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Investing in yourself: one university's leadership models

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ABSTRACT

Looking at higher education institutions today, one constant that is readily noticed is change. Change is indeed inevitable in all organizations; however, we can temper that change to include growing our own successor in order for our leadership components to continue and provide continuity in the workplace. Smooth management transitions are infrequent and when a leader leaves or retires, no matter if a vice-president, supervisor, manager, chairperson, director, often, there is no one prepared to replace them. Succession planning and/or leadership development models have been accomplished at one university will be discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Leadership, succession planning, leadership development



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One of the keys to success in any organization is having a leadership training program that provides a conduit into a promotion or administrative position. Succession planning programs or leadership training programs identify and recognize talented employees before the competition can lure them away. This type of coaching provides continuity in the growth and vision of an organization and in the smaller venue provides continuity within departments. Whether your organization calls this type of leadership program succession planning or simply grooming employees for administrative roles, there is no single approach that can be used for all organizations.

INTRODUCTION

In a higher education setting, there are many instances where leadership training can facilitate the movement of employees from faculty or staff positions into administrative roles. There is a constant demand for competent leaders in all organizations; but, building an effective leadership training strategy can be challenging. In the paragraphs that follow, several models that provide experiences for leadership training will be discussed.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership (Wilson, 2011), an investment by managers or supervisors of 70% leadership assignments, 20% developmental relationships in the organization and 10% leadership training and coursework is necessary to guide employees toward a leadership mentality. However, this rule does not provide detailed guidance about specific types of work experiences that provide the most learning and growth for employees and does not indicate the leadership lessons provided by the experiences (Wilson, et.al, 2011). Although this rule provides some awareness of the different types of experiences necessary for leadership development, many organizations still do not have systematic plans in place to groom leadership.

Wilson (2011) identified one global collaborative effort as five basic sources of leadership developmental experiences: 1) bosses and superiors, 2) turnarounds, 3) increases in scope, 4) horizontal moves, and 5) new initiatives. Role-modeling by bosses and superiors was considered important because observing and experiencing how a supervisor behaves and handles disputes in the workplace provides an approach for employees to model. These supervisors can play distinct roles: positive role models, teachers, catalysts, mentors, or negative role models who have a positive impact (Wilson, et.al, 2011). The second type of leadership experience deals with turnarounds or repairing an organization that is floundering or in decline by changing the institutional structure as well as its culture. Promoting and increasing an employee's responsibility to provide for a wider scope of financial and human resources is what is meant by increases in job scope. Horizontal moves calls for new expertise and new experiences as an employee transitions to a new line of work within an organization. Lastly, new initiatives are those leadership experiences that expand the employee's interaction to a broader area or geographical location extending the scope of the business at hand (Wilson, et. al., 2011).

Another successful leadership program was developed by Susan Schaeffler (Olson, 2008) of the Charter School Network. Her premise is that in order to provide continuity and successful leadership, each of her schools is equipped with two vice-principals so that if one principal leaves or retires, there is another person ready and willing to take over. This process, called *Fisher Fellows*, was the first in leadership development followed closely by other initiatives such as *Principal Prep Pathway*, *Teacher Leader Pathway* and *Mile Family Fellowship pathway*, each

providing leadership opportunities for individuals at all levels of the Charter School Network (Olson, 2008).

Many community colleges and universities have also begun to plan for the retirement of baby boomers by producing their own leadership programs to help alleviate the leadership drain that may be approaching. Two individuals, Scott and Sanders-McBryde, played a part in a community college leadership development program and offered useful pointers for community colleges that are planning to have leadership development or succession planning program. They list five principles that would apply to all leadership programs for community colleges: 1) college administrative support promotes a significant succession planning outcome; 2) never consider your leadership program a class; 3) avoid the in-house crowd; 4) form a team in deed, not in word; 5) challenge your administration to implement as feasible (Scott & Sanders-McBryde, 2012).

How do individuals gain knowledge and experience in leadership? Individuals that are being groomed for leadership roles need to be in a position to learn the job from the ground up. These individuals may not always have the prerequisite skills for certain positions, but they are expected to learn what it takes to perform the job which may be measured in years not in months. Some ways to identify leadership characteristics in future leaders are to look for: vision, character and integrity; performance talks louder than promises; leaders know how much they don't know; must be able to communicate well vertically and horizontally; should bear the blame and bestow the credit (Seeds, 2013). The process of creating new leaders begins with their first leadership role. It is in this position that the individual can make the transition from contributor to leader (Wilkins, Snell & Thomas, 2012). Individuals may lack the initial confidence in their skills to handle all the challenges that are set before them, yet these individuals are the very people that provide the leadership among employees who are responsible for the execution of the strategy and those senior managers and executives who define corporate strategy. So a leadership program should include recruitment to area leadership talent; assessments to evaluate leadership capabilities both internally and externally, performance management to monitor and make course corrections in developing leaders; internal mobility to provide development and promotion opportunities; succession planning to avoid future leadership gaps; career planning to allow employees to understand their leadership options and set their own development goals and development to create in-role mastery and accelerate high-potential leaders (Wilkins, Snell & Thomas, 2012).

In order to establish the competencies noteworthy to initial leadership achievements, Development Dimensions International, Inc. performed more than 700 job analyses. The competencies identified included managing relationships, guiding interactions, coaching for success, coaching for improvement, influencing, delegation/empowerment, judgment, problem/opportunity analysis, and planning and organizing (Wilkins, Snell & Thomas, 2012). In a similar leadership training program, the following abilities were listed as critical for leadership: communication, creativity, vision, image and ability to see how their specialized skills fit into the total organization (Andrica, 1994).

“Education leaders want to accomplish goals that matter, inspire others to join them in working toward those goals and leave a lasting legacy” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). In their article, *Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership* (2004), they list seven principles from their study that define sustainable leadership which are: 1) sustainable leadership matters, 2) sustainable leadership lasts, 3) sustainable leadership spreads, 4) sustainable leadership is socially just, 5) sustainable leadership is resourceful, 6) sustainable leadership promotes

diversity, 7) sustainable leadership is activist (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Using principles from all these different models will assist in creating a leadership program that is slated for success.

Patricia Nugent (2008) indicates that succession planning in public education is not a straight transfer of skills. “Teachers tend to be exclusive, wanting only those who have risen from their ranks to be administrators. In some cases school counselors, social workers and school psychologists, with skills in mediation, conflict resolution and facilitation are often rejected out of hand based on a lack of classroom experience” (Nugent, 2008). Although this should not be the case, many times search committees do indeed single this out as a deficiency in individual applicants. Another item that tends to occur in some cases is that even the elite and smartest individuals, simply don’t wish to transfer given the minor difference in salaries for the amount of work to be done.

One key element to grooming your successor and guaranteeing their success is to surround yourself with talent. Begin by developing the leadership of several different individuals by mentoring and teaching them how you do your job or different facets of your job. Lead with transparency so that these possible successors understand what your job entails and how you navigate through the challenges. Provide these individuals with lists and contacts for completing tasks so that they are able to take over certain responsibilities as soon as possible. Once you have transferred as much knowledge as possible, then it is time to get out of the way and allow them to begin to make their way in the new environment (Hurt, 2012). “The sole purpose of mentoring was once career advancement and promotion, which explains why mentoring was often seen as merely an activity to groom the next generation of leaders. The goal of mentoring today has shifted to focus on helping someone gain new insights and abilities (Emelo, 2011).

MODELS FROM ONE UNIVERSITY

Recognizing the talent within an organization and grooming those employees to take on greater challenges gives an organization depth and strengthens the very foundation of the enterprise. Because good leaders surround themselves with talented people, they are not afraid to bring others along. Doing this insures the success of the organization and the ability to attract and retain employees.

The authors examined attempts made by a mid-size university in South Texas to recognize this talent and groom employees to take on greater challenges. This particular university is geographically isolated with the closest major metroplex approximately five hours away. Enticement and recruitment of faculty and professional staff is often difficult because of its location in the state. The university is faced with identifying and nurturing future leadership talent as a primary concern. Two faculty leadership models, *Provost Fellows* and *ULead*, and one staff model, *The Next Generation*, were identified as being successful. These model projects are applicable in other universities regardless of the size of the organization.

Faculty Leadership/Grooming Initiatives

The first project is entitled the *Provost Fellows* initiative which was designed to encourage faculty to consider administrative and supervisory roles. The project funds two to three fellows each year. Faculty have an opportunity to apply and be selected based on their interest in helping to solve a particular administrative need. Administrative needs have ranged

from designing a freshmen year experience program, researching and proposing policy for the central administration of all academic on line course development, approval, and implementation, reviewing and redesigning a comprehensive assessment and data management system for all academic program to meet accreditation requirements, and creating of a faculty resource center for instructional support. If selected by the Provost, faculty receives release time, a modest stipend and one year to submit their recommendations. In some cases, an extension of time is allowed. In the process of completing their task, faculty become acquainted with university senior management, attends executive level meetings and learn to navigate the university administrative protocols.

This leadership initiative serves to meet critical university needs that the university has identified; but just as importantly, provides faculty with a taste of administrative responsibilities and leadership. To be selected as a *Provost Fellow* rewards faculty, motivates faculty into considering a leadership role in their university and helps identify future leaders for the organization. While the individual focuses on a single yet complex task, the process for addressing the task is one that acquaints them with various units within the university thus giving them a broader perspective of the organization for which they can consider taking on more responsibility.

The second model found was a larger initiative for faculty entitled *ULead*. This particular initiative was organized by a group of faculty, the Faculty Leadership Development Committee and implemented by a former *Provost Fellow*. The purpose of *ULead* is to provide faculty an opportunity to develop skills for sustained leadership within the university. Faculty is selected by the committee based on their commitment to leadership development from theory to practice and on their willingness to transmit the core values of the university mission. This one year program accepts approximately seven tenured and non-tenured faculty members each year who are nominated or self-nominated for the program. Members of the Faculty Leadership Development Committee developed the curriculum and serve as core faculty along with other invited guest lecturers. Participants are provided with a reading list of classic readings in organizational behavior, leadership theory, and other essential university functions such business functions, foundational skills, strategic planning and implementation, and personal leadership development. Specific topics are presented in case study format, interactive approaches and short lectures. Such topics include (1) Ethics and Culture (2) Goal Setting and Expectations (3) Conflict Resolution Management and (4) Introducing and Managing Organizational Change. Faculty meet through the fall and spring semesters taking one full day a month to attend and all day class. Upon conclusion of the program, faculty receives recognition at a ceremony attended by their peers and senior management officials. Participation in this initiative can be recorded on their vita.

The authors completed a follow up of faculty who participated in the two faculty initiatives described and after reviewing records for the past four years found that while many faculty continued in their roles as faculty, others had indeed moved into administrative positions within the same university. These records indicated that some of the selected *ULead* faculty now held positions of Dean of the College of Education, Director of Student Advising, Director of the Faculty Center for Instructional Support, Director of Student Relations and Community Support to name a few. A greater understanding of administration in higher education and a deeper commitment to university values was expressed by many who continued in their faculty role.

The third model to be discussed is one designed for staff. This is a much larger initiative in that it focused on identifying, nurturing, and moving talented staff into key professional

leadership positions that often a university does not recruit in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or other national publications but who do play a key role in the university. Finding talented professional staff at this university that is so geographically challenged has been difficult.

Staff Leadership/ Grooming Initiative

The Next Generation Academy was created for the purpose of preparing the next generation of professional staff to take over key administrative positions. This is a two year program that accepts ten to twelve staff members identified by their direct supervisor as showing promise as a future leader. Because of staff working hours, it is imperative that their supervisor agrees to give the staff member time away from their duties to participate. This particular leadership development model was found in the Division of Student Affairs where the Vice President for Student Affairs, working with other key directors in the division, created the two year curriculum. Faculty for the academy was drawn from university senior management officials, academic faculty with specific expertise in organizational leadership and invited community business leaders and area school district administrators.

Academy participants were given a list of readings for the two year period that ranged from leadership theory, University Regents' policy, successful business models found in various literature reviews and budgeting and procurement operations. Half day classes were held once a month during the two long semesters with class activities ranging from interactive exercises, campus tours of "behind the scenes" administrative offices, forum discussions and problem solving assignments. Emphasis on good customer relations, conflict resolution, ethics, and human resource management was a recurring theme. The summer was used to address a major task assigned to the participants by the Vice President of Student Affairs that focused on finding enrollment management solutions or grant writing.

Upon completion of the two year program, staff members were recognized at a graduation ceremony. Peers, family members, and senior management attend the ceremony. Completion of this program offers staff an opportunity to add their participation in this leadership program on their vita.

The academy experience was a leadership development and grooming experience for staff employees who demonstrated a desire and a potential for greater responsibility. Reviewing the records of individuals who participated in the two year *Next Generation Academy* the authors found many successful leadership stories. One individual moved to become a Registrar and Director of Admissions, another Vice President of Student Affairs at different institution, and a third became a community college President. Other participants became Directors of Financial Aid, Associate Vice Presidents for Enrollment Management, Budget Officers and one a local attorney to name a few.

SUMMARY

In today's challenging university climates, it is imperative to establish continuity in leadership. Succession planning is as important to higher education as it is to the private sector. As the literature reveals, those organizations who have addressed this need are those that will face the future with a sense of employee commitment and certainty. As baby boomers begin to retire, especially in higher education, we can now begin to see many examples of grooming the next generation of university leadership. Successful university leadership is best found when it

is groomed from the ground up. Many examples of model programs can be found on university campuses. The authors focused on three successful models in a mid-size university in South Texas; but, which could easily be found in many other universities.

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