Succession planning in education

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Succession planning began in the corporate and business world as a reactive process of job replacement. Traditionally, it has been viewed as a top down process with little input from employees. This later evolved to developing the skills of a pool of individuals for future positions within the company (Hall, 1986). Replacement planning was a form of risk management. Managers began to recognise that the continued survival of the organisation depended on the availability of the right person to fill the right job at the right time.

More recently, succession planning has become a proactive process that takes a longer-term view. Leibman, Bruer and Maki (1996:22) define succession planning as the deliberate and systematic effort made by an organisation to identify, develop, and retain individuals with a range of leadership competencies who are capable of implementing current and future organisational goals. Succession planning now recognises that people will change employers and careers several times in their working life. Individuals are viewed in the context of the leadership team. There is a longer-term strategic planning focus. Future leaders are prepared by developing a pool of people with a range of leadership competencies. The focus is on future requirements, and providing high potential and high performing employees with developmental experiences that will skill them to meet the future demands of the business (Leibman, Bruer and Maki, 1996).

Organisations need to ensure that their human resource practices support the recruitment, development, and retention of appropriate leadership personnel. Effective succession planning is now seen as more than replacement planning. Succession planning should be based on agreed principles, provide a breadth of experiences critical to leadership, and be active at all levels of the organisation (Friedman, Hatch and Walker, 1998). Effective succession planning identifies future organisational needs (capabilities), and potential future leaders; inspires leadership aspirations; bases the selection processes and program design on future leadership capabilities; creates pools of talent; and recognises multiple paths to leadership (Leibman *et al.*, 1996). It provides for the development of future leaders and the on-going development and retention of current leaders. Strategic succession planning provides opportunities for current leaders to develop capabilities, and access new challenges. Succession planning encourages leaders to review the demands of the business and identify and

provide solid developmental experiences for high performance and high potential employees. It aligns organisational thinking, the external environment, and the development needs of individuals (Brigland, 1999; Hall, 1986; Leibman *et al.*, 1996).

When succession planning is left completely to individuals to manage by themselves, job incumbents tend to groom successors who resemble them in appearance, background, and values (Loughlin, 2000; Rothwell, 1994:8). This practice perpetuates the glass ceiling, and other forms of discrimination. Where succession planning is formalised, all staff have access to development and training plans, managers and subordinates discuss an individual's career path, and the human resource planning process becomes more comprehensive (Rothwell, 1994).

Strategic succession planning includes policies and processes for recruitment, development, and retention of staff (Friedman *et al.*, 1998). Recruitment involves more than just the selection processes. The recruitment aspects of succession planning also need to include processes and policies to attract the highest quality applicants. Recruitment and retention are posing a challenge for many education systems (d'Arbon, Duignan, Duncan and Goodwin, 2001). Shortages of teachers (Auditor General, 2001; Cook, 2001; Hessels, 2001; Mathews, 2001; Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee, 1998) and school leaders (Auditor General, 2001; Barker, 1997; Evetts, 1992; Jacobson, 1990; Lawnham, 2000; Malone and Caddell, 2000; Olson, 1999; Pyke, 1997) in the USA, UK, and Australia would indicate inadequate current recruitment and retention processes. The

> *Approximately forty-five per cent of the government teaching workforce will be progressively reaching retirement age over the next ten years. The aging of the teacher workforce, coupled with natural attrition, will mean that the Victorian teacher labour market is likely to be in a position of shortage over this period unless there is an increase in the number of new entrants into the profession. (Auditor General, 2001:5)*

Teacher Workforce Planning Report (Auditor General, 2001) notes that:

The shortage of teachers is also a shortage of potential future educational leaders (Canavan, 2001).

The resignation of senior personnel before reaching a retirement age of 55 poses challenges for the retention of staff. The average age of teacher resignation in Victorian government schools is 44.7 (DE&T personnel records). In 2001, 32% of the principal class aged between 54 and 59 years ceased employment. For those in the principal class aged 54, the percentage ceasing employment in 2001 was 47.6%. Whereas, 30.5% of teachers aged 54 ceased employment. High numbers of teachers and principals resign at age

54 and 11 months due to a financial incentive for teachers with particular superannuation conditions to resign before reaching the retirement age of 55 years.

A review of the literature indicates that until recently there have been no examples of strategic succession planning processes for schools and / or education systems (Canavan, 2001:75).

I have developed the following framework to assist schools and education systems to develop and implement effective, comprehensive succession plans.

Overview

Succession planning needs to be more than just job replacement. A strategic approach to succession planning aligns organisational thinking, the external environment and developmental needs of individuals within the organisation. A strategic succession plan will:

- Define succession planning. Develop a clear and shared understanding of succession planning.
- Identify and document the future goals of the school or organisation.

Having completed these first two tasks, the organisation needs to base future planning and evaluate the effectiveness of future programs on accurate baseline data. as such, the organisation needs to develop a demographic map that documents the:

- retirement and resignation patterns and forecasts.
- application rates for all positions (by gender, region and sector where appropriate).
- number, gender (and other relevant data) of candidates nominated for each position.
- number of actual candidates available (remove names of people nominated for more than one position).
- age profile of each promotion level.

Use the information in the demographic map to predict hot spots (hard to fill locations, positions) and equity issues.

Recruitment

Recruitment comprises three key elements: attracting high quality applicants, selecting processes, and induction the new employee into the organisation.

Attraction

To attract applicants, the position needs to not only provide job satisfaction, but be perceived by others as providing job satisfaction.

Schools and school systems need to ensure that jobs at all levels are appealing. Schools are now in the open market, competing against each other for the top candidates (and in some cases the only candidate). Simultaneously, schools are also competing against non-educational settings as many Gen X (Jurkiewicz, 2000) teachers shift careers. Schools need to develop an employer of choice philosophy. If the employer were to ask, "Why would a talented person choose this job in this school above all others?" would they have a compelling answer? Both the job itself, and the workplace need to made as attractive as possible.

Schools need to review the

- Job design for all positions
- Procedures for advertising new positions
- Procedures for handling prospective applicants
- Procedures for handling unsuccessful candidates

You might think that this is stating the obvious. However, from time-to-time I provide career advice to teachers, assistant principals and principals. I am constantly appalled by stories related to me regarding poor recruitment practice. A principal recently told of the disappointment she felt when she missed out on an acting position in a regional office. The disappointment was exacerbated by the fact that when the chairperson of the panel rang to tell her that she had missed out on the position, her husband answered the phone. Although she was home at the time, her husband was asked to pass on the message that his wife had missed out on the position for which she had applied. This story provides examples of an array of poor, inexcusable and unethical practice. I wish it was an exception.

The examples of good practice, while rare, are still there. One company develops a broader understanding of various jobs and career paths by providing an internal information interview network where employees can arrange interviews with other employees who are willing to talk about what jobs they do and how they got to do them.

Some schools, due to location or other local challenges, find it particularly difficult to attract staff. Implementing a relocation support program is one positive strategy rarely used in education. This strategy begins with ensuring that the position offered is as attractive as possible and then provides high level support to the new appointee. Staff moving home in order to take up a new position should be provided with information on local

conditions and services, such as medical, dental, clubs, sporting facilities, schools and facilities for their own children, housing and support for the employment of their spouse.

Many women are the primary care-giver for their own children. In the past many of these women have put their career ambitions on hold until their children develop a degree of independence. It appears, however, that women are in a triple bind. At the stage that their children reach an age of independence their parents, or their spouse's parents require care. Women again, are generally the primary care-giver for aging parents. At this stage women have reached the final years of their career when many ask themselves "Is it really worth the bother of promoting to senior leadership positions for the last few years of my career?"

Research indicates that younger teachers are putting their family plans on hod to establish their career. By their mid-thirties these women are in middle level leadership positions and believe that they are forced to choose between a family and pursuing leadership roles. To encourage women to take up, or continue with, leadership positions earlier in their career, there needs to be a much wider range and easy access to shared and part-time leadership positions. Many principals and other senior leaders comment that it is administratively difficult to manage part-time and shared leadership roles in the workplace. I do not doubt that part-time worker make communication issues more complex. However, efficient is mot always effective. Principals who implement strategies that support work/life balance should be rewarded.

Teachers and assistant principals, who have not acted as a principal, have a very limited and inaccurate perception of the role. The role needs to be demystified and understood. Individual schools can do much to increase the opportunities for teachers to develop an understanding of leadership roles such as providing information sessions outlining the responsibilities of particular jobs, and arranging job shadowing experiences.

Acting in a leadership role has a significant and positive impact on teachers' leadership aspirations. Schools can increase acting leadership opportunities. These can be short term, such as acting principal for three or four days while the principal attends a conference, or longer term while a senior staff member is on leave. Even short term acting experiences have a positive impact if they are genuine leadership opportunities and not simply sitting in the principal's chair and contacting them via their mobile phone every time a decision has to be made.

Longer term acting positions can be rotated around a number of staff, providing two or three staff members the opportunity to act in a leadership role for a month to a term at a time.

Selection

Selection processes need to be structured so that they encourage and support the organisation in its attempt to locate and appoint highly qualified and appropriate applicants to leadership positions. The selection processes also need to encourage and support rather than deter leadership aspirants. My research has revealed that principal class selection processes are seen as a strong disincentive to promote, particularly by women. However, both men and women described the application and interview process as time-consuming, demanding and traumatic. Women talked about the affective impact of the process. The application process was traumatic because of a fear of rejection, fear of the unknown and their lack of confidence. Selection processes need to be simplified to reduce the time required, complexity and stress. Strategies need to be implemented to increase the resilience and confidence of women applicants.

The career and life experiences of teachers who do not follow a typical lock-step career progression path appear not to be valued. Teachers believed that selection panels, particularly in country areas, discriminated against aspirants who did not fit into a known and trusted mould, generally male. Panel members need to participate in mandatory training that includes merit and equity principles and the valuing of non-traditional career paths.

Induction

As part of their human resource management strategy, most schools have implemented induction programs for new staff. Staff induction programs are well documented and as such I do not intend to spend time on them here. However, I am yet to find a school that has an induction program in place to welcome and support the new principal. A well-constructed induction program is part of the creating the employer (or workplace) of choice philosophy. The induction program would include all of the elements of any induction program, but it should also include information on local conditions and protocols – any information that will speed the new principal's understanding of local issues.

Development

Career development of current and potential leaders is now considered to be an essential element of succession plans(Friedman *et al.*, 1998; Leibman *et al.*, 1996). However, it is not only the responsibility of the organisation, it is the

dual responsibility of both the organisation and the individual employee. From the organisation's perspective, career development ensures a match between the career plans, interests and capabilities of individual employees and specific organisational opportunities. Career development processes need to provide the opportunities to develop the leadership capabilities of potential leaders. Development opportunities also need to be provided to ensure that current leaders continue to develop the leadership capabilities that will be required to meet future organisational goals.

Future leaders

Who are the future leaders of the organisation? Potential future leaders would include the current top 10% of performers who would be capable of doing a job two levels above their current level. Schools and school systems should identify these teachers and use them to fill acting leadership positions as a matter of priority.

When left to informal processes managers tend to nominate those future potential leaders that most closely reflect their own values, experiences and attitudes, thus perpetuating the glass ceiling and other forms of discrimination. To guard against this all staff should be actively supported in their career planning. Leadership development should become a line responsibility by writing into the job expectations of current assistant principals and leading teachers key criterion such as, "Demonstrated capacity to provide career planning support, particularly for women".

Line mangers responsible for career development would promote career planning, spend time with staff individually on career development issues, and take actions to further their staff's development.

They would promote career develop by

- Communicating the importance and meaning of career development.
- Raising awareness of the benefits of career development.
- Creating a climate suitable for development e.g. providing opportunities for staff to share learning experiences with their peers.
- Encouraging the use of development resources.

The would enhance individual staff member's career development by

- Acting as a coach and counsellor.
- Providing feedback on individual performance.
- Providing information on future opportunities in the organisation.
- Supporting individuals that are examining their career goals and plans.

- Being a resource and source of ideas for development options.
- Acting as a sounding board.
- Setting realistic expectations.

They would take actions to further their staff's development by

- Championing career interests.
- Redesigning jobs to create more challenging opportunities.
- Reinforcing development through reward of staff (Yarnall, 1998:381).

Current leaders

Similar opportunities need to be provided for current leaders as for future leaders. They too need to have their career development promoted, time spent with them on career issues, and actions taken to further their development. Opportunities need to be provided to ensure that current leaders develop the capabilities that will be required to meet future organisational needs. Considering that many teachers take up their first principal position in their late thirties and early forties strategies need to be in place to ensure that these principals can access new challenges, and from time-to-time, have break from the remorseless onslaught daily demands and high stress levels that come with the job.

Retention

To increase the pool of high quality applicants for positions organisations needs to retain high quality employees. A shortage of teachers will inevitably lead to a shortage of potential leaders. School systems need to ensure that they maintain an adequate supply of teachers and identify potential leaders from within that pool. Young teachers are more likely to change their employers than their older colleagues did in the past. Succession planning strategies will need to be implemented to retain these potential young leaders (Jurkiewicz, 2000).

Organisations also need to include strategies to retain experienced leaders. My research has revealed that experienced principals, particularly women, have career plans that do not include remaining a principal until retirement. Employers will need to consider strategies to maintain motivation and challenge for experienced principals. Retention strategies need to maintain the attraction and challenge of leadership for future and current principals.

Many retention strategies may have a dual outcome. Providing early leadership experiences for young teachers is a development as well as a retention strategy. Recruitment strategies such as ensuring that flexible work options and shared leadership roles are available at all leadership levels will

also encourage staff to continue to remain within the organisation. Processes that would increase retention rates include the following.

- Improved career planning advice. Currently, career advice is provided to teachers on an ad hoc basis, generally through the principal. principals, themselves, rarely receive any career advice. All principal class members should have access to a professional career planning service.
- Opportunities for staff at all levels to act in leadership roles more senior to their current position. Research shows that acting, above all other strategies, has a positive impact on leadership aspirations.
- Sabbatical leave at the completion of each principal contract. This should be fully funded by the organisation to allow the principal to pursue an area of mutual beneficial and interest. The length of leave would be linked to the scope of the research project.
- Regular task rotation within leadership roles to ensure that all staff have a wide range of leadership experiences.
- Retain intellectual knowledge and organisational experience through mentorship opportunities for principals. Contract exemplary recently retired / resigned principals to act as mentors for new principals and those experiencing specific difficulties.

Conclusion

Strategic succession planning at an organisational and at a school level would increase leadership aspiration and application rates. A succession plan at the organisational level would include strategies to recruit, develop and retain a large pool of effective principals and assistant principals. It will recognise that the young teachers of today are likely to change jobs and careers several times before they retire. The promotion process within schools will allow for them to move back into education at senior levels having gained leadership experiences elsewhere. At the school level, principals will continue to develop leaders within their schools. Many opportunities for acting in leadership roles need to be provided. Schools need to be encouraged to provide increased opportunities for part-time and shared leadership roles.

The lack of succession planning at an organisational and school level inhibits teachers' principal class leadership aspirations. Education systems within Australia, along with many other large bureaucracies do not have documented succession plans. There is no co-ordinated strategy to recruit, develop and retain leaders. The identification of potential leaders is ad hoc. As has been demonstrated, few teachers regard principal level positions as

attractive. Both men and women describe the selection process as difficult, time-consuming, demanding and traumatic.

To create a climate that encourages leadership aspirations and increases actual application rates schools and education systems need to ensure that they implement strategies to develop and support aspirants and simultaneously implement strategies to reduce or remove factors that inhibit leadership aspirations.

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