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Factors that are Important to Succession Planning: A Case Study of One Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology

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Introduction

The Canadian population is aging; many are rapidly advancing towards the age of normal retirement (Miner, 2010). The demographics for Ontario colleges are similar; in 2009, 70 percent of administrators and faculty were baby boomers, and 40 percent of the workforce in the college sector was eligible for retirement (OCASA, 2009). In 2010, there were approximately 7,051 full-time academic staff and 2,069 full-time administrative staff employed at Ontario Colleges (Colleges Ontario, 2010). Moreover, “with the emergence of our knowledge economy, the proportion of the labour force requiring some form of education or training beyond high school will increase dramatically” (Miner, 2010, p. 1); Ontario colleges will play a vital role in efforts to increase participation in post-secondary education in the province (Colleges Ontario, 2009). Given the colleges’ aging workforce and Ontario’s projected skilled worker shortage there is a real need for colleges to actively engage in systematic succession planning and management programs.

Succession planning and management is a process that not only helps with the stability and tenure of key personnel but is also “perhaps best understood as any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department or work group by making provision for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people over time” (Rothwell, 2005, p. 10). Furthermore, any succession planning and management program is a systematic effort that ensures continuity in key positions, the retention and development of intellectual and knowledge capital for the future and encourages individual development and advancement (Rothwell, 2005).

The purpose of this research study was to determine the factors that are important for succession planning at an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT) as perceived by administrative staff at one large multiculturally diverse Ontario CAAT, located in one large urban centre in southern Ontario. The study aimed to explore college administrators’ perceptions of the opportunities and challenges for succession planning at their college and to determine strategies that best support the implementation of succession planning as perceived by participants. Finally, it was hoped that a document review of the college’s policy statements, business and strategic plans, and related public websites and documentation of affiliated bodies would facilitate the identification of possible concerns and strategies for succession planning in the college sector.

Review of the Literature

Although succession planning has been a common business practice it is only in the last decade that it has been a consideration in the academic sector; with much of the research emanating out of the United States. The only Canadian study acquired through the literature review was that of Cembrowski and da Costa (1998); their inquiry on managers' perceptions of career development and succession planning at a western Canadian Postsecondary Technical Institute provided insights on possible career development plans.

In reviewing the literature on succession planning in higher education I identified four specific themes, namely, the growing awareness of the need for succession planning in academia (Desbiens, 2010; González, 2010; OCASA, 2009; Wallin, 2006; Wallin, D.L., Cameron, D.W., & Kent S., 2005; Ward, 2008); leadership development and competencies (AACC, 2005; Ebbers, Conover, & Samuels, 2010; Geroy et al. 2005; Richards, 2009; Wallin et al., 2005); organizational culture (Desbiens, 2010; Geroy et al., 2005; Luna, 2010; Richards, 2009); and succession planning models and processes (Cembrowski and da Costa, 1998; Geroy et al., 2005; Greer & Virick, 2008; Richards, 2009; Wallin et al., 2005)

I believed that by exploring factors that are important for succession planning at one large multicultural Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology, located in a large urban centre in southern Ontario there was an opportunity to build on research to date. Moreover, I hoped that the results of the exploratory descriptive case study would not only add to the body of literature on succession planning in higher education but specifically provide valuable insights and a framework for further research on succession planning in Ontario colleges.

Research Design and Methodology

This was a sequential, mixed methods case study of one Ontario CAAT, which is referred to by the pseudonym Southern College. In phase one of the study the public documents and websites of organizational bodies associated with Ontario Colleges, and private and public documents of Southern College were reviewed. The documents and websites were subjected to qualitative content analysis with relevant themes identified for further exploration in phase two. In phase two, a survey questionnaire was developed by me based on the themes that arose out of the literature review and the qualitative document analysis of phase one. The anonymous quantitative survey was distributed to 219 fulltime and contract administrative staff at Southern College with a final response rate of 19.63% (n=44). Finally, in phase three, I conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with four key informants at Southern College: a corporate department manager, an academic department manager, a Chair and a Dean. Interviewees were identified using the pseudonyms Susan, Roger, David and Michael. The interviews were based on the themes that arose out of phase two, and provided deeper insights into the study topic.

Presentation and Analysis of the Findings

As key informants at Southern College the administrators that participated in this study provided valuable insights on the factors and strategies that could best support the development and implementation of succession planning at the college. The study focused on three questions that guided me throughout the entire study.

1. What are the concerns of the broader college sector regarding the challenges and best practices of succession planning in Ontario CAATs as identified in public documents and websites?
2.
 - a. To what extent is succession planning included (or not) in Southern College's strategic and business plans, and other relevant documentation?
 - b. What strategies best support the implementation of succession planning at Southern College as perceived by participating key informants?
3. What are the perceptions of the study participants regarding the opportunities and challenges for succession planning at Southern College?

Research Question Number One:

What are the concerns of the broader college sector regarding the challenges and best practices of succession planning in Ontario CAATs as identified in public documents and websites?

Data to answer this question were derived from a review of public documents and websites of organizational bodies affiliated with Ontario colleges; I hoped that the review would identify the extent to which succession planning is seen as a priority, or not, within the sector. I read the public documents and websites of Colleges Ontario (CO), the Ontario College Administrative Staff Association (OCASA) and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) and based my search on the four themes identified in the literature review. My goal was to identify current challenges and best practices of succession planning for Ontario CAATs.

Although a review of public documents and websites of Colleges Ontario (CO), the Ontario College Administrative Staff Association (OCASA) and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) did indicate an increased awareness of succession planning, I found very little information that identified the concerns of the broader college sector regarding the challenges and best practices of succession planning. This is consistent with my review of the literature and would appear to support the premise that although there was an increased awareness of the need for succession planning as identified by amongst others Desbiens (2010), González (2010), and Wallin (2006) the means by which succession planning can be implemented in Ontario CAATs was not identified. Moreover, the additional themes of leadership development and competencies, organizational culture, and succession planning processes and models identified in the literature review were absent from

the public documents that I reviewed; there was little evidence that any of the organizations with an interest in administrative staff in the Ontario colleges were even aware of these issues. Given their importance I found it surprising that college focused organizations did not address these issues in a more explicit and systemic manner.

Research Question Number Two:

(a) To what extent is succession planning included (or not) in Southern College's strategic and business plans, and other relevant documentation?

Data to answer this question were derived from Southern College's public and private documentation along with the 2010-11 strategic and business plans of the college, eight academic departments and 14 corporate departments; private documentation was obtained from and used by permission of Southern College's Office of the Vice-President, Corporate. Only one corporate area with a heavy interest in succession planning indicated the need to complete a college wide succession plan—with some areas in particular being identified as high need. Additionally, one academic department did identify the completion of a succession plan as a goal; while another academic area mentioned the implementation of a plan that supports planned retirements—perhaps, more of a replacement plan than a succession one? I found that the lack of thought given to the actual processes and models of succession planning corresponds to the overall literature review theme of the lack of consideration for succession planning within the academic sector—in contrast to the business sector—and the corresponding absence of succession planning models and processes within the higher educational sector.

On the other hand, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the professional development of staff. This is the one area/theme that I found prevailed throughout. The majority of departments identified the professional development of their staff as a goal for the upcoming year. However, little mention of leadership development was made. Of the eight academic and 14 corporate areas reviewed only one academic and one corporate area spoke specifically to leadership development. Nevertheless, the introduction of a new leadership/management development program was identified as a focus in one key corporate area. As the literature review found there is a need for the inclusion of succession planning in professional development programs (Wallin et al., 2005).

The need for funding for succession planning was identified as an important requirement by one key corporate area. Given the tight fiscal constraints in which the academic sector traditionally operates I found it quite surprising that funding of succession planning did not emerge as a theme in the literature review. I would assume that should an institute of higher education wish to implement a formal succession planning process the issue of funding the plan would be of particular importance. However, Rothwell's (2005) best practice approaches to succession planning and talent management include the need for senior

management buy-in and involvement in succession planning—is it therefore, natural to conclude that the full support of senior management would include the necessary fiscal support?

I found it interesting that despite the fact that Southern College is a large multiculturally diverse college, only one area identified the “development of a workforce that mirrors the diversity of the community” as a goal. As identified in the literature review (Wallin et al., 2005) it is imperative that community colleges are mindful of diverse populations while Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) recommend asking if there is an emphasis on employing a diverse group of individuals when developing a succession plan.

(b) What strategies best support the implementation of succession planning at Southern College as perceived by participating key informants?

Succession Planning at the College

I asked respondents to the anonymous quantitative survey if the college had a formal succession planning policy or process in place and if their respective department/division had a formal succession planning policy or process in place. Of the 44 respondents 4% (n=2) indicated that there was a formal succession planning policy or process at the college with 4% (n=2) indicating its existence at the departmental level. Meanwhile, 39% (n=17) of respondents did not know if a plan existed at the college level and 14% (n=6) did not know if a plan was in place at the departmental level. Finally, 57% (n=25) indicated a plan did not exist at the college level while 82% (n=36) stated that a plan did not exist at the departmental level. Overall, the majority of respondents indicated that neither the college nor their department had a formal succession planning policy or process in place. Moreover, respondents appeared to be more aware of succession planning activity at the departmental level as the percentage of “don’t knows” were higher at the college level, 39% versus 14%. It would appear that there is greater communication at the departmental level and therefore, when implementing any succession planning activity Southern College should ensure that their staff are kept informed throughout the process and any plan is communicated thoroughly throughout all levels of the college.

Overwhelmingly, survey participants perceived the need for the college to engage in succession planning with 95% (n=42) indicating a need for succession planning and 5% (n=2) of respondents thinking there wasn’t a need for the college to engage in succession planning. Likewise, 93% of respondents (n=39) were of the opinion that the college was not adequately prepared for the retirement of administrative staff; 7% of participants (n=3) believed the college to be adequately prepared.

In particular, the written comments presented by participants spoke of the lack of succession planning at Southern College with the dominant perception been that there is no real planning for retiree replacements. Nevertheless, informal succession planning was occurring at the departmental level with strategies in place to encourage development of high potentials.

Additionally, there was concern expressed as to the number of staff scheduled to retire over the next 5-10 years; as many have worked at the college for many years and unless their “job knowledge” is captured in some way it will be lost. The extent to which the college should engage in a formal succession planning process was explored further in the semi-structured interviews. All four participants in the semi-structured interview stage were in agreement as to the need for a formal succession planning process at Southern College; and the issue of institutional knowledge emerged as a concern.

I think that the college should have a formal plan in place ... I believe it is important because as staff are aging, in my mind there is a lot of institutional knowledge that could potentially be lost and I believe then that a formal plan would have at least a framework where we could start to retain some of that institutional knowledge. (David)

In keeping with the literature there is most definitely an increased awareness of the need for succession planning at the college and departmental levels (Braithwaite, 2003; Desbiens, 2010; González, 2005; Wallin et al, 2005). Similarly, the development of staff for future promotions was seen as an area that requires dramatic improvement (Giroux, 1989).

There is little doubt that the need to engage in succession planning is acknowledged within the higher educational sector. However, the impact that it can have on employee morale seems to be neglected somewhat. The participants in this study felt strongly that failing to implement succession planning could not only negatively impact the long-term goals and operations of Southern College but could also have serious consequences for employee morale and retention. It would seem that to the participants in this study the mere act of developing a succession planning model demonstrates that the college is committed to the development and long-term success of its administrative employees.

An interesting theme that emerged from the semi-structured interviews was the importance of succession planning in the recruitment and retention of employees. Susan felt that a succession plan communicates to staff that their employer respects and appreciates them and is willing to invest in them. Michael feels that succession planning can play a role in attracting talent.

I truly believe when people do their due diligence of companies or colleges they are asking what is in it for me, how can I support and help the organization, how can I grow with the organization, does the organization really care about my career development and can I see myself here longer than the 3-5 year plan.

Strategies that best support succession planning

Participants were asked on the quantitative survey if succession planning should be included in the strategic and business plans of Southern College. Overwhelmingly, 93% (n=41) of participants felt it was important while 7% (n=3) felt that succession planning should not be included in the strategic or business plans of the college. This

corresponds to Richards' (2009) finding that succession planning should be aligned to organizational goals. Southern College should consider incorporating succession planning into divisional business plans and should consider including mechanisms that ensure accountability at the departmental level; communication at the departmental level would appear to be greater and therefore, staff involvement and awareness could be facilitated to a greater degree.

Overall, 67% of respondents (n=29) felt that senior management were not committed to succession planning and 82% (n=36) indicated that direct senior management involvement was necessary to the success of any succession planning activity. Therefore, senior management must demonstrate real commitment to the plan through active and direct involvement in the succession planning process and plan. It was felt that they should play a key role in setting direction, establishing priorities, guiding and supporting the process, and ensuring resources—time and fiscal—were available for full implementation of the plan.

The results correspond with the business succession planning literature that contends that succession and management planning should support the strategic direction of the organization. Furthermore, buy-in and hands-on involvement of senior executives is one of the best practice approaches to succession planning (Rothwell, 2005). Moreover, from the academic perspective executive support including the board of trustees and the president is deemed essential for succession planning in higher education (Richards, 2009); with chief executive officer, middle-management and faculty involvement in the broad succession planning process imperative (Fulton-Calkins and Milling, 2005). Although senior management involvement was thought to be essential to the success of succession planning, the majority of participants, 86% (n=38) indicated that human resources should take the lead in developing and implementing succession planning at the college.

On the other hand, 52% (n=22) thought that the Southern College was committed to the leadership development of its administrative staff; 48% (n=20) felt it was not committed. It would appear that participants perceived that there was a greater commitment to leadership development of its administrative staff than succession planning. This is consistent with the literature that I reviewed in that community colleges that have implemented succession planning have built on pre-existing leadership programs (Wallin et al., 2005); and although many colleges are engaged in some form of leadership development there was little evidence of formal succession planning activity or programs.

Southern College is in a position to build-on and adapt current leadership development activities in the development of a succession plan. I would suggest that many colleges may be reluctant to move from the 'increased awareness' stage to actual development of a succession plan as it is such a huge undertaking and literally quite daunting. However, the ability to build on existing activities such as leadership development may encourage higher educational institutes to embrace succession planning, much like their business counterparts.

In the semi-structured interview stage of the study, I explored the means by which Southern College could build the implementation of a succession plan into its current leadership development activities. David felt that leadership development should be a formal, measurable process while Susan suggested that leadership development should be part of the employee performance review process—discussions pertaining to professional development, long term goals, and specific areas of interest. David brought up the practice of leadership portfolios.

I do like the idea of a leadership portfolio, but it is something that I do believe isn't something that should just reside with let's say the Chair ... I think every leader ought to have a portfolio no matter what level they are at, so I would like to see that sort of thing in place.

Furthermore, I asked about professional development activities at the departmental level. Responses were generated using a four point, forced-choice Likert scale with “never” weighted as 1, “rarely” weighted as 2, “sometimes” weighted as 3, and “regularly” weighted as 4. Firstly, I asked if their manager discussed their professional goals with them. Of the 43 respondents 21% (n=9) said “never”, 23% (n=10) “rarely”, 35% (n=15) “sometimes”, and 21% (n=9) “regularly”; a mean response of 2.56, slightly more than “rarely”, and a modal response of “sometimes”. Secondly, I asked if their manager discussed their professional development plan with them, 29% (n=12) indicated “never”, 26% (n=11) “rarely”, 31% (n=13) “sometimes”, and 14% (n=6) “regularly”; a mean response of 2.31, slightly more than “rarely”, and a modal response of “sometimes”.

One survey respondent stated:

I feel the college should do a better job of encouraging and supporting performance and career planning. As part of the manager's performance objectives include contingency planning which would cover who would look after each function in the case of someone leaving. (Anonymous survey response)

I would contend that this may prove an interesting concept especially for leaders who had expressed their intent to retire within the next few years. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as a replacement technique making some feel insecure in their positions. Therefore, if implemented such a process would require a great deal of consideration and communication as to the intent. The development of an effective performance management system is deemed an important component of succession planning and talent management (Rothwell, 2005). Nevertheless, as González (2005) would argue academia has not adopted the business practice of developing leadership through succession planning while Ebbers et al. (2010) recommended engaging the individual in development of a personal plan. Hence, Southern College may consider implementing a systemic professional development program as part of a formal succession plan.

In the semi-structured interviews I queried participants on the processes, methods or strategies that would be necessary to support the implementation of succession planning at Southern College. The interviewees commented on the need to first identify key positions/personnel that are due for retirement in the next few years along with identifying the skills sets and strengths of current administration staff—not only identifying what they do within the college but also their background. Moreover, Roger expressed the need for transparency and open discussions so that the staff are fully aware of possible opportunities. Moreover, although education and experience are important it would give promising young staff who currently do not meet the requirements the opportunity for professional development, so that they can get to the required level. David identified the need for a formal process and documentation.

The human resources department was identified as essential to the development of a plan. Roger felt that the process should start with Human Resources with the development of a high level plan, with training provided to senior administrators so that they could potentially look at succession planning and implementing some of these practices. Additionally, human resources was identified as the vehicle by which an infrastructure could be put in place so that succession planning was top of mind for everyone, especially at the divisional level—so that it could escalate down into divisional plans. “So when we look at devising business plans we will actually see concrete examples of what each area is doing to support a succession plan” (Michael). Again, departmental participation was seen as critical to success.

These findings are consistent with the literature (Fulton-Calkins, & Milling 2005; Gorey et al.; 2005; Richards, 2009; Wallinet al, 2005). From my experiences Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAAT's) operate on a highly centralized system; however, the inherent differences in individual departmental operations—from student services, to academic and corporate departments—can result in operational silos. Therefore, the recurring theme of departmental involvement may be especially significant within the context of Ontario CAATs.

Succession Planning Programs

In the quantitative survey I asked participants about the importance of succession planning programs in preparing them for other positions within the college. Survey responses were generated with a three point, forced-choice Likert scale with “not important” weighted at 1, “important” weighted at 2, and “very important” weighted at 3; and were further examined in the phase three, semi-structured interviews.

Table 1: Succession Planning Programs (morrin-table-1.html)

Leadership Training: leadership training was viewed as the most important succession planning program in preparing participants for other positions within the college with 70% (n=31) of respondents viewing it as “very important”, 25% (n=11) viewing it as “important”, and 5% (n=2) perceiving it as “not important”; just under “very important”.

This is significant for Southern College as it suggests that building on current leadership activities should be explored in developing a succession plan for the college. This corresponds with the literature that I reviewed in that it is advisable for institutes of higher education to utilize leadership development programs as part of a succession planning program (González, 2010, 2005; Wallin 2006; Ward 2008).

In the qualitative phase of the study the interviewees believed leadership training to be an important component of succession planning, but felt strongly as to the format. It was believed that leadership training is not a once-off activity to be offered periodically but should be ongoing —“personally, I would be interested ... but I find that most of the advances I make as a manager, learning and becoming a better manager, are through day-to-day interactions with other managers in my department and learning from them” (Susan). Additionally, it was suggested that leadership training should include a means by which changes in behaviour could be monitored, rather than training in and of itself. In essence, it was felt that although leadership training is beneficial transforming that training into an embedded behaviour is difficult. Finally, although David has had a great deal of experience with leadership training he does not necessarily agree with it.

I find it has in my mind what I would call a westernized notion of leadership and my particular issue with that is that as the college becomes more diverse throughout, a westernized notion of leadership is not going to necessarily work.

Mentorship: the next most important succession planning program with a mean result of slightly more than the mid-point between “important” and “very important” was mentorship; 61% (n=26) of respondents felt that a mentorship program was “very important” in preparing individuals for other positions within Southern college. Furthermore, 30% (n=13) thought it “important”, while 9% (n=4) viewed it as “unimportant”.

Overwhelmingly, interviewees felt that mentoring was a key component of any succession plan, and three of the four had experienced some form of mentorship in their careers, and had sought out both informal and formal mentors at Southern College—it was viewed as important especially for anyone new to the college sector or anyone who might be new to a leadership role.

Mentorship programs have been found to be an important component of succession planning (Ebbers et al., 2010; Wallin et al, 2005). Interviewees had very strong opinions on the opportunities and challenges of a mentoring program. Michael defined a good mentor as “somebody who allows their understudy to actually exceed them; then, they mentorship very well”. Furthermore, Roger argued that a mentor does not have to be someone internal to the organization as many leaders have had someone in their life, whether it is in their family or somewhere else, to guide them. Additionally, he suggested that a mentor could be someone from another CAAT or from the Ontario College Administrative Staff Association (OCASA). In that way, “it is not contentious, and it is

basically in the same environment but it is just a different city in Ontario". It was felt that the selection of appropriate and effective mentors is vital; for instance, people that have exhibited exceptional leadership practices. Finally, one interviewee indicated that a mentor would prove a valuable resource for someone participating in other succession planning programs such as job rotation and secondments (Roger).

Talent Management: talent management was viewed as "very important" by 62% (n=23) of respondents, while 27 % (n=10) of respondents rated it as "important", and 11% (n=4) of participants viewing talent management as "not important"; with a mean response of 2.51, the mid-point between "important" and "very important".

Talent management was seen as a critical component of any succession plan by interviewees in phase three of the study. Michael viewed talent management and leadership training as core principals in succession planning as "if you do your talent management right and find out who you have and what they are missing, you then identify the area that you need to develop and concentrate your efforts on that". Likewise, Roger felt that "talent management seems to be a broader larger term to me and so I guess I would rank that one higher ... to have a proper talent management program job rotation, mentorship, secondment would all be part of that".

Secondments: secondments with a mean of 2.16 were viewed as slightly more than "important" to a succession planning program; 48% (n=21) of respondents felt it was "important", while 34% (n=15) thought it "very important", and 18% (n=8) viewed it as "not important".

At the semi-structured interview phase, three of the four interviewees had been involved in some form of secondment. Secondments were seen as an important vehicle for broadening knowledge and allowing one to participate at different levels. However, caution was expressed as to their temporary nature as the individual does at some stage need to return to his or her original position. "I guess the challenge there is, what sort of obligation does the organization have to make sure that secondment leads to longer term advancement ... if you are right back to where you started two years later it might be a little disheartening" (Susan). Additionally, the support of the human resources department throughout the entire secondment process was seen as vital to success. Finally, including secondments as part of a formal succession planning process would include accountability on the part of the host department's leader so that they can provide direction, support and training.

Administrative Programs: with a mean of 2.02 administrative programs were viewed as "important" to succession planning. 25% (n=11) respondents viewed it as "very important", 52% (n=23) as "important", and 23% (n=10) as "not important".

During the interview phase I questioned participants on the importance of administrative programs, both internal and external—such as those targeted specifically at college administrators. The response was mixed. David felt that administrative programs were extremely important as they can be used to fill gaps in a person's knowledge—"we

learn so much by day-by-day by doing, we don't often have enough time to sit back and really examine what might be the best practices". On the other hand, Michael felt that administrative programs are not targeted at specific groups. In fact, they fall short as every employee at the college should have some kind of administrative program attached to their position.

Job Rotation: similar to administrative programs with a mean response of 1.98 job rotation was seen as slightly less than "important" in developing staff for other positions in the college; 20% (n=9) of participants viewed it as "very important", 57% (n=25) as "important", and 23% (n=10) as "not important".

On the other hand, interview participants ranked job rotation as an integral part of succession planning. Roger stated, "to be a leader you have to actually understand other areas in the college from an intimate level", while David ranked job rotation as a five on a scale of 1-5 (5-most important, 1-least important) as leaders cannot work in isolation but must have a broad understanding of the college. Michael viewed job rotation, like mentorships and secondments as integral pieces of any succession plan. Although much like administrative programs job rotation was viewed as less essential than other programs it would appear that it should still be considered when developing a succession plan at Southern College.

Given the feedback I received from quantitative survey respondents and the participants in the semi-structured interviews leadership training, mentorship, talent management, secondments and job rotation were considered important components of any succession plan. In fact, three of the six programs (talent management, leadership training, and mentorship) were considered "very important"; while job rotation, secondments and administrative programs were viewed as "important" by survey respondents. Conversely, interview participants were very strong supporters of secondments. The findings support the premise that development plans should be specific to the individual (Cembrowski & da Costa, 1998; Ebberts et al., 2010; Rothwell, 2005). Moreover, succession planning programs should be approached with caution; they must be part of a formalized succession plan. At Southern College a great deal of emphasis was placed on the importance of having mechanisms and resources in place to support the individual throughout all stages of the process. Perhaps, participants were concerned that best intentions are not enough to facilitate the implementation of program plans—there must be a commitment to follow through despite the conflicting demands and continuous change that is an integral part of an Ontario CAAT's internal and external environment.

Leadership Competencies

In the quantitative survey I asked participants their opinion on the importance of certain leadership competencies in future college leaders. The competencies listed were based on the Kellogg Foundation funded American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) project that identified six competencies that should be considered in leadership development programs. Survey responses were generated with a three point, forced-choice Likert scale with "not important" weighted at 1, "important" weighted at 2, and "very important" weighted at 3. As before, I

explored the competencies further in the semi-structured interview phase of the study with the goal of determining if the AACCC competencies were considered important within the Southern College context.

Table 2: Leadership Competencies (morrin-table-2.html)

Communication: of the six leadership competencies listed communication with a mean response of 2.95 just under “very important” was viewed as the most essential competency for future college leaders. In fact, 95% (n=42) of respondents viewed it as “very important”. Moreover, none of the respondents saw it as “not important”.

Additionally, interviewees viewed this competency as essential.
Communication is something that needs to be worked on all the time, if you don't work at it you lose it, and especially now that communication comes in different ways, we are talking verbal cues to non-verbal cues, to social media.
Communication has become much more complicated in the last few years. (Michael).

The importance of communicating effectively with students and staff was emphasized by interviewees.

Collaboration: collaboration with a mean response of 2.89, just under “very important” was viewed as the next most important competency with 89% (n=39) of respondents viewing it as “very important”. Similar to communication none of the respondents viewed it as “not important”.

In the semi-structured interview phase I asked participants about the importance of various types of collaboration: faculty, college leaders, industry, universities. Although the level of collaboration may differ depending on a leader's position within the institution it was viewed as essential for any college leader. Moreover, collaboration with faculty was viewed as most important as faculty themselves are leaders, and many would view themselves as the most important leaders in the system, in that they are academic leaders (David). Michael, a strong supporter of collaboration indicated that collaboration and teamwork is the one quality that differentiates people now and it will only become more important in the future. It was believed that “collaboration is the underpinning that all colleges aspire to” (Michael), and collaboration with industry partners, other colleges and external bodies was clearly an integral part of many college leaders role.

Professionalism: the competency of professionalism was primarily deemed very important by survey participants with a mean response of 2.80, just under “very important”, with 80% (n=35) of respondents viewing it as “very important”. Again, none of the participants viewed it as “not important”.

For the interviewees, the leadership competency of professionalism was viewed as extremely important across all leadership levels—“for me personally professionalism and respect for each other is so important”

(Roger). Professionalism stood out as the dominant competency amongst all others for Michael as it was argued that you need a level of professionalism in all of the six leadership competencies.

Organizational Strategy: the next most important competency as perceived by survey participants was organizational strategy; 70% (n=30) of respondents viewed it as “very important” while 30% (n=13) viewed it as “important”; with a mean response of 2.70, slightly more towards “very important” than “important”.

Interviewees thought that the degree to which a leader is involved in organizational strategy is dependent on their role and level within the organization; “I think everyone needs to understand the strategy but not everyone needs to be involved in developing strategy” (Susan). However, it was argued that it is imperative that leaders align their activities with the organizational strategy as otherwise, it is pointless. Finally, Michael viewed organizational strategy as most important.

You really have to understand where the college is going, it is the old Wayne Gretskzy quote, ‘you need to speed to where the puck is going to be, not to where it has been’; and that is the same thing with colleges, you need to focus on where you are going not where you are at.

Resource Management: the mean response for resource management was 2.55, slightly more than mid-point between “important” and “very important”; and although considered one of the least important leadership competencies for college leaders it was still considered very important with 55% (n=24) of respondents viewing it as “very important” and 45% (n=20) viewing it as “important”.

In the semi-structured interview stage of the study participants felt that the level of competency required at the resource management level was highly dependent on the position. Michael felt that resource management was vital as it is imperative that you have a solid fiscally sound base from which you launch from. Resource management was viewed as extremely important at the middle-manager level as management of staff and budget is an important function of that role.

Community College Advocacy: the least important competency as perceived by Southern College survey participants was the competency of community college advocacy. In fact, this was the only competency listed to receive a response of “not important” with a result of 7% (n=3). However, similar to the other competencies it was still considered a “very important” competency with a mean of 2.70, slightly more than mid-point between “important” and “very important”, 48% (n=22) of respondents considered it “very important” while 45% (n=20) viewed it as “important”.

In the semi-structured interview phase of the study the importance of college advocacy for leaders was viewed as highly dependent on the role. As Susan commented, “for higher senior level managers, senior level administrators, college advocacy becomes more important the higher you get, because that becomes a bigger part of your role so the president is a constant advocate for everything” Southern College. Moreover, it was felt

that college advocacy was extremely important as often there is a misunderstanding as to what colleges do, in particular with industry and universities (David). Finally, it was felt that as college advocacy is a competency that not everyone is comfortable with it is important that it is developed amongst college leaders (Michael).

Given the results I received from both the quantitative survey participants and the interviewees it would appear that the college leader competencies as defined by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) could be applied to Southern College and included in the formation and implementation of succession planning at the college. This was somewhat surprising to me as the competencies were developed for American college leaders. Therefore, further evaluation is advisable prior to adoption of these leadership competencies for succession planning at Southern College, or within the CAAT system.

Research Question Number Three:

What are the perceptions of the study participants regarding the opportunities and challenges for succession planning at Southern College?

I asked quantitative survey participants if they thought the culture at Southern College supported the implementation of a succession plan. Of the 43 respondents 60% (n=26) thought it did while 40% (n=17) felt that it did not.

Overall, participants' comments indicated that the culture at Southern College could potentially support succession planning. However, there were concerns about how the process would evolve. The need for transparency and an equitable process was expressed. Singling out individuals for development may be an issue.

I prefer to see more open development to avoid bias in selection of high potentials. I've noticed bias in this process in other organizations which tends to predetermine without adequate evidence that some are more likely to be good managers than others. (Anonymous survey response)

The literature I reviewed recognized the important role culture should play in the development of succession planning; it should consider the current philosophies, principles and processes of the organization (Desbiens, 2010); the collegial culture and shared-decision making model as identified by Richards' (2009) and the need for transparency and equity throughout the entire process is especially important. Furthermore, collaboration between human resources and departments was viewed as key as each division in the college has its own unique culture and often, recognition is primarily at the departmental level.

In the quantitative survey I asked participants if succession planning could be fully implemented at southern College; 77% (n=34) thought it could while 23% (n=10) felt it could not.

Much like the culture of Southern College supporting succession planning, respondents expressed support but again stated the need for transparency, equity and collaboration.

I can imagine a process that would be successful and helpful. I can also imagine one that would take on a life of its own, indifferent to the needs of the current role and alienating the current supervisor rather than engaging him or her. (Anonymous survey response).

It was acknowledged that succession planning could build on pre-existing programs at the college. For instance, a performance review process exists that could allow for evaluation to determine if individuals are suitable candidates for succession planning. Nevertheless, the importance of a centralized process was emphasized—so that it is not department dependant and will therefore, facilitate movement across divisions.

I asked the survey respondents if they were in favour of a formal succession planning process at the college: 95% (n=41) were in favour while 5% (n=2) were not.

Therefore, I found that overwhelmingly quantitative survey respondents were in favour of the adoption of a formal succession planning process.

It is essential. I fear we are missing an opportunity here to rejuvenate the leadership and vision of/for the college. We cannot rest on our past laurels but must continue to grow. (Anonymous survey response)

However, there were mixed reactions as to format. While some felt that succession planning was essential, others thought that a small and focussed plan would work best, while one participant stated, “I am in favour of career and contingency planning where employees may indicate where they are headed and their manager fosters/helps them reach their career goals. I do not feel a formal succession plan will lead to positive outcomes (Anonymous survey response)”. Finally, one respondent felt that there’s untapped talent amongst faculty and they should be encouraged to take on broader leadership roles.

In order to determine administrative staff perceptions on support for succession planning from key college groups I asked quantitative survey participants if they thought that administrative staff, faculty and support staff would support the implementation of a formal succession plan at Southern College. There is little doubt that respondents felt that administrative staff at the college would fully support a plan as 98% (n=43) indicated “yes” while 2% (n=1) indicated they would not. On the other hand, faculty returned a response of 66% (n=29) “yes” and 34% (n=15) “no”. Finally, 73% (n=32) were of the opinion that support staff would support a formal succession plan while 27% (n=12) felt they would not.

Many comments were related to the conflict that exists between succession planning and collective agreements—as unionization does not lend itself to succession planning. However, it was believed that college groups would support succession planning at Southern College.

Finally, there was a perception amongst some survey respondents that some may feel threatened by a formal succession planning process; they might fear that they would become “irrelevant” or be replaced by new and younger employees. Communication, inclusiveness and transparency were seen as critical to success, and for the support of all college groups.

In the semi-structured interview phase of the study, I further explored the opportunities and challenges for administrative staff participating in succession planning. In particular, opportunities to participate should include the establishment of a committee that would include involvement by all levels of administrative staff; “so that cross college ... all areas get their two cents in on the plan and what is happening, and guide it and steer it as it moves, so that it is equitable and communicated across the college” (Roger). Furthermore, it was felt that as the college and divisions within it are quite unique and diverse in terms of scope of practice it is important that a “cookie cutter” approach is not used. Therefore, a proactive approach is required so that Southern College can manage a potential talent shortage. Moreover, it is important that the plan supports the long term goals of Southern College. The importance of communication was again emphasized in that people need to be informed of the goals and objectives of the plan and should be kept informed of the process as it evolves.

As emphasized by Ebbers et al. (2010) leaders must be encouraged and permitted to take responsibility for their own development. Roger saw the need for a series of professional development opportunities that an individual may or may not choose to participate in—such as classes and seminars on budgeting, college council etc. Likewise, Susan argued that incorporating succession planning into the performance review cycle would facilitate individual participation and allow for an equitable process.

Finally, during the semi-structured phase of the study interviewees were asked their opinion on the strategies that would best support a process that recognizes diversity, equity, and the possible sense of entitlement by a few.

Diversity

Interviewees felt that as a multiculturally diverse institution Southern College has a great deal of respect for diversity but did comment that strategies should be implemented to ensure diversity amongst its leaders. David commented on the need to create a culture of inclusion.

I think to just talk about diversity does not necessarily achieve the goal of inclusion. I think that there are hidden barriers within the system itself, within the college itself that are unwittingly there. I'm not saying they are there on purpose but they are there so I think there needs to be a cultural shift to inclusion in my mind so that people have a fair opportunity to be heard and not excluded.

David suggested that accountability strategies need to be in place so that diversity is top of mind in all that we do from recruitment to promotion opportunities. Moreover, although Roger felt that Southern College had quite a diverse workforce and respect for diversity it was acknowledged that as a white male he may have had different experiences than others. Meanwhile, Susan argued that although the “old boys club” does not exist at Southern College it is important that people are recognized for their skills and abilities—having diversity measures and strategies in place helps achieve this.

Equity

Overwhelmingly, interviewees expressed the need for having a formal process in place so that everyone in the organization has the opportunity to participate in succession planning. In essence, even those that are not outspoken have the opportunity to participate in the process (Susan). David argued that a “capabilities approach” is best achieved if everyone has an equal opportunity to accomplish what they are capable of, and there are no barriers to whatever they want to achieve. Choice was viewed as essential.

I see this very much as a cultural shift within an organization, that equity is not just a word, it has to be embedded as a practice, and to recognize that you know to go back to the original topic here of succession planning, if someone does not want to be a part of the succession plan that should be okay and not held against them because if they are very happy with what they are doing, and this is where they want to be they should be free to do that. (David)

Finally, transparency was viewed as an important component and communication was seen as essential to success. It was thought that continuous and repetitious communication through various channels would ensure that everyone is informed of the succession planning process and has equal opportunity to participate.

Sense of Entitlement

Interview participants viewed a sense of entitlement by a few to be directly related to equity. Moreover, it was felt that a formal succession planning process would help to alleviate this issue. Susan voiced a concern that people might feel that there is a position in waiting for them and if unsuccessful they may become disillusioned and leave the organization. This would suggest that if Southern College wishes to hold on to their talent it is important that employees are developed for possible

future leadership positions and not one position in particular. Again, communication was viewed as necessary so that everyone is aware of the process; “this is not an entitlement, you have to earn, or win, or be the best at the interview whatever it may be to still get it” (Roger)—as per Richards’ (2009) study. David suggested that succession planning programs such as job rotation and secondments would provide an opportunity for someone to work with several different managers and therefore, mitigate the advantage one might have if working for a stronger manager, who advocates for his or her people.

There is no such thing as entitlement for a few, it is basically that everyone is judged equally on the merits of what they have done and accomplishments they have done and if your system and strategy has a nice framework they will be rewarded accordingly. (Michael)

In the end, organizational commitment to diversity and equity is a time-consuming and challenging process. As previously stated (Wallin et al., 2005) it is imperative that community colleges are mindful of diverse populations. Southern College must be commended in that the administrative staff that participated in this study appreciate and acknowledge the college’s commitment to diversity. Nevertheless, in developing a succession plan it must include all employees in the process and provide career development and succession opportunities that are inclusive of all employees. As the literature demonstrates (Greer & Virick, 2008) organizations that can link diversity with succession planning will foster strong succession planning processes that will provide a strategic focus for the development of a diverse workforce.

The semi-structured interview participants were in favour of succession planning at Southern College. Nevertheless, they did speak of potential challenges for administrators if succession planning is implemented. The importance of establishing trust through the development of a fair and equitable process was viewed as essential. Once the process is established it is imperative that it is followed and not as Susan stated “ignore the system and go with one’s gut feeling, in some cases that would undermine the entire process”. Additionally, it was felt that the identification of potential successors might prove challenging. It may cause a conflict with one’s immediate supervisor, colleagues, with those that have not been identified, or who were unsuccessful in advancing—a formal process is essential in negating these challenges.

Moreover, the time it would take to participate may prove problematic.

“The time it would take you away from doing what you are paid to do, you would have to have the support of your current boss to be able to spend time on improving yourself and your skills” (Roger).

In conclusion, there is little doubt that the administrative staff that participated in this study were in favour of succession planning at Southern College. Nonetheless, Southern College should be mindful of the perceived challenges to implementation of a succession plan; several

were wary of succession planning, in particular in relation to the format and evolution of the plan. This was quite surprising to me given the extent of support for succession planning; and therefore, it is imperative that a formalized, well-thought out plan is devised—one that fully considers the culture, uniqueness and specific needs of the Southern College, it's staff and students.

Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that Southern College is in a position to develop a framework for succession planning at the college. In doing so, it is recommended that Southern College communicate effectively with constituents, develop a formal succession plan and process, build on existing leadership and development activities, and involve departments and individuals throughout the entire succession planning process.

It was hoped that the findings of this exploratory descriptive case study could provide some insights for further research on succession planning in Ontario CAATs. It would be advantageous to widen the scope of research on succession planning within the sector, so that a succession planning framework including processes and models can be developed for use province-wide—facilitating movement from the “growing awareness” phase to a deliberate and systemic system of succession planning. Furthermore, as faculty and support staff are key informants and constituents at Southern College and within the college system itself it would be beneficial to explore their perceptions on factors that are important for succession planning at Ontario CAAT's. Province wide research could be supported and/or led by Ontario college affiliated bodies such as Colleges Ontario (CO) and the Ontario College Administrative Staff Association (OCASA).

Participants in this study were questioned on their opinions on the leadership competencies required of future college leaders. These competencies were based on a Kellogg Foundation funded American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) project. Although the findings indicate that these competencies should be considered for succession planning at Southern College further examination for their applicability to Southern College and the Ontario college system is advised. As previously, research on the required leadership competencies for Ontario college leaders could be facilitated through Colleges Ontario or OCASA.

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