

YOUR BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE: CREATING SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & SUCCESSION PLANNING

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More than a few years ago, a certain politician (who shall remain nameless!) used to talk about “building a bridge to the 21st century.” The “bridge” to which he referred was technology.

As it turns out, he was partly right. Technology is an important tool for both the private and the public sector, but having a trained and experienced workforce, including managers and supervisors, is proving to be an even more critical piece to building a successful organization in the 21st century. Changing demographics demand the creation of a sound leadership development and succession planning process. At this point in the 21st century, these two elements are of paramount importance for the success, even survival, of most organizations.

Statistics abound as to the impact that aging Baby-Boomers are starting to have on the workforce. For example, *American City & County* magazine recently cited a study that identified the average age of public works directors to be 50. Another study projected the expected range of retirees in the next 5-10 years to be from 25%-35% of the workforce. The workforce crisis is no longer looming; it is here. In this environment, it is fair to ask, “are you prepared?”

At TAP Resource Development Group we have worked on this problem with a number of our clients, many of whom have taken a proactive stance in managing today’s changing workplace. Quite simply, these leaders understand that in order to continue to meet or exceed the regulatory, customer, financial, operational, and customer goals of their city, utility or public works agency, they need to have organizational continuity. However, continuity is not always easy

with today’s aging Baby-Boomers. The key to attaining this organizational continuity is succession planning. We have found time and time again that this means having **a sound leadership development and succession process in place and an effective performance management system to ensure implementation.**

What is leadership in today’s world, how do we develop it, and what does it take to make a difference? John Kotter in his book, *Leading Change*, states that a leader “...defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles.” Dr. William Schneider, author of *The Reengineering Alternative* and a TAP Resource business partner, defines leadership as “*Creating a vision and direction for the organization and mobilizing people to accomplish them.*” Dr. Schneider also indicates that to effectively develop leadership within the organization it is important to understand the organization at its core.

Over the last 16 years, TAP Resource has worked with many managers in a number of public works, utility, and other local government organizations. During that time, we have provided leadership development and coaching services to over 250 managers at all levels of the organization. Our comprehensive approach is built on four fundamental principles:

- There is not one right way to lead (one size does not fit all).
- There are four basic approaches to leadership.
- Some characteristics of these approaches are similar, merely implemented differently.
- Strategic Focus (how the organization provides value to its customers) determines the right approach to leadership.

Comprehensive leadership development and succession planning involves aligning leadership with the organization for which the leader is responsible. For

that reason, we recommend a four step process for effective succession planning:

1. an organizational assessment,
2. a competency mapping process covering the affected positions,
3. a comprehensive and individualized leadership development process, and
4. succession plan development and implementation.

Organizational Assessment

It's important for managers to understand the organization and context within which they lead. For this reason, an organizational assessment is an important part of effective leadership development and critical to succession planning. This includes an in-depth understanding of how the organization provides value to its customers, the organization's culture (how things get accomplished or implemented), and how leadership functions within the organization. The Organizational Assessment process also looks at how supportive (aligned) culture and leadership as a whole are with how the organization provides value to its customers. It will accomplish the following:

- Involve the entire organization in understanding the organization and its current situation.
- Enable the leadership team to get below symptoms and identify core issues.
- Identify strengths and barriers to successful implementation of a leadership development plan.
- Assess clarity of Strategic Focus throughout the organization.

TAP Resource has developed a comprehensive Organizational Assessment process that involves employee focus groups, Culturetek[®] assessment (a comprehensive, statistically validated assessment instrument that assesses focus, culture and leadership), and a facilitated workshop.



Figure 1. The Key Steps of the Organizational Assessment

Through the assessment process, the leadership team will gain an understanding of the organization's focus, culture, leadership, the alignment of culture and lead-

ership with purpose, and the level of integration among elements of culture and leadership.

If an organization is not clear about how it provides value to the community and its customers (its purpose), it will not be particularly effective at meeting the challenges of change. Clarity of focus or purpose must come first, followed by an understanding of culture and leadership. Understanding and capitalizing on organizational culture is how leaders leverage people resources. Dr. William Schneider, in his article "Why Strategies Fall Apart" in the Journal of Business Strategy, states that "*The more business leaders learn how to use their own organization's culture, the more they will succeed in implementing their organization's strategy.*"

The final component of the assessment process is a facilitated workshop with the organization's leadership team to review the findings and recommendations and develop an action plan to guide the leadership development and succession planning process. The workshop will also address barriers that have been identified that may hinder implementation. The information gathered during the assessment process is extremely valuable for, and integrated into, the organization's strategic planning process.

Core Competency Modeling

Comprehensive leadership development and succession planning requires a clear understanding of the behaviors or competencies required for leadership in your organization. A competency model is a listing of the competencies needed for each leadership position and serves as a guide to tie the position to the organization's strategy and purpose. It also provides the members of your organization with direction and focus for their development efforts. And it allows the organization to assess and develop its leadership talent using a specific set of development tools. The process of competency modeling involves:

- Gaining a thorough understanding of each position and the competencies required to successfully accomplish its purpose or job description. We recommend describing the position using desired ranges within a set of 22 specific attributes or behaviors.
- Creating a team of knowledgeable staff to review and finalize the model. We recommend a process called Strategic Direction Setting that takes a focus

group approach to survey results.

- The result is a list of primary and secondary attributes for the position, along with the amount of attention the leader places on the attributes. It's important to keep the list of leadership attributes for each position as short as possible, including only the sets that would be the key behavioral components of the position.

Leadership Development

Due to the very nature of leadership, effective development is an individualized training process that consists of the following activities:

- **Leader Assessment.** TAP Resource uses Management Research Group's® *Leadership Effectiveness Analysis*® (LEA 360) instrument, a 360° assessment system that provides comprehensive information to individual managers about their leadership attributes. The LEA 360° is a non-judgmental assessment process involving individual managers, peers, direct reports, and supervisors. By combining this information with the culture and strategy data already obtained from the Organizational Assessment, we establish the foundation for the creation of individualized leadership development plans.
- **Leadership & Succession Training.** TAP Resource provides a leadership training workshop that covers the basics of leadership in different situations and different types of organizations. **This is a key component of effective succession planning because it enables all of the organization's managers and supervisors to be working from a common knowledge and methodology base, ensuring continuity into the future as retirements and other staff turnover occur.** The program will cover the following topics:
 - Leadership fundamentals
 - The four core leadership types
 - Reviewing the integration of leadership and performance management
 - Beginning development of individual leadership development plans
 - LEA 360° fundamentals and interpretation of results
- **Individual LEA Feedback and Unit Development Needs Sessions.** TAP Resource staff meets with each leader along with their supervisor to review the information obtained from the leader-

ship assessment process. The meeting covers both the leadership attributes of the individual and the implications of leadership within the culture and strategic purpose of both the leader's organization and the larger organization.

- **Team LEA Feedback Sessions.** The development process can provide a Leadership Team feedback on team behavior and areas for development. This includes recommendations for improving team functioning and overall leadership alignment.
- **Create Individual Leadership Development Plans.** Each leader participating in the leadership development planning process designs a preliminary plan for his or her individual development. TAP Resource consultants review and comment on these plans. We also assist leaders with the integration of the development needs of their unit.

Succession Planning and Implementation Consultation

Working with the organization's leadership team, TAP Resource facilitates a process for identifying candidates for designated leadership/management positions based on the position's competency model. A comprehensive Knowledge Management program is an important component of an integrated succession planning program. This critical staffing "bridge" goes a long way towards ensuring organizational continuity.

As our experience in working with utility, public works and local government clients has demonstrated, the development of a sound leadership development and succession planning process is the foundation that a utility, public works, and local government organization needs in order to build their "bridge to the future" and, in fact, taking this approach is quite possibly organizational management's best tool in ensuring long-term measurable success for the organization, its customers, and its employees.

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to make your organization more effective.