base of knowledge and experience they would not otherwise obtain. This will allow them to better serve the department and the community, and meet the intent of the Fire Department Mission Statement.

As a basis upon which to begin discussion, a four-year, phase-in program, suggested by the research and synthesized by this author, is outlined below. The emphasis is on Continuity of Operation, Job Shadowing, Documentation, and Comprehensive Mentoring.

Continuity of Operation

There are two distinct areas concerning Continuity of Operation suggested by the literature, and one suggested in the surveys and informal interviews. The first is formal training, to provide a strong foundation upon which to build command and leadership skills. The Michigan Fire Officer I & II curriculum, developed by the Maryland Fire and Rescue is the suggested foundation. It provides a broad prospective of command officer and leadership roles, and also affords the opportunity to infuse Lansing Fire Department Administrative and Standard Operating Guidelines into the curriculum (MFRI, 1999).

The second area, non-formal but just as important, is the passing of unwritten department history, policies, culture and lore, from person-to-person, and from command officer to command officer. A sort of “oral history” which addresses the successes and

failures that members of the department experience, and gives important clues and guidelines for the success of the new command officer.

The third area suggested in the interviews, is the temporary assignment of command officers throughout the Divisions of the Lansing Fire Department. This would enable each new officer to better understand the services and support each Division provides to the fire department mission.

Job Shadowing

The second phase, Job Shadowing, should introduce the new command officer to a more global perspective of the Fire Department. In this phase, the new command officer is introduced to other areas of city administration they may not have had an opportunity to work with, in their past. The fire department does not exist in a municipal vacuum, therefore it is suggested that arrangements be made with city and county department heads for the new command officer to shadow department heads for a day, or longer period of time if possible. This will allow the new command officer to obtain a clearer picture of that department head's responsibilities as well as their interconnection with the fire department and the delivery of emergency services from all sectors of government, especially in a disaster situation.

Documentation

The third suggested phase of Succession Planning should be the development of comprehensive manuals and documentation that detail authorities and responsibilities of the new command officer. The object is to assist the new command officer or acting command officer to "get up to speed", and not cover ground that others before them have already cultivated.

An extensive written history of the department, to include all guidelines along with a compendium of committee charters, minutes, reports, and evaluations should be electronically available to all department personnel. Mentoring manuals for each rank should be established and distributed, in addition to electronic Administrative and Standard Operating Guidelines.

Comprehensive Mentoring

The fourth phase of a comprehensive Succession Planning process would include comprehensive mentoring of prospective replacements. Based on the perceived needs of the Lansing Fire Department from this researchers perspective, formal mentoring should begin with Lieutenants mentored by Captains who would be mentored by Battalion Chiefs, and up the line of succession.

The focus of this mentoring will be to impart all of the unwritten practices and operational nuances of the department operation, along with an “oral history” of the department from a command perspective. This would address issues of community relations and service, field command, personnel issues as well as other relevant but unwritten information.

Perhaps the most important aspect of mentoring under the guidance of a senior command officer, is to allow the junior officer to take command of both field and supervisory situations to gain the experience; “test their wings” if you will, while having the stabilizing influence of the senior officer in the background if the unanticipated occurs.

Lastly, those aspiring to an administrative position in the organization should be mentored early in their career for succession to this position. This mentoring would

include a variety of job as well as educational experiences and challenges. It is recognized that not all people aspiring to an administrative leadership role will be eligible for that role, but the opportunity should exist for all.

This researcher believes an intensive, multifaceted approach to Succession Planning is critical in the face of documentable leadership loss anticipated in the near future. The significant knowledge base, which has continuously slipped away from the Lansing Fire Department in past, will be solidly retained for future command officers, to the betterment of the Lansing Fire Department and the community it serves.

This research has laid appropriate groundwork for the implementation of Succession Planning at the Lansing Fire Department. It is hoped that future researchers will make use of it for their projects as well.

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APPENDIX A**Telephone Questionnaire**

- **Delhi Township FD**
- **Delta Township FD**
- **East Lansing FD**
- **Lansing Township FD**
- **Meridian Township FD**

Person Reporting _____

Date/Time _____

Statement: I am doing research to find fire departments in our area, which may have a succession, plan in the process of development, or in effect.

Succession plan for purposes of this research is a documented method by which Chief Officers mentor younger personnel, rotate them through the various divisions within a department, and provide them professional development opportunities outside of normal contractual obligations.

No

Yes. If yes, May we have a copy of it.

If not in writing, please explain what is involved.

APPENDIX B**LANSING FIRE DEPARTMENT****Structured Questionnaire - Battalion Chiefs**

To the respondent: On behalf of the Fire Department, we thank you for taking your time to answer these questions. Your assistance will assist us in building a stronger fire department to serve the community.

- 1. How long have you been a Battalion Chief?**
- 2. What was your preparation to become a Battalion Chief?**
- 3. At the beginning of your promotion to Battalion Chief, what level did you feel prepared to undertake the following duties?**
 - a. Personnel Management – Training - Counseling – Discipline**
 - i. Very Prepared** **ii. Reasonably** **iii. Not Well**
 - b. Suppression Management, i.e. Incident Command**
 - i. Very Prepared** **ii. Reasonably** **iii. Not Well**
 - c. Budget, Communications, Inter Department Politics**
 - i. Very Prepared** **ii. Reasonably** **iii. Not Well**
 - d. Committee Responsibilities**
 - i. Very Prepared** **ii. Reasonably** **iii. Not Well**
- 4. What do you see as 3 Major Challenges the person replacing you will have?**
 - 1.**
 - 2.**
 - 3.**
- 5. If you could prepare someone before they were to take your place, what would you do with them?**
- 6. Has anyone actively mentored you in your role as a Battalion Chief?**

APPENDIX C**LANSING FIRE DEPARTMENT
Structured Questionnaire – Suppression Captain**

To the respondent: On behalf of the Fire Department, we thank you for taking your time to answer these questions. Your assistance will assist us in building a stronger fire department to serve the community.

- 1. How long have you been a Suppression Captain?**

- 2. What was your preparation to become a Captain?**

- 3. At the beginning of your promotion to Captain, what level did you feel prepared to undertake the following duties?**
 - a. Personnel Management – Training - Counseling – Discipline**
 - i. Very Prepared ii. Reasonably iii. Not Well**
 - b. Suppression Management, i.e. Incident Command**
 - i. Very Prepared ii. Reasonably iii. Not Well**
 - c. Budget, Communications, Inter Department Politics**
 - i. Very Prepared ii. Reasonably iii. Not Well**
 - d. Committee Responsibilities**
 - i. Very Prepared ii. Reasonably iii. Not Well**

- 4. What do you see as 3 Major Challenges the person replacing you will have?**
 - 1.**
 - 2.**
 - 3.**

- 5. If you could prepare someone before they were to take your place, what would you do with them?**

- 6. Has anyone actively mentored you in your role as a Captain?**

APPENDIX D

To: Captains
Fr: A/C Bouth
Re: Questionnaire
Dt: 9/5/01

Captain,

I request your assistance by filling out the questionnaire on the reverse side of this sheet. I am in the process of completing a research project through the National Fire Academy, as part of a class I am enrolled in. The applied research concerns Succession Planning, and addresses the needs and preparation of individuals when replacing Administrative and Command positions in the future. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Questionnaire Explanation:

Q 1. Time in rank.

Q 2. Your preparation to become a Captain: in addition to time, experience, and contract requirements, any additional courses, experiences, command, you may have done.

Q3. As you transitioned from Lieutenant to Captain, how prepared were you to do items a-d? Consider

- i. Very Prepared - as meaning, you had all of the knowledge and experience you have ever needed as a Captain.**
- ii. Reasonably – as meaning, you had some of the knowledge and experience**
- iii. Not Well – as meaning, you could have been more prepared, and the lack of preparation caused you some difficulties.**

Q4. The more explanation, the better

Q5. What you would like to make available to them before they become a Captain

Q6. Has a senior Captain or B/C spent time with you showing you “the ropes”?

Once again, Thank You! If you have questions, please call at 4561.