

BUILDING BENCH STRENGTH[®]:
SUCCESSION PLANNING READINESS

Institute for Court Management
Court Executive Development Program
2010-2011 Phase III Project
May 2011

Kevin J. Bowling, JD, MSJA
Court Administrator
20th Judicial Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts
Grand Haven, Michigan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals and organizations contributed to the successful completion of this Court Executive Development Program research project. Notable among those supporting research on succession planning in the courts are Hon. Edward R. Post, Chief Judge of the 20th Circuit Court; Hon. Mark A. Feyen, Chief Judge of the Ottawa County Probate Court; and members of the Courts' Leadership Team, Sandi Metcalf, Kelly Aylsworth, Jennell Challa and Penni DeWitt. Special thanks are also due the State Justice Institute, which provided essential financial support in the form of scholarships and grants. Without this SJI support, trial courts would not have the benefit of this important research on employee development.

As with any type of research project, data collection can be troublesome without willing research participants. In this effort, all judges of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts participated, as well as supervisors and members of the Strategic Planning Oversight Team. Beyond the subject courts, several members of the Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators devoted time to complete survey questions and provide helpful suggestions and select Ottawa County Officials assisted with personal interviews. Specifically, the interviewees were County Administrator, Alan G. Vanderberg; Human Resources Director Marie Waalkes and Employee & Labor Relations Manager, Marcie VerBeek.

Finally, thanks are due to members of the CEDP Class of 2011 and the Institute for Court Management faculty and staff for providing support throughout this educational endeavor.

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ABSTRACT

The Cable News Network (CNN) reported on December 27, 2010 (www.cnnmoney.com) that beginning in January 2011, 10,000 baby boomers in the United States will turn 65 years of age every day for the next 19 years. This startling statistic, based on current US Census data, suggests many court employees will be eligible for retirement in the near future. It is unclear from where the talent pool will emerge to select skilled replacement staff. Consequently if court managers do not actively develop talent, there will likely be a time in the near future when the overall quality of court operations and public service will dramatically decline due to the lack of a properly prepared workforce.

BUILDING BENCH STRENGTH[®] (BBS) is a succession planning program (i.e., talent development and talent management) created by the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts, located in western Michigan. The program is an extension of the Courts' strategic planning experience and borrows from the work of the National Association for Court Management (NACM), published in its 2008 Mini-Guide on Succession Planning. The program consists of three distinct phases:

- Discovery Phase Determining Organizational Readiness
- Design Phase Workforce Analysis
- Development Phase Assessing Current Staff Competencies.

This research is focused on the Discovery Phase, which determines organizational readiness of the Courts to implement the BBS program. Simultaneous with researching the readiness of the Courts, two colleagues researched the design and development phases. Once complete, the three distinct research projects will be combined and implemented together in the subject Courts.

To provide some jurisdictional context, the 20th Circuit (general jurisdiction) and Ottawa County Probate (limited jurisdiction) Courts are part of Michigan's "One Court of Justice" (Michigan Constitution, Article VI). As part of a decentralized judicial system, the trial courts are largely funded at the local level and operated under the direction of chief judges appointed by the Michigan Supreme Court. The 20th Circuit Court has four elected judges and 137.5 employees (including 10 FTE from the Intermediate School District and 4.5 from the Sheriff's Department). The Probate Court has one elected judge and six employees.

Following a multi-year period of successfully creating, implementing and institutionalizing a strategic plan, it was determined the next step needed to be succession planning and talent development (BBS). If the Courts are to become high performance courts and fully achieve the Courts' Mission ("To administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust"), it is critical to have "the right number of people with the right set of competencies in the right jobs at the right time." (Duggan, Cornell, Stinson, McQueen, & Wagenknecht-Ivey, 2008). In essence, BBS is a natural outgrowth and important "next step" in the Courts' carefully executed, long range strategic plan.

In addition to the local significance of this research, it appears other court jurisdictions in Michigan and throughout the United States are either facing a similar personnel dilemma now or will be experiencing a workforce shortage in the next five to ten years. "Succession planning [like BBS] is any effort to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization by making provision for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people over time." (Rothwell, 2005). This does not typically happen by accident; rather it requires foresight and planning by organizational leaders.

To determine the Courts readiness to create and implement this talent development/talent management program, research was designed to answer four fundamental questions:

Does the 20th Circuit Court genuinely desire to assess and improve its current and future workforce needs and be more responsive to them?

Do 20th Circuit Court leaders want to develop a comprehensive succession plan as one method of responding to employee recruitment, retention and professional development issues?

Does the 20th Circuit Court see benefit in using succession planning as an effective, proven management tool for bringing about change and improvements that will engage its workforce, manage current talent and develop future leaders?

Does the 20th Circuit Court need to enhance its budget development process by aligning proposed budgets with strategic priorities?

Based on these research questions, it was determined data collection methods would consist of surveys, a targeted focus group and personal interviews.

The resulting data clearly demonstrated the years of strategic planning completed by the Courts uniquely suited these organizations to move forward with another ambitious project like BBS. Prior work on establishing a collective mission, vision, values, goals, as well as successful implementation of other major projects, helped Court leaders and employees count the cost and understand the implications of embarking on the BBS project. In addition to these local findings, it was fascinating to learn of many court managers throughout Michigan who recognize the baby boomer phenomenon and understand the need for succession planning, yet have no developed plans. It seems the daily crush of court business coupled with the lack of adequate training resources results in most court managers ignoring the need for systematic talent development and talent management. Instead, courts tend to handle succession planning on an ad hoc basis.

As a result of this research project, the subject Courts are poised to move forward with implementation of the BBS program. It is hoped other jurisdictions will hear the alarm being sounded by this and similar research; soon there will be a dramatic lack of properly skilled personnel to meet the operational needs of trial courts. Court managers must accept the challenge to reflect on the data, analyze their current workforce, and prepare employees to meet the future needs of the courts.

INTRODUCTION

In 2004, the 20th Circuit Court and Ottawa County Probate Court – two western Michigan trial courts – embarked on a strategic planning process, culminating in the first, joint long-range Strategic Plan for the Courts. The Strategic Plan sets forth priorities and comprehensive strategies for addressing important, long-term issues such as resources, access to the courts, efficient and effective operations and services, collaboration with partners, and organizational structure and employee interests.

Since 2004, the Courts have remained focused on strategic priorities and have successfully implemented the Strategic Plan, completing many time limited projects. In short, the Courts have not only developed a Strategic Plan that has proven to be a useful roadmap for the Courts' leadership and staff but also have succeeded in sustaining focus and momentum for several years.

The purpose of this Court Executive Development Program (CEDP) Phase III Project is to build on the Courts' strategic planning experience, augment the plan with a necessary succession planning (i.e., talent development and talent management) component, and share with other courts the planning experiences of these two jurisdictions including a description of the planning and implementation processes, benefits realized from the process to date, and lessons learned. It is hoped the relevant history of these trial courts may inspire and assist other judicial officers and court executives to pursue and successfully use long-range strategic and succession planning in their efforts to improve the courts and ultimately to improve the administration of justice.

Overview of Ottawa County, Michigan

To put this experience in context, it is important to understand Ottawa County. Until recently, this western Michigan County was viewed as a rural, agricultural area with a notable Dutch population in its southern city of Holland. The county seat, Grand Haven, is a beach/boating community, nestled on the shores of Lake Michigan and is a summer tourist destination. Several years ago, the county population began a rapid growth spurt and now the estimated population is 270,000 within a county of 565 square miles, representing an 11.7% increase in population from 2000 to 2007, according to the U.S. Census. More recently the national economic recession has caused many to relocate for employment; consequently population growth has slowed dramatically. The county is comprised of 6 cities, 1 village, and 17 townships. There are 11 County Commissioners and 6 elected county officials. Ottawa County is now the 8th largest of Michigan's 83 counties.

Local Court Environment

A brief description of the local court environment also provides some important contextual information for understanding the planning experiences and lessons learned. Although part of Michigan's "One Court of Justice" (Michigan Constitution, Article VI), the trial courts in Michigan are largely funded at the local level. Judicial salaries are the notable exception; these salaries are paid through a state appropriation to the Supreme Court. The Michigan trial courts include the general jurisdiction Circuit Court, and the Probate and District Courts, both with limited jurisdiction.

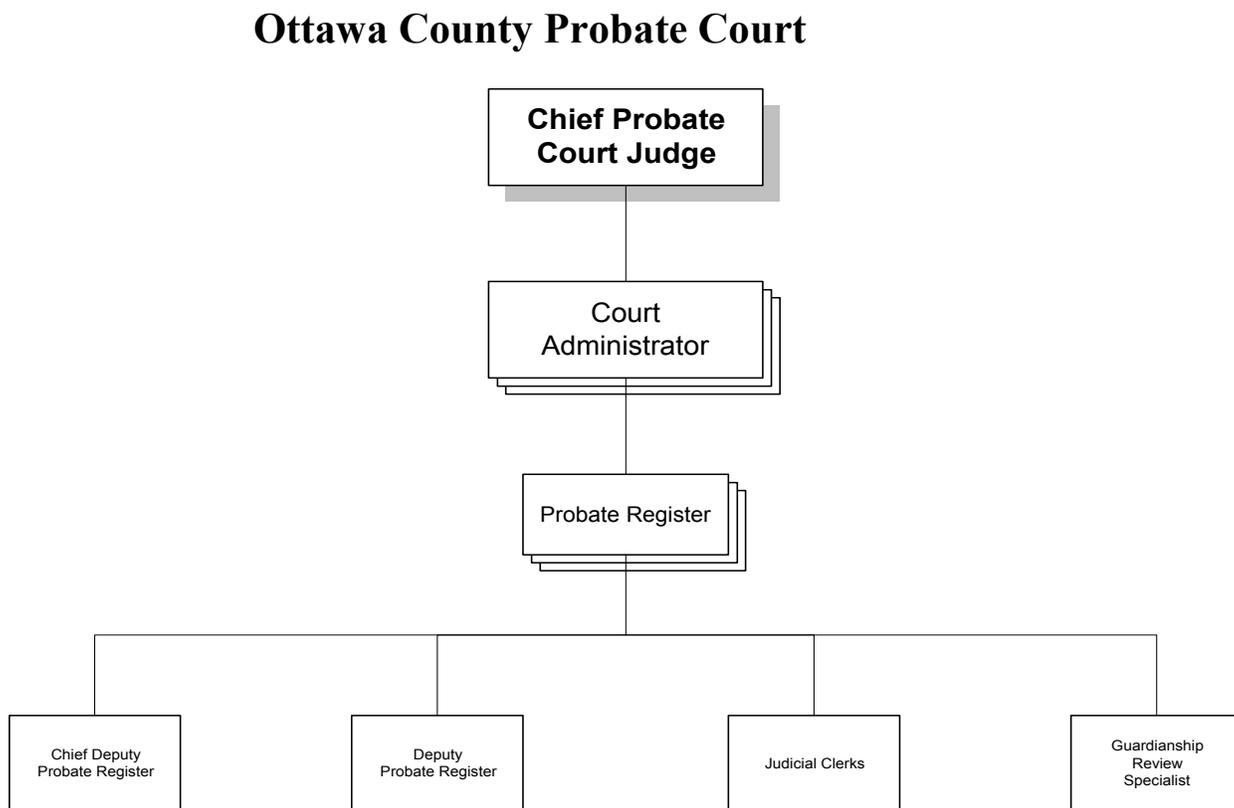
The 20th Circuit Court has four elected judges and 137.5 employees (including 10 FTE from the Intermediate School District and 4.5 from the Sheriff's Department). Locally, the 20th Circuit Court functions within three primary divisions:

1. The Trial Division, located in Grand Haven, which handles appeals, civil, criminal, and domestic relations (without children);
2. The Family Division - Friend of the Court Office, located in Grand Haven with a satellite office in Holland, which handles domestic relations (with children), primarily Title IV-D (child support enforcement) matters; and
3. The Family Division - Juvenile Services, located in West Olive with a Treatment Services Office in Holland, which handles juvenile delinquency, child protective proceedings, juvenile detention, treatment, and casework services.

These Divisions are further identified below on the organizational chart displayed in Figure 1.

The Probate Court has one elected judge and six employees. The staff manages a limited jurisdiction caseload of estates, guardianships, conservatorships, mental illness petitions and a variety of miscellaneous case types.

Figure 2 – Organization Chart: Ottawa County Probate Court



For many years, these Circuit Court divisions as well as the Probate Court operated as totally autonomous units. One desired outcome of the strategic planning process was to break down the perceived walls between these divisions and improve communication and collaboration among Court divisions and between Courts. The determination to add succession planning to the existing strategic plan will further enhance communication among all court employees.

Within this general environment, a decision was made in 2003 (prompted by a change in court administration) to embark on a long-range strategic planning process for the two courts. Previously, some strategic planning had been done in the Juvenile Services Division, but since Court Divisions historically operated as independent units, the benefit of the planning was never shared with other divisions, nor was the Chief Judge aware the planning had taken place. Thus, the newly hired Court Administrator, with approval of the Chief Judges of the two courts, outlined a plan to build on the Juvenile Services planning process, expand the effort courtwide, and include both Circuit and Probate courts.

Given the task at hand, the Court's Leadership Team (i.e., the Court Administrator and senior administrators from each division), contracted with a strategic planning consultant to assist the Courts. Dr. Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, President of PRAXIS Consulting, Inc. of Denver, Colorado, was selected based on her expertise in strategic planning, her experience working with courts nationally and internationally, and her direct knowledge and experience of the Michigan court system from prior work, including assisting the Michigan Supreme Court in the development of its strategic plan. On that basis, the Courts successfully applied to the State Justice Institute (SJI) for initial funding to begin a comprehensive strategic planning effort in 2004. The strategic planning process used by the Courts built on an approach designed for trial courts in the early 1990s, with SJI grant funding, as well as the Visioning and Strategic Planning Core Competency published by the National Association for Court Management (NACM; www.nacmnet.org). In addition to SJI support, the Courts received funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Criminal Courts Technical Assistance Project through American University to partially support its ongoing implementation efforts.

Developing the Long-Range Strategic Plan

There were three phases to the Courts' initial strategic planning process. Phase 1 focused on forming a Strategic Planning Task Force and establishing a working schedule. Phase 2 included gathering information from justice system partners, community leaders, other local stakeholders, and court staff. Finally, the content of the Strategic Plan was developed by the Task Force through a series of facilitated meetings in Phase 3. Each phase is described below.

Phase 1: Forming the Task Force & Designing a Process & Schedule

One of the first tasks of the strategic planning process was to establish a Strategic Planning Task Force. The charge of the Task Force was to develop a long-range strategic plan for the Circuit and Probate Courts. The Task Force was created by special invitation of the Chief Judges of the Circuit and Probate Courts. Care was taken to ensure the Task Force included people from all areas of the Courts including judges, administrators, mid-level supervisors, professional staff, support staff, unclassified staff, and union officials. The Task Force consisted of twenty (20) individuals.

This phase also included (1) finalizing a project schedule including Task Force meeting dates and (2) preparing for the focus group meetings of external justice system partners, community leaders, other local stakeholders, and court staff. Developing a meeting schedule for the entire strategic planning process was instrumental in clearing calendars and enabling Task Force members to attend all Task Force meetings.

Phase 2: Gathering Input from Stakeholders

Phase 2 of the process included conducting six focus group sessions of external stakeholders and court staff. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information and views from attendees to inform and ultimately assist the Task Force in developing a Strategic

Plan for the Courts. Examples of the information gathered included (1) participants' expectations of the Courts, (2) local and regional trends impacting the Courts and (3) major issues the Courts must address in the years ahead. In sum, the focus group sessions ensured the views and ideas of external stakeholders and court employees were included in the strategic planning process.

Phase 3: Developing the Strategic Plan

This phase, which included a series of facilitated Task Force meetings, focused on developing the content of the Courts' Strategic Plan. Specifically, the Task Force developed mission and vision statements, completed a trends analysis and organizational assessment, and identified strategic issues, long-range goals, strategies, and strategic projects for the Courts to pursue. Each Task Force meeting was a working session that included (1) using a comprehensive strategic planning approach, developed and facilitated by Dr. Wagenknecht-Ivey and (2) a variety of large and small group sessions that were extremely effective in engaging members, encouraging creativity, and building consensus among Task Force members.

For example, at one of the facilitated meetings, Task Force members (1) reviewed social, demographic, and other trends impacting the Courts; (2) assessed the implications of these trends on the Courts; (3) constructed several plausible future scenarios given the interactions of the various trends; and (4) began to develop proactive and responsive strategies to address the likely future implications on the Courts. Engaging in a comprehensive trend analysis helped the Courts anticipate some of the likely future pressures and demands they will face and develop effective long-term responses and strategies.

The Task Force completed its charge by the end of 2004, thus completing the Courts' first 2005-2007 Long-Range Strategic Plan (a full copy of the Plan is available at

www.miottawa.org). The Strategic Plan includes: (1) the mission and vision statements of the Courts; (2) the Courts' long-range strategic issue areas (i.e., resources, access to courts, efficient/effective services and operations, positive external relations, and employee opportunities and satisfaction); and (3) long-range goals, objectives, and short-term projects in each of the strategic areas. Summaries of stakeholder assessments, trend analysis, and focus group summaries are contained in the Appendix of the first Strategic Plan.

Implementing the Strategic Plan

The Courts committed substantial time and resources to developing the Strategic Plan. Consequently, the Leadership Team and Task Force members were insistent that it be fully used as a roadmap to improving court operations and service to the public. To that end, building on lessons learned from other organizational experiences and based on the existing court culture, the Courts took deliberate steps to ensure the Strategic Plan was implemented. Below is a brief description of the actions taken by the Courts to ensure implementation.

First, the Strategic Plan included a list of specific, strategic initiatives/projects to focus on during the first year. Naming strategic initiatives/projects helps to identify concrete steps an organization can complete, moving it in a desired future direction.

Second, the Courts conducted an "All Staff" meeting in January 2005 to communicate the importance and substance of the plan. The assembly was received favorably by the staff and judges; consequently, it has been repeated annually as a method of communicating the status of strategic planning projects, celebrating successes, recognizing court staff, and maintaining focus and momentum on the Courts' strategic priorities. This All Staff meeting was used in 2010 to introduce the concept of "Building Bench Strength", i.e., succession planning. In January 2011

the gathering was used to update staff on the status of this research project and outline a specific implementation plan for talent development and talent management in the Courts.

Third, the Courts formed strategic issue implementation/action teams, organized around five strategic issue areas:

- Team #1 Resources
- Team #2 Access to Courts
- Team #3 Efficient/Effective Services and Operations
- Team #4 Positive External Relations
- Team #5 Employee Opportunities and Satisfaction

In 2005, court staff volunteered to be on the various implementation/action teams. In addition, a few team members were recruited, especially where specific expertise was needed. In subsequent years a majority of the original team members have chosen to remain on their respective teams, some new volunteers have been added, and a few team members have rotated to other teams.

The implementation teams have been a very effective way to build enthusiasm for, and generate momentum and follow-through on, the Courts' strategic projects. The Courts have realized secondary benefits from using cross-functional implementation teams including increased courtwide collaboration, communication and enhanced knowledge of both Courts. In sum, the Courts have experienced substantial success, demonstrated by the fact that many employees have volunteered to work on these teams and that all five teams have remained active and focused on their strategic projects for more than five years. Examples of some of the strategic projects the implementation teams have worked on and/or completed include: (1) conducting court user satisfaction surveys; (2) developing a technology master plan; (3)

enhancing employee training; (4) improving the Court Intern Program; (5) improving public service by studying the need for and expanding public court hours; (6) establishing new bench/bar training activities; (7) establishing a Legal Self Help Center, and much more.

Fourth, a kick-off meeting with the co-team leaders and all members of the implementation/action teams was conducted in January 2005. The purpose of the kick-off meeting was to help orient team leaders and members to the task at hand and ensure the teams got off to a fast and productive start. In particular, the meeting included conveying the charge and expectations of the teams, helping the teams get organized by completing a team charter, providing them with information about the development of the strategic plan and on becoming a high performance team, and providing them with time to begin working on an action plan for their specific projects. Each year the Courts have repeated an organizational meeting with the implementation teams.

Fifth, the Courts established a Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT). At the request of members of the Task Force, members transitioned to become the new SPOT, demonstrating their commitment to following through on the Strategic Plan. The SPOT meets three times per year to discuss progress of the five implementation/action teams, to review the status of strategic projects, to build support and enthusiasm for strategic projects, to maintain focus on goals, objectives and priority projects; and to acknowledge and celebrate accomplishments.

Sixth, the leadership of the Courts continues to remain focused, reviewing and monitoring progress on the Strategic Plan. For example, the senior Leadership Team, comprised of the Court Administrator and Division Directors from the two Courts, added a standing agenda item for its bi-weekly meetings. Thus, at each meeting, the Team discusses the status of the

strategic planning activities. Further, the Court Administrator meets regularly with the Chief Judges of the two Courts, and the other judges as appropriate, to discuss the progress and status of strategic planning initiatives. Also, the Division Directors discuss strategic planning activities at their regular staff meetings. Initially, the Leadership Team reviewed and approved specific action plans from each of the five Implementation Teams, to ensure they were on the right track and had adequate resources to proceed.

Finally, the Courts have continued to communicate and share information about strategic planning activities through a regular internal newsletter, annual report, and similar publications. Accomplishments and progress are communicated and shared at every opportunity, keeping focus on the Courts' strategic priorities.

Institutionalizing Strategic Thinking & Strategic Leadership

The NACM core competency on visioning and strategic planning emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing strategic thinking and strategic leadership, moving beyond the mere development of a strategic plan. Additionally, it stresses the need to differentiate among operational thinking, strategic planning, strategic thinking, and strategic leadership. Specifically, many court leaders are focused on the operational requirements of running courts daily, leaving little time for reflection or time to anticipate problems and issues that affect the courts capacity to deliver services over the long-term. According to the NACM core competency materials, strategic thinking enables leaders to anticipate, promote, and sustain change.

In Ottawa County, the shift to strategic thinking and strategic leadership has been a challenging yet vital process. Although it has not yet been fully achieved, significant progress is being made. Some of the steps taken include: (1) periodic judicial briefings, so the judges are aware of and can provide support for strategic activities and projects; (2) a permanent change in

the Leadership Team bi-weekly agenda, which now includes a regular update on strategic planning initiatives; and (3) development of a communication plan to ensure regular updates about project status to all staff, and improved efforts to communicate among implementation teams to avoid duplicating efforts or working at cross-purposes on similar strategic projects. In sum, the Courts' Leadership Team continues to strive for balance between tending to operational matters while remaining focused on the Courts' long-term, strategic direction and priorities.

Succession Planning: A Natural Extension of Strategic Leadership

Following a multi-year period of successfully creating, implementing and stabilizing a strategic plan for the Courts, a new focal point has emerged. Ongoing goals, highlighted by the five strategic issues noted above, must now be augmented with an emphasis on succession planning and talent development (“Building Bench Strength”). To ensure the time and effort spent on developing court resources, improving public access to courts, increasing efficiency and effectiveness, building positive external relations and providing professional development opportunities for staff results in a high performance court, it is time to envision a future court where all of these strategic issues will continue and the Courts have the right people with the right qualifications in the right place at the right time. As a result of the Courts' Leadership Team research and development of the BBS program, the Circuit and Probate Courts in Ottawa County have a clearer understanding of their workforce and future personnel needs, as well as professional development plans for employees aspiring to move into key positions. This succession/talent development plan will ensure the Courts have trained internal candidates ready to meet the organization's future needs in leadership and other key positions. It is a natural outgrowth and important “next step” in the Courts' carefully executed, long range strategic plan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For many decades, succession planning has been a common business practice in the private sector, especially with family owned enterprises. Perhaps seen as a method of avoiding family in-fighting or ensuring stable executive leadership to placate stockholders, succession planning (frequently referred to as talent development and talent management) continues to be an element of regular practice in the corporate world. Much of the public sector, however, has historically done little to systematically prepare key organizational leaders for advancement. The notable exception is in certain federal government operations, where time and resources appear to be less of a scarce commodity than at the state and local levels. This interest in succession planning was spurred on by the Government Accountability Office in 2001 when they identified the strategic management of human capital as a “high risk area” (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2007). In addition, President George W. Bush issued the President’s Management Agenda, causing the Office of Management and Budget to establish standards for better managing human capital. Subsequently, related reports on succession planning were issued.

For instance, in 2003 the US General Accounting Office issued a report to Congress outlining a strategic planning process for the Architect of the Capitol (United States General Accounting Office, 2003). In the context of this recommendation for strategic planning, there is clear recognition that “strategically managing its human capital to drive transformation and to support the accomplishment of agency goals”, i.e., succession planning, is a necessary part of the process. Conducting an appropriate gap analysis and developing professional competencies is

understood as key to future organizational success. The following year, requirements emanating from the President's Management Agenda were further elucidated by the Corporate Leadership Council in a "Fact Brief" entitled, Succession Planning in the Government Sector (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004). Using several federal government agencies as case studies, the Council outlined a four part process for measuring and improving succession planning. The components include: a succession planning structure with clear responsibilities and leader involvement; leadership talent identification, including a participant selection process; leadership development programs for various staff levels; and an evaluation process to measure planning and program results. Although this Fact Brief is focused on certain federal agencies, the succession planning process is described in sufficient detail so that most public sector organizations could adapt the process for state or local usage.

In 2007, the US Office of Inspector General and the US Department of Justice added to the public sector succession planning literature by issuing reports on succession planning and strategic leadership. The OIG Report includes success factors for succession planning, emphasizing the need for "commitment and active support of top leadership" as well as clear linkages between an agency's strategic plan and succession plan (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2007). The Department of Justice takes a further step by articulating the business case for succession planning and then providing an incremental process to achieve the desired results (U.S. Department of Justice, 2007).

At the state and local levels, there is much less written by on succession planning by public sector practitioners either because there is less emphasis on the process, i.e., such planning is not actively pursued, or there is insufficient time available for government leaders to perform

the required tasks and document them. Two exceptions include the State of California and the City of Lemon Grove, California. In the State example, the State Personnel Board has conducted workshops on Workforce Analysis and emphasized the need for succession planning. Based on research by the California Department of Personnel Administration, it appears 35% of their 80,000 FTE workforce will be eligible to retire in within five years (Sanchez & Lopez, 2008). In the City of Lemon Grove, the Fire Chief determined the need for a succession plan and conducted a research project to document the need and establish a plan to address workforce needs (Torchia, 2007). These are notable examples at the state and local levels because, as in the federal government examples noted above, there is a clear understanding of the succession planning process needing to be linked with an agency's strategic plan. If a public sector agency has no strategic plan, it is suggested one be created before attempting workforce planning, in part because of the need for clear organizational vision and goals.

In other jurisdictions where public sector literature is not readily available, agency managers and court administrators must rely on a variety of private resources for succession planning guidance; many of which are most easily located on the Internet. For example, <http://hrweb.mit.edu/ctm> provides career and talent management resources outlining the various responsibilities for organizations, managers and employees when trying to align employee skills with organizational needs. Many of the available resources include simple checklists and meeting agendas to assist a leader begin the process and conduct necessary organizational assessments.

For a more elementary approach, which may be appropriate in a small public office or in an organization seeking to learn the basics of succession planning,

<http://www.successionplanning101.com> may be of assistance. More detailed strategies are likely to be found in professional journals or university publications. For instance, in www.iveybusinessjournal.com Paul Cantor provides a thought provoking article entitled “Succession Planning: Often Requested, Rarely Delivered”. (Cantor, 2005) In this article, Cantor narrowly focuses on the position of CEO arguing that lower level positions may be effectively filled without a formal succession plan, however, the primary administrative position in any organization demands a more deliberate and thoughtful selection process. This requires development of a plan or process long before a leadership position becomes vacant. Building executive competencies into an organizational strategic plan is also a necessary precursor to succession planning.

In a similar business article which can be applied to the public sector, the Aberdeen Group published The Succession Planning Benchmark Report, Aberdeen Group (2006). This report has many similarities with the Ivey Business Journal and the Graziadio Business Report (Fulmer, 2002) in that it provides a logical model for improving bench strength in key positions and identifies a number of best practices employed in organizations which have successfully implemented some form of succession planning. The Aberdeen Group takes the process a step further by strongly emphasizing the need for metrics. Measurable performance is key to successful implementation and the Report further emphasizes the need to create a process which is competency based. Although written for private sector businesses, the applicability to state trial courts is clear. Most courts are dealing with increasing reporting requirements and the need for compliance with either self imposed or state imposed performance measures. This model demonstrates how such data can be more effectively used by management for long range

planning as well as immediate operational oversight. Additionally, the Aberdeen article discusses technology aspects of succession planning and how regularly amassed data, which many courts and business already have available, can be re-purposed to assist with workforce development.

A successful succession planning effort will require intense communication efforts throughout an entire organization. Often to begin, there is a need to clearly articulate the need, benefits, and advantages of such planning. While many Internet sources carry some relevant information, the Center for Simplified Strategic Planning, Inc. effectively provides numerous examples of advantages which may be crucial to implementation of a plan. M. Dana Baldwin provides elements for consideration, advantages of succession planning, long term benefits, and a process outline (Baldwin, 2010). In addition to traditional articles available on the Internet, organizational leaders may also benefit from a variety of current Internet discussions that are relevant to workforce development. For example, Strategically Speaking is a blog devoted to nonprofit organizations attempting to create strategic plans and succession plans (<http://strategicthinkingandplanning.blogspot.com>).

Due to the general lack of court specific strategic planning resources, the focus of this literature review has been on federal agency resources, academic journals, business journals and Internet resources. There are, however, two important court resources and one textbook which should be considered in any court related succession planning effort. In 2008, the National Association for Court Management convened a Succession Planning Mini Guide Workgroup, including court executives, policy analysts and consultants to research and publishes a guide for court managers regarding workforce analysis, talent management and leadership development

(Duggan, Cornell, Stinson, McQueen, & Wagenknecht-Ivey, 2008). The Mini Guide provides helpful definitions to clarify what succession planning “is” and “isn’t”, especially within a court environment. In addition, courts contemplating development of a succession plan are provided a three phase process to determine organizational readiness, complete a workforce analysis and assess staff competencies. The NACM Board of Directors is hopeful the Mini Guide will assist courts by making the planning process more attainable.

A pre-cursor to the Mini Guide is an actual court succession plan developed by Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey in conjunction with Court Administrator David Lawrence, First Judicial District of Pennsylvania (Wagenknecht-Ivey & Lawrence, 2006). An important benefit of this publication is a detailed case review, providing an account of lessons learned in the Pennsylvania experience. The final resource, also reflected in the NACM Mini Guide is a text by William Rothwell, entitled *Effective Succession Planning* (Rothwell, 2005). Rothwell provides one of the most extensive discussions of succession planning, along with numerous examples, templates, and readiness questionnaires. Even though the text is not exclusively addressed to local, state or federal courts, the broad range of work environments contained in the book ensures court managers from various jurisdictions and governance structures ample material to draw from when constructing a viable succession plan.

METHODS

At the outset of this project four specific research questions were identified. These questions guided the development of various methods to capture essential data and ensure answers could be appropriately fashioned. Each of the following questions is aimed at determining organizational readiness to proceed with a systematic succession planning process:

Does the 20th Circuit Court genuinely desire to assess and improve its current and future workforce needs and be more responsive to them?

Do 20th Circuit Court leaders want to develop a comprehensive succession plan as one method of responding to employee recruitment, retention and professional development issues?

Does the 20th Circuit Court see benefit in using succession planning as an effective, proven management tool for bringing about change and improvements that will engage its workforce, manage current talent and develop future leaders?

Does the 20th Circuit Court need to enhance its budget development process by aligning proposed budgets with strategic priorities?

Based on these research questions, it was determined data collection methods would consist of surveys, a targeted focus group and personal interviews. The individual data collection subjects include local judges, leadership team members/supervisors, members of the Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators (MACCA), the Ottawa County Human Resources Director and Employee & Labor Relations Manager, members of the local Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT), and the Ottawa County Administrator. These sample groups were selected purposefully rather than on a random basis. The judges, leadership team and supervisors are important decision makers in the court who have relevant historical knowledge regarding why prior succession planning efforts failed and what is necessary to successfully plan for the future. The SPOT members have some overlap with the judges and leadership team,

however, there is also front line staff and labor union representation which is important to provide balance in responses. MACCA respondents provide an important perspective of court managers from other Michigan jurisdictions and shed further light on whether succession planning is a current court priority.

All data collection was scheduled during the fall of 2010 and various instruments were developed and tested prior to actual use. The pre-testing of the survey questions and interview questions by key court personnel and the CEDP Advisor proved to be an important step to improve clarity of the instruments and ensure ease of completion by research participants. The order of data collection proceeded as follows:

- September 15th – Completed organizational readiness assessment with Chief Judges and supervisors (Strategic Planning Oversight Team meeting). See Appendix A for data collection instrument.
- September 15th – Conducted focus group with Chief Judges and supervisors (Strategic Planning Oversight Team meeting). See Appendix B for data collection instrument.
- October 15th - Completed organizational readiness assessment with MACCA volunteers. See Appendix A for data collection instrument.
- October 22nd - Interviewed County HR Director and Employee & Labor Relations Manager to determine how court employee development will blend with county training opportunities. See Appendix C for data collection instrument.
- October 28th - Surveyed judges, court leadership team and supervisors regarding the perceived need for employee development. See Appendix D for data collection instrument.

- November 2nd – Issued reminder notice to complete October 28th survey
- November 17th – Distributed MACCA survey, regarding current recruitment, retention and development practices. See Appendix E for data collection instruments.
- November 23rd – Issued reminder notice to complete November 17th survey.
- December 20th - Interviewed County Administrator regarding best practices related to aligning budget development and employee professional development. See Appendix F for data collection instrument.

To maintain confidentiality and achieve efficiency in the return of survey responses, a web-based survey instrument was used for the judicial, leadership team, supervisors and MACCA questionnaires. Subsequently, a survey reminder email was sent to all participants who did not respond to the initial survey request.

In an effort to provide appropriate context for the survey questions, an introductory statement was developed to briefly describe the purpose of the CEDP Research Project and provide some relevant information regarding the courts' current workforce. The introduction also included a brief definition of succession planning and how the data/responses are intended to be used.

Questions for the SPOT were handled in a focus group setting and County Officials questions were delivered in a personal interview format. In a manner similar to the survey introductions, focus group and interview participants were provided contextual information regarding the CEDP Research Project and the courts' current workforce.

The two Readiness Assessments were administered during regularly scheduled meetings. The variation in return rates exist because 100% of the SPOT members were in attendance at their September meeting, whereas only 33% of the MACCA were able to participate in a

quarterly meeting and only a portion of those attending completed the assessment instrument. The survey return rate was excellent among the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Court participants (100%). The MACCA survey return rate was less (33%), however, the results and comments were instructive. As results of each data collection instrument were summarized, analysis included review of the raw data and discussions among the Court Leadership Team. This two step process was necessary to ensure the involvement of court decision makers as the implications of the study results became clear. Table 1 further describes the various data collection methods and rates of return.

Table 1
Data Collection Methods and Return Rates

Data Collection Method	# Questions	# Data Instruments Distributed	# Data Instruments Returned	Return Rate
Readiness Assessment SPOT	10	18	18	100%
Readiness Assessment MACCA	10	15	7	47%
Focus Group Questions - SPOT	8	18	18	100%
HR Interview	10	2	2	100%
Survey - COURT	34	20	20	100%
Survey - MACCA	13	45	15	33%
County Administrator Interview	8	1	1	100%

FINDINGS

The various research findings resulting from this project are presented below in the order which best allows for comparison of relevant data, rather than chronological order of data collection. The collection instruments, in order of usage, include:

- SPOT – Readiness Assessment
- MACCA – Readiness Assessment
- COURTS – Survey
- MACCA – Survey
- SPOT – Focus Group Questions
- County HR – Interview Questions
- County Administrator – Interview Questions

Although each of these data collection instruments proved beneficial in answering the research questions for this project, individual trial courts are likely able to determine organizational readiness for succession plan development by using an Organizational Readiness Assessment and a single survey instrument.

Organizational Readiness Assessment

In many strategic planning and succession planning endeavors (see Literature Review) organizations find it instructive to determine the level of institutional readiness prior to devoting significant financial and human resources. Projects of this type necessarily require broad support at all levels of an organization. Consequently, the ten questions/statements included in the assessment instrument (Attachment A) are intended to identify current levels of support or lack thereof. Participants were provided with ten sets of opposing statements and asked to select a

number (along a six point scale) which best represents the Courts' current position relative to the two statements. Each statement reflects a level of support for or lack of interest in succession planning (a score of 6 indicates a high level of readiness and a score of 1 indicates a lack of readiness). Once scored, a total of 50-60 points is interpreted as a "green light" to proceed with the planning process. A score of 30-49 suggests a "yellow light" or caution, i.e., a need to pay attention to preliminary details and improve levels of support where possible. The level of necessary caution is related to the actual score, so that a score of 45+ is more indicative of support than a score of 35 or less. Scores of less than 30, i.e., a "red light", make it clear the organization is not ready to proceed and planning attempts are likely to fail unless significant project support is developed. This assessment instrument was initially developed by Dr. Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, President of PRAXIS Consulting Inc., for use in determining the readiness of trial courts to proceed with long range strategic planning. After consulting with Dr. Wagenknecht-Ivey and receiving her permission to modify the document, several revisions were made to update the questions and focus attention on succession planning and talent management within the court environment.

Table 2 contains results from the Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT) and Table 3 results are from the Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators (MACCA). Based on individual SPOT scores, 39% of respondents believe the Courts are fully prepared to proceed with succession planning. This score is in marked contrast to the MACCA results where 0% of respondents scored in the 50-60 point range, indicating a general lack of readiness to proceed among other Michigan Circuit Courts. The remaining 61% of the SPOT respondents scored in the cautionary level (30-49 points) and most of these responses were at the higher end of the cautionary level (45+ points). The MACCA responses were mostly in the lower 32-38 point

range and 14.3% scored in the “red light” or stop level, suggesting more foundational work is necessary before undertaking any form of succession planning. Although these groups contain relatively small sample sizes, the implications are clear. Most SPOT members believe the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts are fundamentally prepared to move forward with a succession planning effort. This finding is further supported by a Median (middle value) and Mode (most frequently occurring value) of 49 points. The cautionary scores indicate the need for continued communication among staff and judges, as well as the need to clearly articulate reasons why succession planning is important to the overall health of the organization; however they are not low enough to suggest the need for a delay in implementation. In comparison, the MACCA results suggest there is not as strongly a perceived need for succession planning and it does not rise to the level of importance reserved for other court operational issues.

Table 2
Assessing Organizational Readiness:
Are Conditions Right for Doing Succession Planning?
Results from 20th Circuit and Ottawa Court Probate Courts – SPOT.
N = 18; 100% response.

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	
2	2	5	3	4	5	4	2	4	2	33
6	4	6	6	5	6	4	5	4	5	51
2	2	5	5	3	4	5	1	2	3	32
6	6	6	5	5	5	3	4	4	5	49
5	5	4	6	4	5	5	5	4	5	48
5	5	6	6	5	6	5	5	5	6	54
5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	6	5	49
6	4	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	4	52
5	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	45
6	6	5	6	5	4	5	6	6	6	55
5	3	5	4	5	6	5	5	5	4	47
4	5	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	5	39
4	5	4	4	3	5	3	1	2	4	35

	5	5	6	4	5	6	5	4	4	6	50
	6	4	6	6	5	6	4	4	4	4	49
	5	6	3	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	54
	6	4	4	6	6	5	5	5	5	4	50
	4	4	4	4	5	6	5	5	4	4	45
Mean	4.8	4.4	4.9	5.0	4.7	5.1	4.5	4.3	4.3	4.6	46.5
Median	5	4.5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4.5	49
Mode	5	4	5	6	5	5	5	5	4	4	49
SD	1.25	1.20	0.94	1.03	0.97	0.87	0.71	1.49	1.18	1.10	
Ranking	4	8	3	2	5	1	7	10	9	6	

Table 3
 Assessing Organizational Readiness:
 Are Conditions Right for Doing Succession Planning?
 Results from members of the Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators.
 N = 15; 47% response.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	
	5	5	4	4	5	5	3	4	4	3	42
	5	5	2	5	2	2	5	2	2	2	32
	1	3	3	5	3	6	4	4	4	4	37
	2	4	1	1	2	2	1	2	3	6	24
	2	5	3	4	3	2	5	6	4	4	38
	4	3	2	5	5	5	3	3	4	2	36
	4	4	3	5	3	5	2	3	3	3	35
Mean	3.3	4.1	2.6	4.1	3.3	3.9	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.4	34.9
Median	4	4	3	5	3	5	3	3	4	3	36
Mode	5	5	3	5	3	5	3	4	4	3	#N/A
SD	1.60	0.90	0.98	1.46	1.25	1.77	1.50	1.40	0.79	1.40	
Ranking	9	1	10	2	7	3	8	5	4	6	

Another way to consider this data is by ranking each of the ten assessment statements by the mean and standard deviation scores, as shown below in Table 4. As further described below, Table 4 shows the subject courts clearly exhibit more readiness to proceed than the MACCA counterparts. This finding, however, does not diminish the need to examine warning signs highlighted by the lower ranked categories. The Ottawa County courts may have prepared well

for this BBS endeavor, but there are still potentially problematic issues, including the willingness to reallocate resources to ensure the success of BBS, developing the necessary cultural support to establish priorities, and ensuring the ability of all court leaders to work together and share the responsibility of implementation so the majority of the work is appropriately delegated rather than becoming the work of a few. Most of this can be accomplished by creating an organizational sense of urgency and an understanding of the way in which BBS will help the courts achieve their mission. Creating this sense of urgency can be accomplished formally through a well-crafted communication plan, as well as informally through dialogue at various staff meetings, internal training sessions, new employee orientations, etc.

Table 4
Assessing Organizational Readiness:
Are Conditions Right for Doing Succession Planning?
SPOT and MACCA Rankings

Abbreviated Assessment Statements	SPOT Rank	MEAN	SD	Abbreviated Assessment Statements	MACCA Rank	MEAN	SD
Q6 – Leadership is stable; priorities deemed important	1	5.1	.87	Q2 – There is an urgent need for a Plan	1	4.1	.90
Q4 – Leaders want to assess performance priorities	2	5.0	1.03	Q4 – Leaders want to assess performance priorities	2	4.1	1.46
Q3 – There is a Plan “Champion”	3	4.9	.94	Q6 – Leadership is stable; priorities deemed important	3	3.9	1.77
Q1 – Leaders will make time to participate in succession planning	4	4.8	1.25	Q9 – The culture supports an open process to set priorities	4	3.4	.79
Q5 – Leaders will change priorities and develop staff to improve outcomes	5	4.7	.97	Q8 – All leaders will work together	5	3.4	1.40
Q10 – Anticipated outcomes and benefits are clear	6	4.6	1.10	Q10 – Anticipated outcomes and benefits are clear	6	3.4	1.40

BBS: SUCCESSION PLANNING READINESS

Q7 – Based on the Plan, the organization is willing to reallocate resources	7	4.5	.71	Q5 – Leaders will change priorities and develop staff to improve outcomes	7	3.3	1.25
Q2 – There is an urgent need for a Plan	8	4.4	1.20	Q7 – Based on the Plan, the organization is willing to reallocate resources	8	3.3	1.50
Q9 – The culture supports an open process to set priorities	9	4.3	1.18	Q1 – Leaders will make time to participate in succession planning	9	3.3	1.60
Q8 – All leaders will work together	10	4.3	1.49	Q3 – There is a Plan “Champion”	10	2.6	.98
Overall Mean		46.5				34.9	

Table 4 reveals a number of stark contrasts between the SPOT and MACCA assessments of readiness to proceed with a succession planning process. For example, the overall mean scores for the two groups are at opposite ends of the cautionary spectrum, with SPOT at 46.5 and MACCA at 34.9 demonstrating significantly more readiness to proceed on the part of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts. The individual rankings also indicate very different levels of readiness. SPOT results suggest the most important variable is Q6, i.e., the stability of court leadership, continuity in direction and an understanding that priorities related to talent development are important to the organization. This lead ranking is closely followed by Q4, which shows the court leaders are interested in and willing to critically assess court performance. These first two variables are supported by the third ranked champion or sponsor who will provide the necessary resources and encouragement to ensure project success. In comparison, the MACCA results show their understanding of the need for succession planning with Q2 being the top ranked variable, yet the 10th ranked Q3 makes it equally clear there is an apparent lack of support to move forward with development of a plan. It is also instructive to note the relative

placement of Q1 in both rankings. The SPOT rank of 4 suggests court leaders are motivated to incorporate the work of succession planning with other priority projects, however, the lower MACCA ranking of nine indicates that even with awareness of the importance of employee talent development; there is a distinct lack of motivation to support such an effort. Based on these rankings, it appears the several preceding years of strategic planning efforts by the SPOT placed their Courts in a stronger position to move forward with succession planning than the various trial courts represented by the MACCA sample.

In addition to the instructive comparisons between the SPOT and MACCA rankings, it appears the SPOT rankings are responsive to the four research questions outlined in the Methods section, above. These fundamental questions are aimed at demonstrating the overall readiness of the trial courts in Ottawa County to pursue development of a sustainable succession plan. The first question measures desire to assess and improve the current workforce. Q4, second ranked, directly indicates a significant level on interest and support in critically assessing court performance.

The second question delves deeper to determine whether a succession plan is a method of choice to respond to professional development issues. Q2 (ranked 8), Q9 (ranked 9), and Q10 (ranked 6) each suggest support for a succession plan. Results for Q2 show an average response of 4.4 on a 6 point scale, demonstrating a basic understanding on the part of court leaders that such a plan is warranted. Q9 mean results, at 4.3, also show support by indicating there is an organizational culture which will sustain an open and inclusive planning process. The higher ranked Q10, with a mean of 4.6, most clearly responds to these research questions by indicating the outcomes and benefits of developing and implementing a succession plan are clear to the trial courts.

The third research question relates to the trial courts understanding the benefits of succession planning. The highest ranked Q6, with a mean of 5.1, reveals stability in the organizational leadership, as well as an understanding of the importance of established priorities which already includes succession planning. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume the Courts' see the benefits of this planning process and view it as a proven management tool.

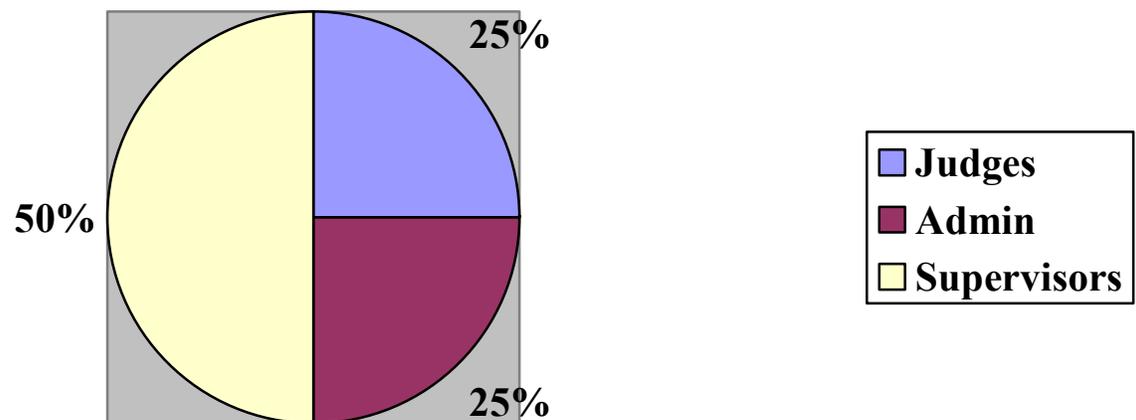
Finally, the fourth research question relates to the budget process and seeks to determine the need for better alignment of the courts' budget and its strategic priorities. Although touching peripherally on this issue, Q7 with a ranking of 7 and a mean of 4.5 demonstrates the organizational willingness to shift resource distribution and utilization based on an established succession plan.

Although the clear import of the data presented in Table 4 is the two subject courts are organizationally prepared to move forward with BBS implementation, there are additional issues relevant to court managers. While highlighted high scores demonstrate readiness, the lower ranked issues (e.g., Q7 – willingness to reallocate resources; Q2 – sense of urgency; Q9 – cultural openness in setting priorities; and Q8 – ability of leaders to work together) are important reminders. All of the trial court scores are positive, yet lower rankings point to a need for improved communication regarding the urgency of pursuing talent development/talent management and management's willingness to reallocate resources as needed to ensure success. Such improved communication will strengthen the implementation process and demonstrate the ability of court leadership to effectively work together thereby improving overall service to the public.

Survey Instruments

In light of current succession planning literature, the Readiness Assessment instrument discussed above, assists in determining whether general organizational conditions are appropriate for launching a planning project requiring significant resources. The two distinct survey instruments described below are intended to gather more specific information regarding the process currently used by courts to fill key positions and provide talent development opportunities to court employees. The initial survey, entitled “Survey for Judges, Leadership Team and Supervisors: Perceived Need for Employee Development“, was electronically distributed to twenty select decision makers in the Courts. The composition of respondents by position is represented in Figure 3.

Figure 3 – Composition of Respondents by Position



This survey instrument is comprised of thirty four (34) questions, soliciting opinions (ranked on a five point Likert scale), factual information, and narrative comments. Since this “Discovery

Phase” research project is narrowly focused on determining organizational readiness for succession planning, it is necessarily coupled with two additional projects, which are independently studying the “Design Phase” (workforce analysis) and the “Development Phase” (staff competency issues) related to the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts. Consequently, it was decided to construct a single survey containing questions for each of the three distinct projects. The Courts’ chief judges and leadership team believed this was necessary to improve response rates and avoid survey fatigue. The specific questions related to the Discovery Phase include questions #1 through #8; the Design Phase includes questions #9 through #20, the Development Phase includes questions #21 through #33, and question #34 elicits commentary relative to all phases.

As noted above in Table 1, the first survey was distributed to 20 research participants and the response rate was 100%. An exemplar of the complete survey instrument, with results, may be more fully examined in Appendix D. The two initial questions elicited a strong response, with 100% of respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing with the proposition that Ottawa County should develop and maintain high performance trial courts, as well as the need to maintain a well qualified and trained workforce. Comments noted that to provide the excellent level of service expected by the general public, such a workforce is necessary. Question 3 showed a disagreement among respondents. Eighty-five percent of the responses supported the concept of filling vacant positions by internal candidates, assuming they are well qualified. Fifteen percent of respondents disagreed and elaborated with comments. There seemed to be an important recognition that qualifications are critical in the hiring process, but to promote a high performing organization, administrators must also consider the “right attitude” or “right fit” before a hiring decision is made. This perspective has ramifications for the Development Phase

so that training programs are not designed exclusively around qualifications, but consider the less tangible qualities of attitude and character development.

Next, 65% of respondents indicated current recruitment and hiring practices ensure the best qualified candidate is hired or promoted. Twenty percent neither agree nor disagreed and 15% disagreed with this assessment. It appears the disagreement is focused on a perceived lack of creative recruitment and points to potential process improvement which may be incorporated in the succession plan development. Once employees are hired or promoted, there is 100% agreement that the Courts' should provide professional development opportunities. This response was consistent in both parts of Question 5, i.e., development opportunities related to an employee's current position and opportunities related to possible promotion.

Question 6 showed a strong positive consensus that judges, administrators and supervisors have some responsibility for the professional development of employees. The comments suggest some understanding that certain officials may not have time to provide direct oversight or instruction; however, there are many opportunities to support employee development and assist when available.

The sensitive resource issue addressed by Question 7 provoked the most disagreement among respondents. 45% agreed it is appropriate to offer professional development only to "high potential/high performance" employees if there are insufficient resources to provide development opportunities to all employees. Forty percent disagreed and 15% neither agree nor disagree. The Literature Review suggests many organizations are naturally strategic when allocating training resources; however Question 7 raises the issue to a more public venue and suggests this practice be part of a promulgated succession plan. As any organization develops a plan and considers this issue, it will be important to distinguish between how a court will

effectively manage scarce resources while avoiding blatant or inappropriate discrimination in the allocation of training resources.

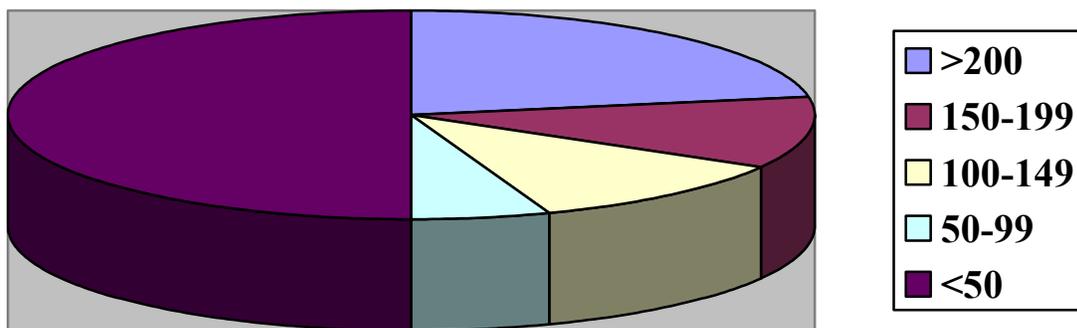
From the standpoint of organizational readiness to implement a succession plan, Question 8 suggests the need to communicate well at all levels of an organization, so there is an understanding that all employees share in the courts' collective successes and failures. Ninety-five percent of respondents agreed with the position that employee recognition of this understanding is an important aspect of the plan.

The final question related to the Discovery Phase, #34, solicits narrative comments about any concerns respondents may have regarding succession planning. A review of all comments suggests certain themes related to the concept of organizational readiness. It is clear respondents understand the planning process requires a significant time commitment, however, there are cautionary notes requesting planners to remain aware of daily court duties which must be accomplished and not sacrificed as a result of succession planning. Likewise, many respondents note resource concerns. During budget years when the public sector is required to be more fiscally conservative, there is concern about where the financial and other resources may come from to support professional development. Perhaps the most critical theme deals with communication and how all staff will be encouraged and supported, even if they choose to not be an active participant in a succession plan.

The second survey instrument, entitled "Perceived Need for Employee Development" was electronically distributed to the 45 members of the Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators (see Appendix E). Although Michigan has 57 circuit courts, not all circuits have an administrator and MACCA membership is voluntary. Once distributed, 18 MACCA members began the survey and 15 members completed it, resulting in a 33% response rate.

The survey contains thirteen (13) questions and was designed to elicit information from other Michigan trial courts regarding the existence of written succession plans as well as levels of interest in related workforce development issues. Respondents represent a broad geographical area of the state and various sizes of courts, as depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Number of FTE's Employed by MACCA Respondents



Although a variety of trial courts responded, 100% indicated they have no written succession plan. This information coupled with anecdotal information from several court administrator colleagues, suggest a majority (if not all) of Michigan trial courts are currently operating without benefit of a written succession plan. However, 53% reported agreement with the statement “succession planning is important to administration of Michigan trial courts.”

A portion of the survey dealt with key positions, which is defined in the following manner: “The term “key position” identifies the position as critical to the Courts’ functions on a day-to-

day basis and/or a position that is statute-driven. The term does not suggest that other positions within the Courts are not “key” to the Courts, but rather, in the absence of the position, the Courts’ efficiency/effectiveness may be critically impaired.” As an example, the identified key positions for the 20th Circuit Court and the Ottawa County Probate Court are noted in Figure 5, below.

Figure 5 – Key Positions: 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Court

Trial Division

Job Classification:

CIRCUIT COURT ADMINISTRATOR
CIRCUIT COURT REPORTER
CIRCUIT COURT CLERK- ADR CLERK
FELONY COLLECTIONS CLERK
TRIAL COURT DIRECTOR

Probate

Job Classification:

DEPUTY PROBATE REGISTER
PROBATE REGISTER

FOC

Job Classification:

ASSISTANT FRIEND OF THE COURT
FAMILY SERVICES COORDINATOR
FOC INVESTIGATOR
FRIEND OF THE COURT
PARENT LOCATION SPECIALIST

Detention

Job Classification:

ADMINISTRATIVE AIDE (DETENTION)
ASST. SUPT. OF JUVENILE DETENTION
SHIFT SUPERVISOR
SUPT. OF JUVENILE DETENTION

Treatment Services

Job Classification:

TREATMENT SERVICES MANAGER
TREATMENT SPECIALIST

Juvenile Services

Job Classification:

DIRECTOR OF JUVENILE SERVICES
ASST. DIRECTOR OF JUVENILE SERVICES
PROGRAMS SUPERVISOR

Casework Services

Job Classification:

CASEWORK SERVICES MANAGER
JUVENILE CASEWORKER
SENIOR CASEWORKER

Juvenile Register

Job Classification:

JUVENILE REGISTER
REIMBURSEMENT SPECIALIST

In this context, 53% reported their court has identified key positions and 13% has not. In a follow-up question, 53% indicated their court has the ability to fill key positions rapidly if necessary and 13% do not have the same ability. In each of these situations, 33% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements. Further demonstrating the need for some type of succession planning; only 40% of respondents indicated their court has a well trained talent pool from which key positions could be filled.

In a manner similar to the first survey responses, MACCA respondents disagreed about offering professional development only to high potential/high performance employees in difficult economic times. Fifty-three percent agreed with this practice, while 33% disagreed. There was much less disagreement about the practice of filling vacant court positions with internal candidates, with 87% of the MACCA respondents agreeing with the practice and no one disagreeing. Yet the comments revealed some cautionary notes about the need for organizations to occasionally select new staff from outside to ensure the influx of new ideas.

To further highlight potential organization problems when there is no succession plan, more than half of the respondents admitted court operations were at risk when key employees leave the court and nearly 30% indicated their current recruitment and hiring practices are not optimal. Similar to the narrative comments of the first survey, MACCA respondents voiced concern about the time and resources needed to create and implement a sustainable succession plan. Although the value of such a plan is recognized, there seems to be insufficient incentive for the majority of trial courts to customize a succession plan.

Focus Group

In an effort to gather data from a cross section of the Ottawa County trial courts, including judges, administrators, supervisors, union leaders and front line workers; eight focus

group questions were developed for use with the Strategic Planning Oversight Team (see Appendix B). During a regularly scheduled SPOT meeting in September 2010, members were provided with these questions and a vital discussion ensued.

Beginning with a question regarding the alignment of a succession plan with the courts' existing strategic plan, SPOT members saw the new focus on professional development as a natural outgrowth of the courts' mission. The current mission statement: "To administer justice and restore wholeness, in a manner that inspires public trust", requires a high performance court. Consequently, it is necessary to ensure "the right people with the right skills are in the right place at the right time". This discussion naturally leads into the second question about how a succession plan may benefit the courts. The team members suggested communication about the need for a plan will raise awareness among staff about development opportunities and the need for continuous improvement as we seek new ways to better serve the public. The process may also benefit the courts by improving morale through the highlighting of promotional opportunities for internal candidates. Simply sharing information about attrition rates and potential retirements will clearly demonstrate upcoming vacancies and perhaps will encourage high performing employees to hone skills for future positions.

Regarding anticipated changes in staffing patterns, SPOT members suggested a few potential revisions including the combining of certain positions and the creation of some new positions. For instance, technology changes in courtrooms may lead to less reliance on traditional court reporters and a need for new video technician positions. Likewise, electronic content management systems used to process most court workflow may require new systems expertise in the courts. Also, future changes in the Chief Judge positions may change expectations for administrative staff.

The next question, dealing with potential barriers to succession planning, sparked extensive discussion. Although most SPOT members are supportive of succession planning and seem to understand the need for such a process, there are clear concerns about the availability of resources to sustain professional development. In part, these concerns seem to stem from the recent suspension of the County tuition reimbursement policy – which paid for employees to attend college classes related to their current positions. As the national, state and local budgets continue to shrink, there is also concern about program or staff reductions which may be necessary to support a new initiative like succession planning. These and similar concerns demonstrate the need for more communication with court employees regarding the personal and professional benefits which could accrue through this process. Additional transparency in the budget process may also be helpful, as well as sharing details about available scholarships and grant funding that may be available to augment court training budgets.

The final focus group questions regarding new opportunities and potential concerns, brought the discussion full circle as SPOT members reiterated the potential barriers to plan development and implementation. After considering the entire situation, however, there was clear support to move forward with the development process, based on an understanding this would directly benefit court employees and allow the courts to better serve the public.

Human Resources Interview

The initial data collection interview with Ottawa County Human Resources (HR) Director, Marie Waalkes and Employee & Labor Relations Manager, Marcie VerBeek was used to determine how professional development for court employees may effectively blend with training opportunities for county employees. In addition, it provided an opportunity to share more detailed information regarding succession planning efforts being pursued by the courts. As

noted in the Introduction, Michigan's trial court system is controlled on a state-wide basis by the superintending control of the Supreme Court, yet most court funding is localized at the county level. Consequently, Ottawa County serves as the "funding unit" for the local circuit and probate courts. Legally the courts and the county are separate and distinct employers, but from a practical and operational standpoint there is little difference between how court and county employees are treated. The courts follow most county policies, use the same budget and payroll process, orient new employees in the same manner, etc. When embarking on a new professional development endeavor, however, it is important for all participants to understand the courts and the county represent different branches of government and there is a fundamental difference between the trial courts and county departments.

Appendix C contains the interview instrument and a summary of responses obtained. The interview began with an explanation of the "Building Bench Strength" project and a review of employment statistics which demonstrate a need for succession planning as well as organized talent development. The initial HR responses toward succession planning were positive and the respondents indicated it can strengthen employee knowledge, skills and abilities, while simultaneously providing guidance regarding available career paths. HR recognizes the need for some specialized training necessary for court operations; however, it was also clear that all court employees were welcomed to take advantage of available county training, with appropriate supervisory approval.

The newly developed "GOLD STANDARD" leadership classes offered by HR are viewed as the most helpful local training to prepare employees for promotional opportunities. Additional ways HR may be able to assist with implementation of a court succession plan includes recruitment and hiring; availability of all training classes; wage and classification

studies to timely update position descriptions; and assistance with development of new training curricula. Of course, as professional development opportunities are created and implemented, HR cautions the courts and county departments to consider the need for notification of all employees and in the event training may not be relevant for all employees, to at least avoid any discriminatory bias in the selection of employees who may take advantage of professional development opportunities (see Michigan ELLIOTT-LARSEN CIVIL RIGHTS ACT, Public Act 453 of 1976). This cautionary note is especially important in courts and county departments where groups of employees are unionized or have organized collective bargaining associations.

Regarding county participation in a succession planning effort, the HR respondents indicated a desire to pursue plans once the economy improves and there are resources available. They also regularly review best practices in employee professional development, which are available through the Society for Human Resource Management (<http://www.shrm.org/>) and the International Public Management Association (<http://www.ipma-hr.org/>). Although succession planning is generally viewed as a beneficial endeavor, several barriers to implementation and generalized concerns were discussed. Specific barriers include lack of political support, available resources, appropriate understanding of generational differences in the workforce, and the need of some unions to treat all employees in exactly like fashion. Other concerns include the fundamental difficulty of establishing a sustainable succession plan in a county with more than 1100 diverse employees, the potential need to move employees out of “comfort zones” to assist with professional development, and the need to avoid creating a system of perceived entitlements for some while creating morale problems for others. In spite of these barriers and concerns, the potential benefits of a well crafted succession plan are supported by the Human Resources Department.

County Administrator Interview

The final data collection effort for this BBS research project was an interview with Ottawa County Administrator, Alan G. Vanderberg. Best practices related to aligning budget development and employee professional development was the focus of the interview. A copy of the interview instrument and summary responses is contained in Appendix F.

Overall, the county is supportive of professional development and assists in the process through “GOLD STANDARD” leadership training. In addition, there are preliminary plans to add an executive track to this training. It was suggested the indefinite suspension of the county tuition reimbursement program was unfortunate, but necessary due to difficult economic times. The plan is to reinstate the program as soon as it is fiscally prudent. Although the county supports employee talent development through training, there is no current method of integrating multi-year development plans with the county budget process. Instead, most training decisions are left to the discretion of department heads and court administrators, as long as sufficient resources are available in current budgets and do not require expenditure of county contingency funds. Additional ways of supporting employee training includes the negotiation of more vendor contracts (e.g., Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) or Electronic Content Management (ECM) systems) with extended training included; seeking educational grants and local foundation funds for professional development; and applying for more professional association scholarships.

As the county continues to link budget allocations with identified performance measures, it was noted new employee requests currently require a connection with performance measures. However, there is not a similar linkage between the allocation of professional development resources and performance measures. Even though such linkages are not developed, there are active discussions among county administrators in Michigan about best practices regarding

professional development. Since most counties are currently dealing with difficult financial circumstances, many are adding “stay or pay” conditions to the expenditure of training or conference funds. For example, if a county were to approve a sizeable expenditure for a professional development program, such as CEDP, there may be a written or tacit expectation that the recipient will continue their current employment for a minimum period of time (e.g., 2 or 3 years). If the employee leaves sooner, he/she would be liable to reimburse the county for the actual cost of the training. Other best practices include reliance on less expensive distance learning options and increased “train the trainer” expectations, whereby employees who are approved for professional development opportunities are expected to train other court or county employees once their educational process is completed.

When the interview turned to the subject of potential barriers or concerns about succession planning, the “political” barrier raised by HR was mentioned again. Unlike the private sector where many decisions are made by fiat or exclusively based on financial considerations, in the public sector politics is an ever present variable. It was noted county administration can prepare various programs, but no guarantees can be made to employees until new ideas are fully vetted through the political process. Other barriers discussed were more employee focused. For instance, there seems to be a decline in critical thinking skills among employees. Specifically, in an era of increased public expectations we should be more focused on outcomes (i.e., how we are doing) rather than on outputs (i.e., what we are doing). Also, there is a phenomenon, sometimes referred to as the zombie effect, where employees arrive at work barely on time, work at minimally acceptable levels, race out at close of business, and exhibit absolutely no interest in any extra effort to serve the public, assist co-workers, or engage in professional development. To whatever extent the zombie effect is present in an organization, it

will create a barrier to implementation of succession planning and may create some serious employee morale issues. Finally, while the concept of professional development makes good business sense and should be pursued, a major concern is the management of employee expectations. The ultimate success or failure of such an initiative will likely be linked to how well the program is communicated to staff; how effectively the benefits are articulated; and whether ongoing employee issues/concerns are effectively managed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As noted in the Introduction, the primary purpose of this CEDP Phase III Project is to build on the Courts' strategic planning experience, augment the plan with a necessary succession planning (i.e., talent development and talent management) component, and share with other courts the planning experiences of these two jurisdictions including a description of the planning and implementation processes, benefits realized from the process to date, and lessons learned. Preliminary success has been achieved by combining the results of this project with two companion CEDP projects which study the Courts' current workforce and develop an implementation plan for talent management. The Courts' 2011 All Staff Meeting was selected as the most appropriate venue for sharing the results of the three CEDP research projects with judges and staff, along with the implementation plan. By moving forward with this project, the Courts' anticipate the formation of a sustainable succession plan and thereby build the "bench strength" of the organizations.

A secondary purpose is to determine a process for assessing court readiness which may be used by the Courts' and other jurisdictions seeking to establish professional development capabilities. This will be accomplished by sharing the research findings during various Michigan court association meetings and by offering a modified version of the research findings to the National Association for Court Management for publication. Additional presentations of the findings will be made upon request.

When this succession planning project was conceptualized, four research questions were proposed to guide the research and as a result these same questions are now reframed as the first four conclusions.

CONCLUSION 1: THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS DESIRE TO ASSESS AND IMPROVE THEIR CURRENT AND FUTURE WORKFORCE NEEDS AND BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO THEM.

Beginning with the development of a long-range strategic plan, as described in the Introduction, the Courts have been committed for several years to the improvement of court operations and public service. In essence, there have been repeated efforts to become high potential and high performing courts. As judges and court leaders became increasingly aware of the impending departure of staff in key positions, primarily due to the baby boomer phenomena, it was determined the Strategic Plan needed a talent development and talent management component. Subsequent efforts to develop and implement this component are demonstrative evidence of the Courts' desire to understand and improve its current workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 1A: THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS SHOULD CONTINUE REFINEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE "BUILDING BENCH STRENGTH" MODEL.

The combined results of the three BBS research projects dealing with distinct phases of succession planning should be more fully integrated in the Courts' strategic planning process. As implementation proceeds, this necessary integration includes regular communication with staff regarding project status, training of supervisors to assist staff with personal goal development during performance reviews, identification of professional development and training opportunities, reviewing applications for the BBS program, establishing a data base to track "Bench Strength" developments, seeking resources to provide training, etc.

RECOMMENDATION 1B: COURT MANAGERS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO ASSESS CURRENT WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS AND INSTITUTE A TALENT DEVELOPMENT/TALENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IF WARRANTED.

Based on current US Census data, CNN reported on December 27, 2010 (www.cnnmoney.com) that beginning in January 2011, 10,000 baby boomers in the United States will turn 65 years of age every day for the next 19 years. This startling statistic suggests many court employees will be eligible for retirement in the near future. It is unclear from where the talent pool will emerge to select skilled replacement staff. Consequently if court managers do not actively develop talent, there will likely be a time in the near future where the overall quality of court operations and public service will dramatically decline due to the lack of a properly prepared workforce. Succession planning is premised on the goal of having the right people, with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time. This does not typically happen by accident; rather it requires foresight and planning by organizational leaders.

CONCLUSION 2: 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURT LEADERS WANT TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE SUCCESSION PLAN AS ONE METHOD OF RESPONDING TO EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES.

Although organizational readiness to embark on major initiatives can be difficult to accurately assess, responses to the Readiness Assessment Survey (Appendix A) and the SPOT

Focus Group Questions (Appendix B), as well as numerous discussions during SPOT and Leadership Team meetings demonstrate comprehension of the immediate need and support for succession planning. It is clear to the Courts' leaders that several years of strategic planning created a positive environment and institutional mindset which is accepting of the succession planning challenge.

Other jurisdictions may approach succession planning in different ways and have equal success; however, regardless of the process used it seems there is a need for regular communication at all levels of an organization and strong institutional leadership if a talent development/talent management initiative is to be viable.

RECOMMENDATION 2: TO SUPPORT THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF AND THE BBS PROGRAM, THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS SHOULD CONTINUE TO UPDATE THE RECENTLY COMPLETED WORKFORCE ANALYSIS AND COORDINATE WITH THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT TO CREATE A BBS DATABASE TO PROVIDE FOR FUTURE ANALYSIS OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND READINESS.

At the outset of a succession planning process, the necessary data collection and verification can be onerous; however, once the initial labor force is fully described the maintenance of a database becomes more manageable. Readiness to proceed with BBS or a similar system requires data on all employees and positions in a court. Leaders must understand that unless BBS is based on documented competencies and is transparent to all staff, the program will be subject to criticism and loss of confidence by employees. It is important to have the present ability to show how actual skills and training are matched with promotional

opportunities; this is critical to avoiding accusations of favoritism when vacant positions are filled.

CONCLUSION 3: THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS SEE BENEFIT IN USING SUCCESSION PLANNING AS AN EFFECTIVE, PROVEN MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR BRINGING ABOUT CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENTS THAT WILL ENGAGE ITS WORKFORCE; MANAGE CURRENT TALENT; AND DEVELOP FUTURE LEADERS.

It is clear the BBS program will be an effective management tool in the many ways described throughout this report. It is incumbent on Court leaders, however, to not view BBS as an exclusive method of engaging the workforce, managing talent and developing leaders. BBS certainly provides an essential framework to ensure staff is given an opportunity to participate in talent development and focus the attention of supervisors when evaluating performance. Historically, however, employees will often pursue independent means of personal and professional development. Such efforts should be encouraged, in addition to BBS. Also, supervisors often find informal means of encouraging, training and developing staff which should not end simply because an organized talent development system is introduced to the organization. In essence, one size does not fit all – it only fits one. Therefore BBS can be successfully implemented as an important professional development tool as long as employees continue to be treated as individuals by supervisors.

RECOMMENDATION 3: THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS SHOULD PROVIDE SPECIFIC TRAINING FOR SUPERVISORS

REGARDING BBS IMPLEMENTATION AND INFORMAL METHODS OF PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG EMPLOYEES.

Due to several years of participation in the Courts' strategic planning process, current supervisors are well equipped to articulate the organizational mission, vision and values. In addition, their collective participation with various planning teams has prepared them to understand how the strategic and succession plans are intended to be incorporated in the organizational culture. Consequently, additional supervisory training to assist BBS implementation will focus on organizational needs in key positions, improved performance evaluation methods, professional development and goal setting for employees, and the creation of innovative development opportunities.

CONCLUSION 4: THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS NEED TO ENHANCE THEIR BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS BY FURTHER ALIGNING PROPOSED BUDGETS WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES.

Governmental budgeting often follows a prescribed format based on the level of governmental agency and the specific source of funding. The trial court budget process is no different and since Michigan does not have a unified court structure, the County of Ottawa is the official funding unit for the subject Courts. In recent years, the County has modified the budget process by requiring performance measures for all courts and county departments. In addition, budget requests are expected to identify goals and objectives from the County strategic Plan which are furthered by the proposed activities/services funded with general fund dollars. The Courts' currently provide the necessary performance measures; however, few of the specified County strategic goals are relevant to court operations. Although there is limited recognition of

the legal separation of the executive and judicial branches of government, the Courts' are often treated as another county department. As a result, there is little attempt on the part of the County Fiscal Services Department to understand or embrace the distinct goals and objectives identified in the Court's Strategic Plan. Further communication and collaboration with County officials is needed to resolve this deficiency in the current budget process.

RECOMMENDATION 4: THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS SHOULD INCORPORATE THESE CEDP RESEARCH RESULTS IN THE BUDGET PREPARATION PROCESS; DEMONSTRATING THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES.

Due to the recent national and state financial crisis, Michigan is struggling with double-digit unemployment, a housing crisis, political discontent and a 1.8 billion dollar projected deficit for FY 2012. This financial situation has trickled down to the county level and significantly impacts local budget decisions. County property taxes, which comprise over 70% of annual revenues, are projected to be significantly reduced and the already reduced state revenue sharing money is likely to be eliminated. Even with a history of conservative fiscal management, the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners is more challenged than before to maintain a balanced budget.

Often, in difficult budget times, governmental decision makers will reduce or eliminate any expenditure viewed as "non-essential". Among such items are training, conference attendance, and professional development. Frequently viewed as a "perk", these items seem to be easy targets when budgets are reduced. Based on this research project and the

likely attrition of key positions in the near future, such budget cuts may prove to be short sighted. As experienced staff begins to leave the Courts', unless well trained replacements can be found in a timely manner, the quality of court operations will decline and the overall quality of public service will suffer. It is incumbent on the Courts' to ensure such budgetary impacts do not adversely affect the quality of justice for court users.

CONCLUSION 5: MOST MICHIGAN TRIAL COURTS HAVE NO FORMALIZED SUCCESSION PLAN, ALTHOUGH COURT MANAGERS RECOGNIZE THE URGENT NEED FOR A PLAN.

The research finding from a number of Michigan court managers was frank and unambiguous. Michigan trial courts need a succession plan, yet they do not exist in most jurisdictions. Survey results and anecdotal observations suggest current court workloads preoccupy the available time of most court managers. Accordingly, there is little time available for reflection, strategic planning, workforce analysis, or talent development. Although the need for such planning is recognized, the fact that most courts have been able to successfully hire and train staff in past years has lulled many administrators into a false sense of security, thinking the ready pool of trained candidates will always be available. Current labor and census statistics suggest otherwise. With fewer people of employment age and with fewer of the potential workforce being prepared for court specific employment, the future ability of trial courts to timely fill key positions is likely to be compromised.

RECOMMENDATION 5: THE 20TH CIRCUIT AND OTTAWA COUNTY PROBATE COURTS SHOULD SHARE RESULTS OF THIS SUCCESSION PLANNING

RESEARCH WITH OTHER JURISDICTIONS TO ASSIST WITH FUTURE TALENT DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS.

Building on the creative succession planning work done by NACM in its 2008 Mini-Guide, the Courts' intend to provide information from this research project to any jurisdiction interested in pursuing talent development and talent management. Practically, this will be done by reference to the complete research project reports available through the National Center for State Courts library. In addition, the researchers are scheduled to present the project results to various Michigan court manager associations. At least one additional presentation has been scheduled in Minnesota and others may be included at future NACM conferences.

CONCLUSION 6: IF MICHIGAN'S "ONE COURT OF JUSTICE" FAILS TO DEVELOP TALENT DEVELOPMENT/TALENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS PRIOR TO THE EXODUS OF "BABY BOOMER" COURT EMPLOYEES, THE RESULTING VACCUUM IN INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE WILL CAUSE A CRISIS OF PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN MICHIGAN'S JUDICIAL BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT.

Results of several studies on public trust and confidence in the court system have demonstrated three primary reasons for dissatisfaction: courts are too confusing, they take too long, and they are too costly. Based on these repeated findings, many states have undertaken remedial programs to make trial courts more user-friendly, more efficient and less expensive. Although it may not be a perfect "fix", many courts have accepted the challenge to become more available and inviting to the public. The new challenge is to be prepared for the impending

workforce shortage caused by aging baby boomers and a slowing in population growth.

Succession planning can help courts ensure the right people, with the right skills, are in the right place, at the right time. If this does not occur, court users will be faced with new struggles in courts where staff are either not available or insufficiently skilled to assist them. The ultimate result will be a crisis of public trust and confidence in the courts.

RECOMMENDATION 6: THE MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT, THROUGH THE STATE COURT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE, SHOULD ADVOCATE FOR AND ASSIST TRIAL COURTS IN DEVELOPING APPROPRIATELY CUSTOMIZED SUCCESSION PLANS.

Based on the Michigan Constitution, Article VI, Judicial Branch, the Supreme Court has superintending control over Michigan's court system and the position of State Court Administrator is created to assist with the proper administration of justice. Often, this function is operationalized through the monitoring of compliance with statutes, court rules and case management standards; fiscal oversight; judicial assignments; etc. In regard to succession planning, additional opportunities are available for the Supreme Court to demonstrate leadership and help avert a potential crisis of public confidence. Specifically, through the Michigan Judicial Institute, the State Judicial Educator could create educational materials and training opportunities to assist judges and court managers prepare the trial courts for inevitable changes in the composition of Michigan's available labor force. Additionally, the Chief Justice and State Court Administrator could urge Chief Judges to review the local court employment situation and make necessary adjustments to ensure proper continuity in trained employees and the provision of excellent public service.

APPENDIX

Appendix A

CEDP Assessing Organizational Readiness: Are Conditions Right for Doing Succession Planning?

Assessment Instrument

Appendix B

CEDP Focus Group with Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT)

Succession Planning Readiness Questions

Appendix C

CEDP Interview with Ottawa County Human Resources Director, Marie Waalkes and Employee & Labor Relations Manager, Marcie VerBeek

How Court Employee Development will Blend with County Training Opportunities

Appendix D

CEDP Survey for Judges, Leadership Team, and Supervisors

Perceived Need for Employee Development.

Appendix E

CEDP Survey for Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators (MACCA)

Perceived Need for Employee Development.

Appendix F

CEDP Interview with Ottawa County Administrator, Alan G. Vanderberg

Best practices related to aligning budget development and employee professional development

Appendix A

CEDP Assessing Organizational Readiness: Are Conditions Right for Doing Succession Planning?

Assessing Organizational Readiness: Are Conditions Right for Doing Succession Planning?

Assessment Revised by: Kevin J. Bowling, JD

Based on a Strategic Planning Assessment Prepared by Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey, Ph.D.

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(Revised September 2010)

Please consider each statement, which represents opposite ends of the scale. Circle the number that best represents where your organization is on the 6-point scale relative to the two statements.

- | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Leaders/managers are willing to make time to participate in a succession planning process. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Leaders/managers are too busy with other, more pressing matters. |
| 2. There is an urgent and compelling need or pressing reason to develop a succession plan. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | An urgent, pressing, or compelling need, reason, or opportunity is lacking/absent. |
| 3. A champion/sponsor exists for the succession planning process and the succession plan once completed. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | We are lacking a champion/sponsor for the planning process and/or for the completed succession plan. |
| 4. Organizational leaders are genuinely interested in and willing to critically assess the court's performance. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Leaders are uninterested in a critical analysis and/or unwilling to hear or listen to things that should be improved. They think what the organization is doing and how it is performing are just fine. |
| 5. Leaders and managers are willing to change the priorities of the organization and develop staff for improved future outcomes. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Change is unlikely; the organization will not likely re-think and/or shift its priorities, or change and improve how staff are developed. |
| 6. The organization's leadership is stable, and continuity in direction and priorities are deemed important. | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | It is a volatile, political internal or external climate where the organization's leadership is likely to change and consequently, the organization's direction and priorities are likely to change. |

Assessing Organizational Readiness: Are Conditions Right for Doing Strategic Planning?

(Continued)

7. Based on a succession plan, the organization is willing and likely to shift how its resources are distributed and utilized.	6	5	4	3	2	1	It is likely that the organization's succession plan will not shape or affect the budgeting process and how resources are deployed.
8. Organizational leaders will collectively work together to follow-through on the succession plan.	6	5	4	3	2	1	Leaders, managers, and staff will likely continue to do what they have always done and the responsibility for implementing the succession plan will fall to a select few.
9. The organizational culture supports an open and inclusive planning process that will determine the organization's long-term direction and priorities.	6	5	4	3	2	1	Current leaders/managers want to set the direction and priorities of the organization.
10. The outcomes to be achieved and the benefits to be gained by developing and implementing a succession plan are clear.	6	5	4	3	2	1	The desired outcomes and benefits to be gained are unclear; leaders, managers, and staff are wondering why we are doing succession planning.

Assessing Organizational Readiness: Are Conditions Right for Doing Strategic Planning?

(Continued)

Scoring Instructions:

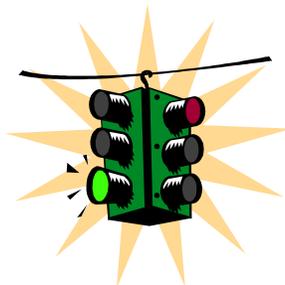
1. Add the numbers and place the total on the line below.
2. See the attached table for interpreting your score.
3. Compare & contrast how you rated your organization's readiness with how other SPOT members rated the organization's readiness. Discuss the differences.
4. Determine what steps you/others need to take to increase the likelihood of having a successful succession planning effort.

Total Score: _____

Interpreting Your Results:

Total Score:

- | | |
|-------|--|
| 50-60 | GREEN LIGHT – proceed with your planning effort |
| 30-49 | CAUTION – Identify the areas that need attention; take the necessary steps and time to improve in those areas and then proceed deliberately and carefully. |
| <30 | RED LIGHT – STOP – Do not proceed with your planning effort at this time; take the necessary steps and time to build support for the planning effort before proceeding. Only proceed once you have successfully addressed the areas that need attention. |



Appendix B

Focus Group with Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT)

Succession Planning Readiness. N = 18

Building Bench Strength (BBS) is an outgrowth of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' strategic plan and is intended to assist the Courts in achieving their mission (i.e., "to administer justice, restore wholeness and inspire public trust"). To accomplish this and ensure the Courts have "the right staff in the right place at the right time" so they can be high performance courts, a sustainable succession plan is needed.

Bench strength is a measure of how deep management talent reaches in the organization. Measuring an organization's bench strength allows court leadership to prepare and monitor the availability of future leaders.

Thank you for participating in this focus group. Your responses are important in determining the Courts' readiness to proceed with *Building Bench Strength*.

Instructions

Begin with "Assessing Organizational Readiness: Are Conditions Right for Doing Succession Planning"

Focus Group Questions

1. How does succession planning align with the Courts' strategic plan?
2. How will the development of a succession plan strategically benefit the courts?
3. What impact, if any, will development of a succession plan have on the Courts' ability to better serve the public?
4. Do any anticipated changes in court staffing patterns suggest a need for a succession plan? If yes, what are the anticipated changes?
5. What are some barriers to an effective succession plan?
6. Are judges and court staff adequately prepared to implement a succession plan? If not, what remains to be done?
7. What new opportunities may become available to court staff through succession planning?
8. What concerns, if any, do you have about succession planning?

Appendix C

CEDP Interview with Ottawa County Human Resources Director, Marie Waalkes and Employee & Labor Relations Manager, Marcie VerBeek

How Court Employee Development will Blend with County Training Opportunities (N=2)

Building Bench Strength (BBS) is an outgrowth of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' strategic plan and is intended to assist the Courts in achieving their mission (i.e., "to administer justice, restore wholeness and inspire public trust"). To accomplish this and ensure the Courts have "the right staff in the right place at the right time" so they can be high performance courts, a sustainable succession plan is needed.

Bench strength is a measure of how deep management talent reaches in the organization. Measuring an organization's bench strength allows court leadership to prepare and monitor the availability of future leaders.

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses are important in determining the Courts' readiness to proceed with *Building Bench Strength*.

Interview Questions

1. Based on your HR experience, do you think succession planning will affect the professional development of court employees? If so, how?
 - Yes, it can strengthen knowledge, skills and abilities for current positions and provide guidance for potential career paths.
2. What County training opportunities are available to court personnel?
 - Currently, court employees are eligible for all HR provided training as long as the immediate supervisor approves release time for the educational sessions.
3. What County training is most helpful in preparing employees for promotional opportunities?
 - Based on feedback from recent County employee satisfaction surveys, extensive planning was done to create "Gold Standard" Leadership Classes. These specialized classes are intended for those employees seeking promotional opportunities and supervisory responsibilities. Leadership classes are offered in addition to the variety of employee training opportunities noted in the brochure highlighted below.

Figure 6 – Cover for Ottawa County GOLD Training Brochure



4. Can HR staff assist with the development and implementation of a court succession plan? If so, how?

- Assistance with recruitment and hiring
- “Gold” training
- Updating wage and classification studies
- Development of new training curricula

5. Are there any collective bargaining implications related to succession planning?

- There could be challenges if all staff are not provided with similar training opportunities
- Must avoid any discriminatory bias in the selection of training candidates (see Michigan ELLIOTT-LARSEN CIVIL RIGHTS ACT, Public Act 453 of 1976)
- Must provide appropriate notice regarding the availability of training opportunities

6. If the court wishes to devote more training/development resources to high performing/high potential employees, what is a reasonable resource request which HR could support?

- Grant funded training and conferences
- Training which is not a duplication of effort between the Courts and County
- Evidence based training developed for an identified need

7. Has HR prepared or considered preparation of a succession plan for County employees? If not, why not?

- It is under consideration, however, resource limitations has prevented any significant progress

8. What are some HR best practices related to employee professional development?

- Best practices followed by the HR Department are often those published by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the International Public Management Association (IPMA)

9. What are some barriers to creating or sustaining an effective succession plan?

- Lack of political support
- Limited resources
- Understanding generational differences
- Union expectations regarding equal treatment of all employees (even when there are different organizational needs)

10. What concerns, if any, do you have about succession planning?

- Overall difficulty of a comprehensive planning process
- Testing requirements
- Lack of appropriate perspective
- Need to avoid creating a system of perceived entitlement
- Potential morale problems
- Difficulty in moving some employees out of existing “comfort zones”

Appendix D

CEDP Survey for Judges, Leadership Team, and Supervisors
Perceived Need for Employee Development. N = 20.

Introduction

Building Bench Strength (BBS) is an outgrowth of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' strategic plan and is intended to assist the Courts in achieving their mission (i.e., "to administer justice, restore wholeness and inspire public trust"). To accomplish this and ensure the Courts have "the right staff in the right place at the right time" so they can be high performance courts, a sustainable succession plan is needed.

Bench strength is a measure of how deep management talent reaches in the organization. Measuring an organization's bench strength allows court leadership to prepare and monitor the availability of future leaders.

Thank you for completing this brief survey. Your responses are important in determining the Courts' readiness to proceed with Building Bench Strength.

Instructions

There are thirty four questions in this survey. For the first eight questions, please mark your response by selecting the answer which most closely represents your opinion: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neither Agree nor Disagree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree. Please answer the following twelve questions with a "yes", "no" or "don't know" as appropriate. The remaining thirteen questions will follow the same format as the first eight questions. Question number 34 invites you to articulate your thoughts in narrative form. Additional comments will be very helpful in further understanding your response.

Key Position Term Definition

The term "key position" identifies the position as critical to the Courts' functions on a day-to-day basis and/or a position that is statute-driven. The term does not suggest that other positions within the Courts are not "key" to the Courts, but rather, in the absence of the position, the Courts' efficiency/effectiveness may be critically impaired.

Approximate Time to Take the Survey

Approximate time to complete the survey is 20 – 25 minutes. Your answers are saved so if you need to stop and restart, the survey will begin where you left-off upon clicking the link below. Please note, your responses are confidential and anonymous.

1. It is important to develop/maintain high performance trial courts in Ottawa County.

Strongly Agree	19
Agree	1
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

To provide the excellent service expected by the public, it is critical to operate high performance courts

2. Ottawa County trial courts should have the best qualified/trained staff in all key positions.

Strongly Agree	18
Agree	2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

We should have the best in all positions - not just key positions...

3. Vacant trial court positions should be filled by internal candidates, if well qualified (i.e., have the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform successfully).

Strongly Agree	8
Agree	9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	3
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Whenever possible, internal candidates should be promoted. but it is not enough to be well qualified...high performers need the right attitude to help sustain excellence in service.

While qualifications are extremely essential, the "right fit" is also an important factor to consider when filling positions.

I think that internal and external candidates should be considered and then a decision made based on best fit--this may be an internal candidate

There are times when a person from the outside can provide a new, fresh perspective. The example I will cite is when the Circuit/Probate Court Administrator, Kevin Bowling, was hired.

4. Current recruitment and hiring practices are optimal (i.e., these practices ensure the best qualified candidate is hired/promoted).

Strongly Agree	2
Agree	11
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4
Disagree	3
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Hiring practices seem routine and there is little creative recruitment currently being done. The process should be evaluated and updated.

Often times, Human Resources dictates the process. They should be held at arms length when filing a COURT position

I think the current practices are adequate but the level of solicitation through HR for position recruitment is too limited, e.g. posting only in the local papers, etc. Internally, I think our process is adequate.

5. The trial courts should provide professional development opportunities for staff.

Opportunities related to current position

Strongly Agree	15
Agree	5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments:

Planning professional development should be part of every evaluation cycle

Opportunities related to possible promotions

Strongly Agree	10
Agree	10
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments:

These promotions may not be within the County, but I believe that all employees should be positioned for a promotion even if they leave the County.

6. Judges, administrators and supervisors should support/assist with the professional development of employees.

Strongly Agree	16
Agree	4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

"support/assist" could include many things, e.g., mentoring, OTJT, informal training, organized education sessions, etc.

Although they do not always have the time to provide direct oversight, they need to be clear in their support and offering of information/assistance to the best of their ability.

7. If resources are limited, it is appropriate to offer professional development to high potential/high performance employees and not others.

Strongly Agree	1
Agree	8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3
Disagree	8
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

This may not be a popular thing to do, but administrators must deal openly with budget limitations and do what is in the best interest of the Courts

Determining whether or not an employee is "high p/high p" is subjective and could result in an employee not having the opportunity to shine in a training. Keeping trainings open to all helps reduce the effect of any possible bias of a supervisor.

I believe the systems should be built to offer everyone growth within the organization. Professional development should be an all inclusive, daily model.

Who determines if an employee is "high potential/high performance?"

All staff needs the opportunity for professional development. It would be appropriate to be selective in what is approved based on what is needed for the organization.

With budgets being limited, all employees may be required to find their own resources to better themselves.

There are several ways in which the Courts can provide professional development to all staff, even with limited resources, e.g. online, MJI, etc. Thus, I disagree with the assertion that only the high potential/high performance employees should receive it. Some of the responsive attitudes are situational, as well. In a strength-based organization, people can turn from a low potential/low performance employee to a high potential/low performance employee when they are appropriately placed doing what they enjoy and are good doing. It is not always realistic, however. It is important to allow all employees access to opportunities.

8. Succession planning should be driven, in part, by recognition that employees have a stake in the organization and share its successes.

Strongly Agree	7
Agree	12
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

In the public sector it is difficult to find tangible ways for employees to share in successes - perhaps more recognition is a starting point...

S.P. should be: 1) hiring the best 2) providing outstanding training & educational opportunities, & 3) ensuring good supervision.

9. Based on the definition of key positions, should any existing positions be added to the list?

Yes	3
No	11
Don't Know	6

Comments

I see positions here that do not meet the definition given. As an alternative, there are very few positions that didn't make this list.

I am unsure of the key positions outside my own department.

Chief Deputy Probate Register; it is an unclassified, supervisory position that requires filling in for the Probate Register in his/her absence.

Chief Deputy Probate Register, this position plays a much larger role as a key position than the Deputy Probate Register. Both the Probate Register and Chief Deputy Register would have to be absent before the Dep. Probate Register can exercise authority.

If the Court Reporter/Recorder position is to be classified as a key position, it should be a key position in all four circuit courts.

10. Referring to the list of key positions and respective job descriptions, do any job descriptions need modification to accurately reflect the position?

Yes	2
No	14
Don't Know	4

Comments

Court Reporters should also be required to perform office duties when not in court; Trial Court Director description does not adequately reflect what is expected and required of that position; Felony Collections is no longer the ADR Clerk

Trial Division, FOC, Juv. Services *Don't know. Probate Court, Deputy Probate Register: Essential Functions: #13 Should be removed. No longer applies. #15 and #16 These are weekly reports run by the Chief Deputy Register. #23 should read Member of SPT and/or SPOT Under Contacts: #11 should be removed. "Fiduciaries" is covered under #10.

These job descriptions were recently revised and are probably fairly accurate now.

11. Should any key positions be consolidated?

Yes	8
No	5
Don't Know	7

Comments

The 2 assistant FOC positions should be considered for consolidation; the assistant juvenile services director and casework services manager should be considered for consolidation. The FOC office and Juvenile Services office seems "top heavy" compared to other divisions.

Casework Services Manager and Programs Supervisor should be combined. Programs fall under probation and should be maintained through probation. There is also plenty of time for more work for both positions. Casework Services Manager and Program Supervisor/Foster Care Licensor or Caseworker and Program Supervisor/Foster Care Licensor

If being a "key position" means we will train an existing employee to fill the position one day, I do not believe the position of Court Reporter should be considered a key position. It is a technologically obsolete skill which should be sunset when existing employees retire. We should not pour resources into training someone else to do the job.

Casework services manager and Programs supervisor/foster care Is there enough work to support both positions?

The Programs Supervisor/Foster Care Licensor could be consolidated with the Casework Services Manager or Asst. Juvenile Services Director. This position could also be moved to the Senior Caseworker position.

Program supervisor position could be split up between casework manager, treatment manager & reimbursement specialist/senior caseworker(victim support)

Based on declining case load, the consolidation of Casework services and Treatment services managers should be looked at for consolidation. Second, as a result of declining revenues, additional cuts must be made in government. As such, the assistant juv. services director may need to be eliminated as part of that process to reduce the size of government.

12. Should any key positions be eliminated within the Courts?

Yes	7
No	9
Don't Know	4

Comments

Programs Supervisor and Casework Services Manager should either be consolidated or one eliminated.

Programs Supervisor/Foster Care Licensor

FOC Investigator; Caseworker; Treatment Specialist. These are positions that have more than one employee in them with the knowledge to train new employees in these positions.

Upon retirement, the Programs Supervisor position could be eliminated but that would mean the position responsibilities as now known and performed need to be divided among the Sr. Caseworker, Casework Services Manager, Treatment Manager, JCJ Coordinator and Asst. Director positions.

Program supervisor under juvenile services

Court reporter/recorder. It appears if transcripts are needed, they could be contracted out. It appears there is other staff that could operate the recording devices in the courtroom. Hand dictation is no longer needed.

13. Should any key positions be privatized?

Yes	2
No	14
Don't Know	4

Comments

Custody investigations can be done externally for \$1000/case. If using external contractors can result in quality reports at lower cost, it should be considered.

It may be possible to privatize some of the treatment services in the Juvenile Division, but that would require some thought.

Court reporters/recorders. Perhaps collections on both the circuit court criminal side and juvenile side.

It would be inappropriate to delegate court duties to a profit oriented company. Currently, the court uses private companies to conduct drug testing, etc. This is appropriate.

14. Is there adequate workload to justify each key position?

Yes	9
No	4
Don't Know	7

Comments

It seems juvenile caseworkers have very low caseloads - so personnel needs should be evaluated

Juvenile Services has 3 managers that discuss needing more work.

At times caseworkers have had low caseload numbers. Is this a continuing problem or just a point in time?

Program supervisor (juvenile services) seems to have duties that could be assigned to other positions, eliminating the need for the position

I can only speak with any certainty about my own department where the workload is tremendous. I don't have enough information to answer for others.

I question whether as a result of the declining case loads that we continue to need the number of managers (see prior question) that we currently have. In addition, we need to determine if all probation workers/support staff is required given shrinking number of cases and declining revenues.

15. Should any key position be reclassified?

Yes	5
No	8
Don't Know	7

Comments

With new court recording technology, the court reporter positions should be revised to video operators through attrition.

Court Reporter should be classified as Court Reporter/Court Clerk; Trial Court Director should be reclassified to adequately reflect the duties and responsibilities of that position

Treatment Manager that are the Assessment Unit Coordinator and Treatment Specialist in the Lighthouse Program

The Juvenile Services Director should be at the same classification level as the Friend of the Court due to the workload, double the staff, a 24/7 facility and three times the budget.

Senior DP Specialist title was changed with last wage study to "FOC Technical Support Specialist" - should be at higher grade given it's required IT knowledge

16. Are any job descriptions likely to change within the next year?

Yes	1
No	13
Don't Know	6

Comments

Court Reporter/Recorder, as all circuit courtrooms are equipped with video recording capability. The standardization of recording among all circuit courtrooms should be a goal.

Not in my department, there were changes in how some positions were used without changing the job description itself. The reallocation of responsibilities has streamlined processes.

17. Is each key position consistent with the Courts' Strategic Plan and Mission Statement (i.e., "To administer justice and restore wholeness in a manner that inspires public trust")?

Yes	19
No	0
Don't Know	1

Comments

NO COMMENTS

18. Do current key positions match the future needs of the Court?

Yes	16
No	1
Don't Know	3

Comments

But I also think the court needs to take an honest look at workloads combined with needed services and see if there are areas we can consolidate and be more productive.

Although all the positions listed under juvenile services are valuable--I'm not sure they all need to be listed as key for future needs of the court.

It is hard to say what changes will be made at the State level that could impact operations in some area. More and more may become centralized.

The positions as described certainly meet the future needs of the court

19. Collectively, the key positions are intended to represent a full spectrum of services and functions of the Courts. Are there any gaps in services/functions not represented by the identified key positions?

Yes	2
No	14
Don't Know	4

Comments

Adoption/judicial bypass/emancipation specialist in Probate. Collections specialist in Juvenile.

20. Are any staff prepared to move into key positions as needed?

Yes	11
No	1
Don't Know	8

Comments

For our department they are, not sure of different departments.

All

Caseworker

I am assuming that some are, but I don't know which ones.

There are some Treatment Specialist Assistant Superintendent Shift Supervisor

There are those in the Probate Court that have the degree to move into key positions, but perhaps not the experience. There are those that have the experience, but not the degree . . .

Chief Deputy Probate Register to Deputy Register.

The Assistant Detention Superintendent could possibly move into the Superintendent's position with some support. This is true of internal staff "could" fill Asst. FOC positions, FOC Investigator position and Family Services Coordinator/Custody investigator position

There are several on staff with the requisite education who could move into an FOC Investigator spot. There may be one or two who could fill the Assistant FOC's positions.

21. Judges and Leadership Team members understand the need to identify and prepare successors for key positions.

Strongly Agree	2
Agree	15
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Leadership discusses these issues regularly....judges may need some prompting

I'm not sure what judges and leadership team members "understand." I'm concerned that a focus on internal promotions may cause the Court to not consider great candidates from outside the Court--due to an unspoken "promise" of promotion.

I believe they do not have the necessary contact or relationship with staff to really know the skill level of possible successors for key positions.

22. Succession planning is guided by a philosophy that high potential staff should be developed while working rather than primarily by off –the-job experiences.

Strongly Agree	3
Agree	11
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

I don't understand this statement, unless "on" was meant to be used rather than "off" the job. Almost all staff have high potential.

I think preparation comes from both on and off the job experiences.

However, excessive time away from the office is not good for the court in that service is compromised and morale is harmed. Care should be taken in scheduling training, and training should be strongly related to court activities. Employees can be developed while working, but they should be developing themselves while not at work as well, such as by continuing their education by way of obtaining their degree or taking classes and obtaining certifications which will make them more valuable in the workplace. I believe there has to be a commitment outside of work, not just from 8-5.

There are times when bringing someone in from the outside is preferred. If the work environment is unhealthy for whatever reason, new blood can restore the balance. At the same time, well deserving employees with the required credentials should have the opportunity. Good talent could be lost if the sense is there is nowhere to go in the organization.

23. Succession planning has prompted the Courts to focus developmental programs on increasing the familiarity of high potential staff with who does what, when they do it, why they do it, and how they do it.

Strongly Agree	5
Agree	9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

We are moving in this direction - but there is much more work to do.

Not yet. If the question is "...will prompt the Courts..." then it makes sense to answer "agree."

"has happened"--this has not yet happened, but is needed and the purpose of BBS

24. Succession planning is supported by career paths that move not only up a specialized ladder, but across a continuum of professional competence.

Strongly Agree	6
Agree	8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

This question makes no sense at all to me. Sorry! However, I believe training should focus on encouraging all staff to improve their work-related skills.

"but across a continuum of professional competence" - not sure what this means.

25. Technical competencies of staff are best identified through the recruitment and hiring process.

Strongly Agree	0
Agree	6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6
Disagree	7
Strongly Disagree	1

Comments

Initial competency levels must be evaluated in the hiring process, but staff can also learn new skills after being hired

However, many staff improve their competencies through work experience as well as training and education while in a position. Sometimes bad employees are hired because they seem to have technical competencies, but (in reality) they lack creativity, self-motivation skills and drive.

I believe they are also identified through the working knowledge and execution of responsibilities of systems in place.

It is difficult to judge a person on paper. Many times an employee's technical competency manifests itself while on the job, not through recruitment or the hiring process. A person can tell you anything in an interview, but the truth comes out in the pudding when they can actually demonstrate what it is they can do.

Agree-if skill testing is involved in the hiring process

If technical competencies can be tested as part of the hiring process, it may be helpful. It's the behavioral aspects that are the most difficult to assess in the recruitment/hiring process.

26. In addition to technical competencies, behavioral competencies are important to court operations.

Strongly Agree	15
----------------	----

Agree	5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Since we deal with people of all ages, backgrounds, and educational levels, staff must have great interpersonal skills

27. Performance reviews are helpful with identifying in-house talent (i.e., technical and behavioral competencies).

Strongly Agree	6
Agree	10
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Yes - regular reviews provide a systematic way of learning how staff are developing professionally.

A performance review can document competencies, but do not identify these. Day to day interactions between the employee and his/her supervisor is the best way talent is seen, encouraged and exploited (in a positive manner, of course).

But this does not mean just yearly performance reviews. Staff should be offered feedback on performance on a regular basis, as needed.

If evaluations are honest.

They are only as good as the supervisor or employee who remembers to add these to the performance review.

The evaluation form in use now is awful. You are asked to evaluate the same things over and over. If a person has one particular shortcoming, it should be addressed in only that area and not creep over into everything the employee does.

28. Performance reviews should include individual development plans aimed at improving current competencies.

Strongly Agree	10
Agree	9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Development plans should include opportunities to move beyond their current assignment. It is helpful to discover what the employee has in mind for themselves within the court. Are they going to school with a goal in mind, or are they perfectly happy doing what they are doing and have no intention of moving beyond it.

29. Goals in individual development plans should be prioritized based on:**Individual career goals and development interests**

Strongly Agree	6
Agree	14
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments:

As long as it is of benefit to the organization and not just the individual

Organizational needs to fill key positions

Strongly Agree	6
Agree	12
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments:

I believe an organization should provide a structure of systems that allow each staff to grow for various reasons and positions.

connected to fit for the person

Available resources

Strongly Agree	2
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Agree	15
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments:

A motivated employee can work toward his/her goals without needing Court resources. In fact, seeking out resources (and finding them) could be an indicator of an employee who is of great value to the Court.

30. Employees seek careers with the Court for these reasons:**Passion for justice**

Strongly Agree	1
Agree	8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8
Disagree	3
Strongly Disagree	0

Desire to work for the Court

Strongly Agree	2
Agree	11
Neither Agree nor Disagree	6
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Salary/Benefits

Strongly Agree	10
Agree	8
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Location/Community

Strongly Agree	6
Agree	11
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Making a difference in client's lives

Strongly Agree	5
Agree	10
Neither Agree nor Disagree	4
Disagree	1
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments:

The "feel good" part of the job comes later, but is usually not the HONEST reason for seeking the job. People primarily want interesting work in a stable environment with good pay and benefits.

31. The Courts have adequate resources to train and develop current staff for promotion to key positions.

Strongly Agree	0
Agree	6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3
Disagree	11
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

In times of financial crisis, staff education has been significantly reduced

Distance travel to non internal training is discouraged due to limits in the mileage budget. The court should seek out state-wide opportunities for court staff and fund travel to these (e.g. JJAM or similar professional conferences, etc.)

Not providing tuition reimbursement could hinder staff who want to pursue their degree. There are no training dollars to spend on staff. Supervisors and employees alike are going to have to become creative in finding dollars to train staff. Team #5 also struggles with this.

Training and development of staff require time from administration at all levels. Currently, there is a strong need for clerical support within Juvenile Services to allow administration time to adequately be involved in staff training

As funding for training has been cut it ties our hands with getting staff the types of trainings that provide real in depth coverage of current issues

In the current economic climate, resources for training have really dried up. While grants are wonderful, they are not always there.

32. Tuition reimbursement is an important component of an employee training and development program.

Strongly Agree	12
Agree	5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	3
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

But the training must be relevant.

If the court places a value on education--in particular for key positions--then we ought to provide some incentive for on-going education

Several of my staff have depended on this resource to continue their education. Some staff won't be able to continue toward their goal without it due economic pressures at home.

33. It is important for the Court to develop and maintain a reputation as an employer of choice.

Strongly Agree	13
Agree	7
Neither Agree nor Disagree	0
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

NO COMMENTS

34. What concerns, if any, do you have about succession planning?

It is a difficult concept for staff to grasp and it requires significant work to be successful.

Succession Planning is important but we must be cognizant of our daily duties and not spend countless hours on SP and neglect our every day jobs.

I think it can discourage some employees because they will come to believe a position has been "promised" to them. The Court should hire the best, provide great training (including state-wide opportunities), support supervisors in methods to help individual staff grow, and encourage employees to be creative and to maximize their opportunities for growth. This can be done without any special programming or having to ID key positions.

I just hope it allows the court to develop systems that help all staff work successfully in the organization and not just those who might be chosen or find success in this planning.

In the past succession planning was perceived as administration subjectively selecting favored employees for positions. I'm in favor of succession planning and see the value of it as long as ALL employees are offered opportunities if they choose to participate. I'm concerned employees who do not identify themselves as wanting to seek a managerial position will be seen as unmotivated and not valued for what they are contributing to the organization.

The idea is good, on paper. I am concerned about unintended consequences, which have yet to be identified. Maintaining a positive workforce is a tricky undertaking. Careful planning and study will be necessary to develop the idea of succession training - but we can probably do it because we have good people working on the project.

That it will create consistency in the promotional process and that internal staff will be honored for their skills, abilities and drive.

1. Do we have the resources to pull this off? 2. Will some employees perceive unfairness in this process?

That the bad feelings of the past attempt will sabotage this honest and open effort to make it work.

Just the lack of resources to train and develop staff. In these hard economic times, it will certainly be a challenge for all of us.

There seem to be many assumptions made about level of staff knowledge as to the issues raised in this survey which limit the usefulness of the results.

I am aware of cross training of staff but don't know if there is specifically identifiable succession training or planning nor should there be any, if there is a difference, as a failure of success or opportunity is often met with a negative attitude which can be toxic - affecting all staff.

Organizational time on all levels of the administrative staff; sustainability; successful implementation that reaps positive outcomes; and effectively communicating the process to staff so the message can be understood and hear without a prejudicial, preconceived perspective.

It is important to me that we develop a process that encourages and supports all staff whether they choose to apply for advancement or not.

Sometimes it's a good decision to hire external people and that could be very disheartening to an internal candidate participating in succession planning.

I have no concerns as management is appropriately addressing this issue.

I am concerned about objectivity in selecting those who are seen as good candidates. We have staff that have the credentials, but politically can't cut it. At what point and how are they eliminated from consideration without collateral damage.

Appendix E

Survey for Michigan Association of Circuit Court Administrators (MACCA)
Perceived Need for Employee Development. N = 45.

Fellow MACCA Members:

The 20th Circuit Court (Ottawa County) has identified talent management / succession planning as a need and we are creating a planning template for our use, as well as for other interested courts.

This effort is being done in conjunction with the ICM Court Executive Development Program, which requires completion of a research project (including data collection). I am requesting your assistance with the data collection by taking a few minutes to complete the attached online survey.

Thanks for your anticipated cooperation with this survey! If there is sufficient interest, the 20th Circuit will be happy to present our findings and share the planning template at a future MACCA meeting.

Sincerely,
Kevin J. Bowling
Court Administrator
20th Circuit Court

Introduction

Building Bench Strength (BBS) is an outgrowth of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' strategic plan and is intended to assist the Courts in achieving their mission (i.e., "to administer justice, restore wholeness and inspire public trust"). To accomplish this and ensure the Courts have "the right staff in the right place at the right time" so they can be high performance courts, a sustainable succession plan is needed.

Bench strength is a measure of how deep management talent reaches in the organization. Measuring an organization's bench strength allows court leadership to prepare and monitor the availability of future leaders.

Thank you for completing this brief survey. Your responses are important in determining the Courts' readiness to proceed with Building Bench Strength.

Instructions

There are thirteen questions in this survey. For question one, please select the range that is appropriate for your Court. Please answer the second question with a "yes" or "no" as appropriate. For questions three through ten, please mark your response by selecting the answer which most closely represents your opinion: Strongly Agree; Agree; Neither Agree nor Disagree;

Disagree; Strongly Disagree. Question 12 asks you to select at least one from the list given. Question number 13 invites you to articulate your thoughts in narrative form. Additional comments will be very helpful in further understanding your response.

Key Position Term Definition

The term “key position” identifies the position as critical to the Courts’ functions on a day-to-day basis and/or a position that is statute-driven. The term does not suggest that other positions within the Courts are not “key” to the Courts, but rather, in the absence of the position, the Courts’ efficiency/effectiveness may be critically impaired.

Approximate Time to Take the Survey

Approximate time to complete the survey is 15 minutes. Your answers are saved so if you need to stop and restart, the survey will begin where you left-off upon clicking the link below. Please note, your responses are confidential and anonymous.

1. How many FTE's (full time equivalent positions) does your court employ?

> 200	4
150 - 199	2
100 - 149	2
50 - 99	1
< 50	9

Comments

None

2. Does your court have a written succession plan?

Yes	0
No	16

Comments

None

3. Succession Planning is important to administration of Michigan trial courts.

Strongly Agree

2

Agree	6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

SP is important, but it often is ignored due to other workload issues.

Not a really big priority for our court.

4. Our court has identified key positions.

Strongly Agree	2
Agree	6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

This is a recent development.

5. Our court has the ability to fill key positions rapidly if required.

Strongly Agree	2
Agree	6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

It takes time to review/revise positions, to assure funding is in place, to recruit, to interview, etc...

6. Our court has a well trained talent pool, from which to fill key positions.

Strongly Agree	0
	6

Agree	
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Certain court divisions have an internal talent pool, while others do not.

Typically, but not always and it depends on the position.

7. If resources are limited, it is appropriate to offer professional development to high potential/high performance employees and not others.

Strongly Agree	3
Agree	5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	5
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Although this may not be a popular decision, it is important to focus on what is in the best interest of the court.... In an era of limited resources, court administrators must be more discriminating about how resources are used.

8. Vacant court positions should be filled by internal candidates, if well qualified (i.e., candidates have the knowledge, skills and abilities to perform successfully).

Strongly Agree	4
Agree	9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	0
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Filling vacant positions with well qualified internal candidates recognizes good performance with a promotion and opens additional promotional opportunities for other staff. This is important for operational continuity and staff morale.

However, it is also important to bring in qualified employees from "outside" of your workplace so new ideas can be explored, otherwise there is very limited opportunity for change.

Our preference is to fill from within so long as the requisite qualifications, skills, knowledge, and experience can be found among current employees. Otherwise we would seek qualified candidates from the outside. Example: we have a quasi-IT unit within the court. The employees within this unit possess certain qualifications and knowledge. If a vacancy arose in this unit we would be interested in filling it from within, but because the qualifications and knowledge are particular, we may have no choice but to recruit from the outside.

9. Current recruitment and hiring practices in our court are optimal (i.e., current practices ensure the best candidate is hired/promoted).

Strongly Agree	0
Agree	9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	4
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

As long as courts in Michigan are required to follow funding unit protocols/policies and are prevented from operating as an independent employer, hiring practices will not be optimal.

The County's Human Resources Department does all recruitment for the Court and this has worked out very well.

Generally agree; however, there have been instances in the past when less than the optimal candidates were hired or promoted. This may be a function of a supervisor selecting a subordinate employee for promotion perhaps out of a felt obligation to that employee. One of the ways to guard against this happening is to permit the supervisor to recruit, interview and select, but with the proviso that he/she notify next up the chain of command thereby giving notice as to the recommended candidate for promotion (or hire). The default for the person next up the chain is to abide by the supervisor's recommendation unless the recommendation is not acceptable. In that event, the next up the chain has the right to "veto" the recommendation or at least the opportunity to thoroughly discuss the recommendation with the supervisor. We found that this approach reduces the chance that less-than-optimal candidates will be promoted or hired.

10. Court operations (i.e., ability to serve the public and provide mandated services) are at risk when key employees leave the court.

Strongly Agree	1
Agree	7
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2
Disagree	5
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Speed and quality of service often suffer when experienced staff leaves the court.

Sometimes

Usually not, and if so, only for a brief period of time.

This is possible depending upon the uniqueness of the job performed by the key employee who leaves the court, but court operations do not have to be at risk if preparations were made in advance to cross train employees. We identified those "key" functions that are central to the court's ability to perform its required duties and responsibilities and made arrangements to cross train employees, develop "back-up" employees, and in some instances developed training manuals that outline the duties and responsibilities associated with those key positions. These arrangements help to mitigate the risk of losing key employees.

11. Our court can easily identify and develop future court leaders.

Strongly Agree	0
Agree	5
Neither Agree nor Disagree	8
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	0

Comments

Courts can certainly do this...but it is not an easy process. Talent development requires careful planning and specific resources.

This has not been a focus or a priority for the court, but neither has it been a problem finding qualified candidates both within and without the court.

This is in part made easier for the court thanks to the many training opportunities provided by our funding unit, SCAO, MJI and other organizations. Our funding unit, for example, offers an array of classes on professional development, computer use, dealing with the public, specific topics such as ADA, diversity training, etc.

12. Please indicate the type(s) of professional development offered at your court

None	0
On the Job Training	12
County Training	8
MACCA	7
New Employee Orientation	10
Courtroom Observation	9
Michigan Judicial Institute	14
National Training	3

Comments

Periodic court "in-service" training, often conducted as an adjunct to regularly scheduled staff meetings.

13. What concerns, if any, do you have about succession planning?

Comments

Having the time and resources available to establish a sustainable plan.

Maintaining staff and judicial support for a comprehensive plan.

The same as the premis of the survey, it is lacking.

I do not have any concerns. Thank you.

I don't have a problem identifying all the key components of a job and what type of person should fill such a position(s), but I don't like identifying certain people to fill certain positions not yet vacant.

BBS: SUCCESSION PLANNING READINESS

How to best identify and reach out to employees who may be interested in moving up in the organization.

My concern is the lack of succession planning currently in place.

None

Nothing at this time.

None at this time.

None at this time.

None

n/a

None.

None

Appendix F

CEDP Interview with Ottawa County Administrator; Alan G. Vanderberg

Best practices related to aligning budget development and employee professional development (N=1)

Building Bench Strength (BBS) is an outgrowth of the 20th Circuit and Ottawa County Probate Courts' strategic plan and is intended to assist the Courts in achieving their mission (i.e., "to administer justice, restore wholeness and inspire public trust"). To accomplish this and ensure the Courts have "the right staff in the right place at the right time" so they can be high performance courts, a sustainable succession plan is needed.

Bench strength is a measure of how deep management talent reaches in the organization. Measuring an organization's bench strength allows court leadership to prepare and monitor the availability of future leaders.

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses are important in determining the Courts' readiness to proceed with *Building Bench Strength*.

Interview Questions

1. Does the County value employee professional development as a tangible investment? If yes, how? If no, why?

- Yes; e.g., 900+ employees taking advantage of HR's GOLD Leadership training classes
- Plans to add an executive track to the GOLD training
- Unfortunately, had to suspend college tuition reimbursement benefit due to economic downturn. Would like to reinstate the program if the economy improves

2. How can multi-year professional development plans be integrated with an annual budget process?

- Currently, the cost for most training and development plans are incorporated in the annual budget cycle (based on department head recommendation)
- This needs further thought if development plans are developed to span multiple years

3. In difficult financial times, are there methods of leveraging available training resources so more employees may benefit?

- Negotiating additional training opportunities in vendor contracts (e.g., ERP and ECM systems)
- Seek training grants
- Scholarship funds from professional membership associations
- Pursue local foundation funding

4. What are some reasons for existing disparities among court and county department training resources? Should disparities be minimized? If so, how?

- Not convinced disparities exist. If they do exist, they should be reviewed on an individual basis.

5. Can budget related performance measures be linked with employee professional development? If so, how?

- Linkages currently exist with new employee requests; however, performance measures are not yet connected with professional development

6. What are some Fiscal Service best practices related to employee professional development?

- Following an investment in professional training, establish a “stay or pay” policy; requiring employees to continue employment for a set period of time (e.g., two years) or repay the training costs
- Improve in-house training opportunities by focusing attention on “train the trainer” programs for key staff
- Take advantage of distance learning programs (e.g., national webinars; archived programs; etc.)
- Partner with community organizations to sponsor national speakers and share the costs

7. What are some barriers to creating or sustaining an effective succession plan?

- Politics!!! Therefore, we prepare, but we cannot guarantee...
- The “zombie” effect, i.e., employees who barely work 8am-5pm and never make any extra effort
- Lack of critical thinking skills; need more focus on outcomes (how are we doing?) vs. outputs (what are we doing).

8. What concerns, if any, do you have about succession planning?

- Managing expectations
- Providing training and not being able to retain high performing staff at least three years

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