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SEMPER PARATIS:

MARINE CORPS INTELLIGENCE SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Introduction

The purpose of succession planning is to prepare an organization for risks associated with the planned or unplanned loss of knowledge that is critical to the success of the organization. To accomplish this, an effective succession planning model develops employees to ensure that the organization has highly qualified employees who are capable of filling critical positions. Succession planning is a key element to both workforce planning and strategic planning in government agencies. [i] [ii]

Under a new Intelligence Community (IC) senior succession management initiative in 2009, the Office of Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) began holding the IC accountable for leadership continuity and tasked each agency, including Marine Corps Intelligence (MCI), to develop a succession plan for key leadership positions (KLPs). The goal is to develop a three-year succession planning horizon focused on the top 5-10 senior leadership positions at "succession risk". Figure 1 provides an overview of the succession management process identified and disseminated to each IC agency by ODNI. [iii]

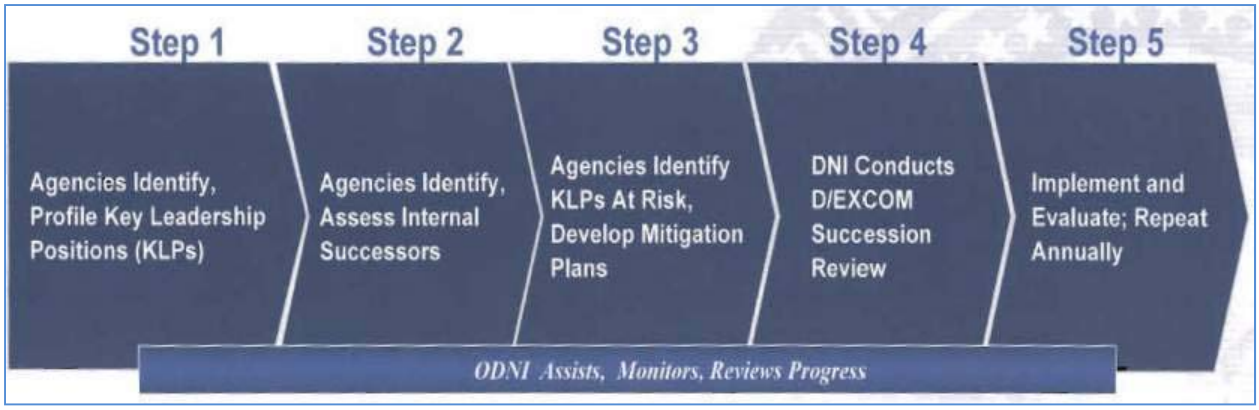

Figure 1: IC Senior Succession Management Overview

In her 2002 Applied Research Project (ARP), Sharon Ley created a succession planning model based on the needs of the Texas State Bar. This research project expands on the practical ideal model developed by Ley to include elements of succession planning that can be applied to federal agencies, including the IC, based on employment regulations and applies it to the succession planning process for MCI. [iv] [v] ((*Note: For the purpose of this paper and the ODNI task, MCI is defined as Marine Corps Intelligence organizations located at Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) Intelligence Department (I-Dept) in Arlington, Virginia and the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) in Quantico, VA, as well as out of area Marine Forces.*))

Literature indicates that regardless of size, the same fundamental concepts and practices that inspire a best practice succession management system apply to all organizations. However, small organizations cite a number of unique conditions that may make the implementation of certain types of succession management and leadership development initiatives more difficult. In light of these challenges, this paper examines practices that smaller organizations may implement, either by applying general concepts underlying the tactics or by reducing the scale on which they are executed. [vi]

Purpose and Scope

MCI is required to develop a three-year succession plan for KLPs. This paper provides a comprehensive description and essential background information of succession planning, along

with the benefits and risks of implementing succession planning in federal government agencies. The purpose of this research is threefold:

- First, based on the ARP of Sharon Ley (2002), as well as literature pertaining to the subject, it describes the critical components of an ideal succession plan for federal government agencies.
- Second, utilizing the practical ideal type characteristics and conceptual framework model, it assesses and offers strategies for implementing an effective succession plan for MCI organizations.
- Finally, based on the assessment of methodologies and tools researched, recommendations have been made to MCI on effective methods for implementing succession planning. [vii]

Assumptions

After performing extensive review of existing literature as well as MCI, and other government policy and strategic documents related to or impacting succession management, we have determined the following key factors or assumptions should be considered when applying realistic succession planning methodologies to MCI organizations:

- ODNI requires a three-year succession plan for KLPs which should be updated annually. [viii]
- There is no succession management plan or strategy for senior leadership within MCI. [ix] [x]
- MCI Continuity of Operations (COOP) plans do not designate alternate personnel to assume senior leadership positions or roles in case current leaders are unable to report to the COOP site for duty.
- Merit system principles prohibit pre-selection of specific personnel for senior leadership positions in MCI. [xi]
- MCI organizations meet recruiting needs on a reactionary basis only, and do not have a career development process that enable succession management.

Challenges/Restraints

Summarized below are the challenges that small organizations such as MCI face with respect to succession management. Appendix A provides a list of imperatives and practices that such organizations may consider. [xii]

- **Challenge #1: Limited Developmental Opportunities—**flat organizational structure and limited number of positions limits the types of available opportunities to develop high-potentials or successor candidates.
- **Challenge #2: Limited Pool of Potential Leaders—**organizational size inherently limits the size of the talent pool from which to choose possible successors.
- **Challenge #3: Limited Staff Support and Budgetary Resources—**smaller organization and training budget limits the amount of dedicated resources available for succession management or leadership development activities.
- **Challenge #4: Lack of Urgency Around the Issue—**managers' busy schedules and absence of accountability and incentives lead to a lack of focus and awareness regarding the urgency of succession management.

Discussion

While turnover is an inevitable factor that all organizations face, succession planning provides a method of ensuring that loss of key personnel does not prove detrimental to the organization. In the case of MCI and in the scope of the ODNI succession management initiative, this study recommends that senior level positions (DISL or SES) are prime candidates for succession risk assessment. The rationale lies in structure of our organization, our relatively small number of seniors, and the capabilities required of these individuals. The seniors do not have deputies but in most cases are deputies to military officers or stand alone entities who exhibit unique responsibilities within MCI and in the IC. On the other hand, MCI's Bands 5's (GG-15's) are primarily management positions generally assisted by deputies or operations officers. Management skill sets are much more portable and gaps can be covered more easily than the seniors. At the Band 4 level (GG-13/14), there are several critical subject matters experts (SMEs) who also might be considered for succession risk. Succession management is only one way to protect from knowledge loss. Changes to organizational structure can bridge gaps to critical positions and lessen the impact of knowledge loss.

According to Human Capital (HC) reports, approximately, 32% of MCI Bands 4 and 5 will reach their minimum retirement age within five years. Additionally, 23% of all MCI employees will reach their minimum retirement age within five years. These employees retain a wealth of

knowledge gained through years of experience. Clearly, this poses a potential threat to the continuity of corporate knowledge, experience and innovation. Succession planning is a method of grooming less tenured staff to ensure the availability of capable personnel ready to assume key or critical positions.

Stakeholder programs are linked to succession management through shared priorities or rely on coordination or collaboration for successful execution, especially within small organizations. It is absolutely essential to identify key stakeholders for successful succession planning. Within MCI and the Marine Corps as a whole, these include but are not limited to the following:

- Leadership programs
- Joint Duty Assignments (JDAs)
- Competitive Programs (i.e., Marine Corps Command and Staff College, or Industrial College of the Armed Forces)
- Mentoring programs
- Training and Education programs
- Career Development Program (CDP)
- Individual Development Plan (IDP)
- Internal and External Recruiting
- Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP)
- Strategic Plans
- Human Capital (or Workforce) Strategic Plans
- Intelligence Community Oversight Programs

Conceptual Framework

This research expands on the practical ideal type conceptual framework for succession planning developed by Sharon Ley (2002). According to Patricia Shields, practical ideal types provide benchmarks with which to understand and improve reality. In this case, the practical ideal type outlines the ideal elements with which all succession planning models should be based.

In looking at applying succession planning to federal agencies, it is essential to examine regulations on hiring and promotions in order to ensure that the model complies. The remainder of this paper provides an examination and justification of the elements of a successful succession plan through a review of pertinent literature and provides various factors and recommendations on how these elements apply to MCI.

The conceptual framework of this paper consists of the following categories as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Succession Planning Conceptual Framework

1. Top Management Support

Before succession planning can be implemented in any organization it is imperative that organizations obtain both leadership and executive buy-in for the initiative. Literature cautions that without this support, even if a succession plan is identified, the plan will never take flight within the culture of the organization. Indeed, according to Bill Byham, the CEO of Development Dimensions International (DDI), "succession management has to be a senior management program". Executives and managers are uniquely positioned to assess how their

mission will be carried out and to identify the human capital capabilities needed to do so effectively. It is the responsibility of leadership to set the standard for implementation of the program by leading through example, thus instilling the importance of the plan. The leadership and executive staff within an organization are the connecting link between direction and management of a succession plan and are responsible for translating direction and general policies into more specific policies and programs.

Management is responsible for determining the criteria of an organization's succession plan. In addition to specifying the conditions under which a succession planning program will be initiated, executive and management staff are responsible for ensuring that the plan is carried out. Succession planning should be incorporated into employee performance evaluations, and it is the responsibility of management to ensure employees are aware of the concepts and processes involved. Given the importance of obtaining senior leadership and management support, organizations may develop formal processes to communicate the value of, and ultimately secure support for succession planning activities.

2. Dedicated Responsibility

As with any program, a succession plan should have a project planner or team assigned to administer it and ensure that the plan stays current and relevant. Without a planner dedicated to ensuring that the program is being utilized, there will be no accountability for the plans' success. The planner must be temperamentally interested in details, and have the capacity for extensive analysis and synthesis, as well as have both the management and employee perspectives in mind in order to track future succession planning needs of the organization. Succession planning is an on-going activity that must be monitored once established; it is something that forms a subset of broader organizational approaches to workforce planning which seek to ensure in general that the right people are in the right place at the right time to achieve mission success. Having a single staff in place to monitor succession planning fosters a systematic approach in which the organization can implement the process.

In addition to communicating the value of succession management to the organization, literature suggests the importance of keeping leadership updated on the candidates considered

for successor talent pools. Periodic updates on the succession planning process should be provided throughout the course of the year. Ultimately, while it is the leadership's responsibility to drive succession planning, the project planner and HC play a role in ensuring that the staff is aware of governance issues and developments with respect to leadership objectives.

3. Needs Driven Assessment

In order to create an effective succession planning model, an assessment of current employees' skills and interests must be completed. Through a needs driven assessment, an organization can identify what positions are mission critical and what skill sets are necessary for performing the duties required of those positions. Mission critical, or key positions in an organization, are those that have a significant impact on the work that needs to be performed. Ley explains that it is necessary to perform a needs assessment, as it is essential to identify critical skill sets in order to determine how to most effectively implement all succession planning criteria, such as training requirements.

One way to determine which positions are critical is to perform an assessment of the competency levels of current employees. This will help determine the number of those available and capable of fulfilling future functional requirements, as well as what recruitment, training, and other strategies need to be employed to address workforce gaps and surpluses. An effective way to conduct this assessment is through a checklist including ratings of competency levels such as: advanced, intermediate, beginning, or none. Ideally, each manager and employee should conduct the assessment, and then collaborate on the results. Another method of conducting the assessment is through "capability templates," which can be used as a basis for benchmarking the skills required for critical roles and guiding learning and development for those individuals identified as having potential.

In assessing the needs of an organization, it is often also appropriate to perform external benchmarking by studying external recruitment markets. For example, through assessing what positions are in high demand at other IC agencies, programs can better understand their potential or risk of retaining critical positions in the future. In this assessment,

the organization can draw on a demographic analysis flowing from the broader workforce planning framework, and analyze the gap between current capability for key roles and future requirements to identify strategies for closing the gap.

Effective succession planning involves preparing the organization for a change in leadership, but it also includes assessing what has been valuable and how that can be preserved in the future. Once key positions have been determined through the needs driven assessment, a successful succession plan should include building a job profile for each position; communicating primary knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes required for key jobs; developing an inventory of prospective candidates; designing a plan for each candidate; and providing development opportunities. Higher-level HC and typically the organizational development department, can create the standard guidelines and tools for the overall process, which local HC can then customize to fit function- or area-specific needs (*e.g.,* competencies).

4. Professional Development Opportunities

Beyond identifying what skill sets and knowledge bases are required for key positions, it is crucial that a succession plan provide a method or plan for providing employees the opportunity for professional development. Since experience and job knowledge are highly valued for succession, it is necessary that organizations provide employees with the opportunity to develop and advance these skills. These opportunities can be accomplished through job assignments, training, or job rotation, and it is one of the best ways for employees to gain additional knowledge and skills. Other opportunities for professional development can include**:** specialized training programs, conducting lessons-learned meetings, developing job aids, allowing employees to work closely with key staff members or to 'shadow' other employees who are or may be departing, and establishing a formal mentoring program. When providing these development opportunities, it is important to develop clear timeframes and perform periodic evaluation to monitor the effectiveness of the program.

Successful succession planning models should include planned career paths for employees. Career paths provide employees a map from their current position to the position they aspire to reach. Specifically, career paths should provide information on what skill sets

and knowledge bases an employee will need for positions in the future, and offer suggestions on what training and development opportunities will provide those skills. Cross training or job rotation is among the most effective means of developing employee's understanding of specific functions. Disseminating responsibility for job functions among multiple employees is critical for succession planning because, in order to avoid gaps in knowledge, several employees must be the owners of the knowledge in an organization. While formalized training can be useful for developing an employee's knowledge and skill base, organizational knowledge is gained primarily through first-hand experience. Cross training and job rotation provides employees exposure to a range of organizational functions, thus allowing them to gain the experience needed to fill any gaps in institutional knowledge created by attrition.

5. Focused Individual Attention

In a performance based selection system, individual employees can be put in a leadership track by being tasked with a special assignment that allows him or her opportunity to grow. Often, leadership tracks are guided by career paths, which provide employees with a road map or stepping stones allowing them to move from their current position to their desired career interest. In providing employees with career paths and listening to their career goals and desires, an organization places a personal responsibility on the employee to ensure that their career goals are achieved. Ultimately, individuals are responsible for their career and accountable for meeting developmental objectives while at the same time gaining and demonstrating new capabilities; therefore, employees should be enabled to select training that suits their career goals. This will also help increase sustainability for the organization.

In order to make employees accountable for this developmental responsibility, advancements in the career path should be explicitly outlined in employee IDPs, and reinforced through DCIPS performance objectives and reflected in self-assessments. During the performance evaluation, individuals and managers should discuss performance, potential and development, and contribute constructively to the implementation of development plans. Dovetailing the career development plan with the succession plan provides exponential value to the organization as well as to its employees.

6. Extends to all Levels of the Organization

Most often, when creating a succession plan, agencies focus on upper level management positions, but in actuality, there are many positions throughout an organization that are critical to its success, thus in implementing a succession plan, organizations should identify talent at all levels. In addition to management positions, other positions that are often chosen for succession planning are information technology specialists, senior analysts, and front-line operations personnel. These are all positions that require an intimate knowledge of an organization that often an outside candidate would not possess. A succession culture should be developed at all levels, not just at the top, with shared responsibility for succession management across the organization. An organization should take into account the career aspirations, values and preferences of all employees, who are given the opportunity to express interest in pursuing leadership roles. In doing this, an organization will build a supply of capable staff.

Succession planning should be openly communicated throughout an organization, as leadership trends are increasingly focusing on sharing knowledge, helping others learn, and building commitment and motivation, with an emphasis on identifying competencies that are most critical for organizational success. These core competencies are those that are embodied across the organization and between job types. Individual competencies should be examined when determining what competencies are most important at the organizational levels. If the individual competencies in the workforce are not congruent with those needed by the organization, workforce planning should pinpoint these gaps. Communication plans for succession planning should be created to encompass key messages, methods for gathering feedback and appropriate uses of various technologies.

7. Part of Strategic Plans

In the ongoing rush of activities, competing demands for attention, and the press of day-to-day decisions, focusing on a viable and responsive strategic agenda is of fundamental importance, and succession planning is a key component to the overall strategic plan for an organization. The strategic plan, which also includes a workforce plan, provides a description

and analysis of where the organization is, and where it will be in the future. Strategic planning provides the vision and measurable program objectives, and the workforce provides a mean through which the objectives of the strategic plan will be achieved. Workforce planning is a comprehensive look at the demographics of an organization's workforce in order to anticipate vacancies, conduct succession planning efforts, and coordinate personnel actions, thus the workforce plan, as a subset of the strategic plan, determines which positions should be included in succession planning.

The workforce and strategic plans pinpoint gaps and surpluses in positions throughout the organization, as well as identify what positions are most critical. Succession planning is included in workforce and strategic plans as a means of addressing staffing gaps and setting measurable goals and timeframes. Through workforce planning, HC ensures that the organization has the necessary workforce capacity to meet its strategic goals by: defining the current, near, and far future working environments.

Table 1 below provides a checklist of the practical ideal type categories for an effective succession plan as described in the conceptual framework above.

Top Management Support
☐ Management is responsible for determining criteria of succession plan
☐ Management is responsible for ensuring succession plan is followed once implemented
Needs Driven Assessment
☐ External benchmarking
☐ Assessment of core competencies to determine gaps, needed skills, and what positions need succession planning
Provide Professional Development Opportunities
☐ Types of opportunities
☐ Career paths
Focused Individual Attention
☐ Listen to employee's goals/desires
☐ Individuals make training choices
☐ Include in performance management
Dedicated Responsibility
☐ Designate coordinator or project planner that keeps plan current
☐ Systematic approach
☐ Keeps track of future needs
Extends to all Levels of Organization
☐ Identify talent at all levels
☐ Open communication and knowledge of plan
Part of Strategic Plans
☐ Strategic plan determines which positions will be in succession plan
☐ Have written purpose statement and measurable goals

Table 1 Succession Plan Checklist

The Human Factor

As we've learned from the research detailed above, succession management serves an organization by lessening the impact of knowledge loss of key personnel and easing the transition of the chosen replacements. Under Merit Systems Principles, succession management means a pool of qualified candidates competing for the impending vacated position, so these recommendations will be applied across all candidates in the pool giving each equal opportunity to compete without favoritism.

A documented and repeatable process for succession management is essential. This should not be a static process, but continuously running and updated annually according to ODNI guidance. Since government is not run with a profit motive, the effect on mission of a poor transition does not have a meaningful dollar figure attached. Instead, the lack of a succession management plan or a poorly managed one can be gaps in leadership, and delays in organizational responsiveness that can damage credibility and effectiveness leaving your customer adrift and disillusioned with your organization's commitment to the mission.

Questions to be asked:

- Who are the key people?
- Do they know what their responsibilities are?
- Are they engaged with the process?

As with so many processes that can become bureaucratic, the overlooked factor is the human factor. Don't forget about the people transitioning out. It may seem obvious, but the key focus of this process should be bringing the key personnel into the program in such a manner that puts emphasis on their impact on future longevity and success of the organization. The succession management process should not give the appearance of trying to push them out. If this happens, it will most likely result in a rocky process and a resentful senior fighting the plan rather than facilitating the transition.

Time to adequately run the process is always variable. Will there be enough time? This is occasionally dictated by external factors; retirement, permanent change of station, etc. However, the human factor often delays initiation of the plan. It's natural for key personnel to feel trepidation about leaving. They may feel:

- "I'm not ready to go yet."

- “I haven’t made up my mind.”
- “I have many good years left in me.”
- “What if they consider me a lame duck?”

The variability involved with the human factor is the exact reason why a succession management process should be in place and running continuously to prepare the field of succession candidates. To counter the potential delays caused by human factors, key personnel should be encouraged to take an active role to prepare the field of successors through vigorous mentoring, shadowing, and coaching. Making coaches available to transitioning key personnel will have a high return on investment by increasing commitment and ensuring an effective process that passes the baton in a seamless way.

MCI is part of the larger IC. It is the smallest of such agencies. Key personnel that leave the organization, perhaps transferring to other IC agencies, can still maintain a key role in its future success as “grey beards”, situational mentors, and supporters of its foundation within the community or perhaps with lawmakers. A succession that goes badly makes this post-transition scenario less likely.

A case for internal successors:

- Provides someone that understands the mission and internal workings of the organization.
- Creates growth within the organization. A rising tide floats all boats providing a career path.
- Provides a quick transition so the organization demonstrates to its customers a return to effective business.
- If external experience is considered value-added for the position, the succession candidate pool should consider utilization of JDAs.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Although MCI already has many preliminary elements and stakeholder programs established to support succession management, a cohesive plan does not exist and needs to be completed. In order to fully implement a successful succession planning model in accordance with ODNI requirements, the organization should focus on creating a formalized and standardized approach to succession. Appendix B provides a series of sample succession

planning templates. [xiii] Once a Succession Planning Team (SPT) is formulated, these templates could be utilized to initiate the process and help maintain an effective plan.

Of note, the *Succession Planning Status Worksheet Example* (Appendix B) shows that five positions should receive the highest priority in the succession planning strategy. However, limiting the strategy to five positions would limit the number of potential leaders targeted to receive leadership developmental opportunities, and who could fill leadership vacancies. We recommend developing an acceleration pool (or talent pool) of high-potential employees to receive enhanced developmental experiences. By using an acceleration pool, MCI can increase the number of employees who will be prepared to step into KLPs. Also, the SPT will need to exercise care in developing a plan for selecting high-potential employees for the acceleration pool. The SPT should consider the following when identifying high-potential employees:

- MCI will be expending significant resources on the enhanced development of those in the acceleration pool – it is important to include only those who have real potential for leadership positions.
- It is equally important to develop a process that ensures that every employee with leadership potential is fairly and thoroughly considered for participation.
- As previously mentioned, because MCI is a federal agency, the selection process must conform to merit system principles of fair and open competition.
- MCI will also want to ensure that the selection process results in a diverse group of employees to include in the acceleration pool.

Additional Recommendations

Following are additional recommendations for fully implementing succession planning at MCI:

- Periodic job rotation of key Band 4/5 (GG-14/15) employees within all elements of MCI.
- Include succession planning goals/requirements in performance objectives for KLPs and other high-potential employees.
- Include succession planning goals/requirements in the MCI CDP and employee IDPs.
- Identify a billet/person to be assigned as the Succession Management Planner (possibly the MCIA Strategic Planner) and lead the SPT.

- Establish a Succession Planning and Career Development panel of experts from across MCI to meet at least quarterly.
- Include the concept and implementation of Succession Planning in the MCI Strategic Plan as well as the COOP –the top down approach will compel others across MCI to adopt and implement the change.
- For each billet or KLP identified as essential, ensure they are actively enrolled and engaged in mentoring/coaching programs to facilitate development of successor candidates.
- Leverage use of JDAs to support succession planning –the 9 Block Model [xiv] (Figure 3) in the JDA candidate screening package/application is a useful resource.

Figure 3 JDA 9 Block Model

Appendix A: List of Imperatives and Practices for Small Organizations

Appendix B: Succession Planning Templates

Sources

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