SPECIAL ARTICLES

Succession Planning in US Pharmacy Schools

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The deans, associate and assistant deans, and department chairs of a college or school of pharmacy retain historic memories of the institution and share the responsibility for day-to-day operation, sustainability, and future planning. Between the anticipated retirement of baby boomers who are senior administrative faculty members and the steady increase in number of colleges and schools of pharmacy, the academy is facing a shortage of qualified successors. Succession planning involves planning for the effective transition of personnel in leadership positions within an organization. This paper describes the subject of succession planning at a sample population of AACP institutions by obtaining perspectives on the subject from the deans of these institutions via standardized interview instruments. The instruments were utilized with 15 deans; all interview data were blinded and analyzed using analyst triangulation. The majority of deans responded that some level of succession planning was desirable and even necessary; however, none claimed to have a formal succession planning structure in place at his or her home institution. Although widely accepted and well-recognized in the corporate and military sectors, succession planning within pharmacy schools and colleges is neither universally documented nor implemented. Differences exist within the administrative structure of these non-academic and academic institutions that may preclude a uniform succession planning format. While the evidence presented suggests that succession planning is needed within the academy, a concerted effort must be made towards implementing its practice.

Keywords: succession planning, leadership, faculty development, mentoring, administration

INTRODUCTION

More than 450 faculty members serve in leadership roles at pharmacy institutions as deans, associate or assistant deans, or department chairs.[1] The possibility of loss of these key personnel coupled with a lack of redundancy at the upper administrative levels of colleges and schools of pharmacy present disturbing questions concerning the viability of these institutions. In the event that 1 or more key people leave unexpectedly, could the institution continue to move forward and grow? Have future leaders been identified and developed to afford a smooth transi-tion? Has a succession plan been developed and documented, or will institutional legacy (and efficiency) be lost along with the outgoing leaders?

Succession planning is a process that can provide seamless leadership transition across the organization.[2] The need for succession planning with respect to a pharmacy school's executive committee has never been more evident. Approximately 35% of deans of US colleges and schools of pharmacy are approaching retirement age; this plus the growing number of schools and colleges portends an upper administrative vacuum within the academy.[1] Pharmacy faculty members must be prepared to be leaders, at their home institutions and at other institutions and within the AACP administration itself. Offering leadership programs is one solution – succession planning is another. Succession planning is not merely recruitment and retention,

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enticing someone into the organization and meeting their needs so that they remain. Succession planning is true mentorship and development of an individual to allow for his/her advancement. Succession planning is also being proactive to ensure the continuity of the organization and preservation of the institutional memory. Without a plan, the successor often is either unprepared for or overwhelmed by the new responsibilities, and unable to manage the organization as effectively as his or her predecessor.[3]

While the literature is scarce regarding succession planning in pharmacy education, there is some evidence of the activity occurring in pharmacy practice.[4,5] Health care professions such as nursing that are confronted with the dual challenges of an aging and declining workforce have been engaged in succession planning for some time.[6] Unlike health care and academia, the literature shows that the US military and private corporations have been the most consistent advocates and users of succession planning .[7-11]

A possible reason for the limited succession planning resources available in higher education is that university models operate differently than business or military models.[12] Higher education operates in a manner of shared governance, meaning that all faculty members and upper administrators play a role in decision making and establishing university policy. Such a self-governing body may perceive the succession planning approach of positioning certain faculty members for leadership roles to be distasteful, connoting favoritism.[12,13] Furthermore, transitioning a faculty member to a needed administrative position may also be viewed as punishment for the faculty member not being a productive scholar or top teacher. While these perceptions may have some validity in certain situations, there are increasing concerns about continuity and succession planning in senior administrative positions in academic pharmacy.[14] The academy should begin to take an active role in succession planning and utilize the experiences from the business and military world to create a model that is applicable to pharmacy education.

PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESSION PLANNING IN PHARMACY

To investigate the state of succession within pharmacy academia, deans at a cross-section of public and private, secular and nonsecular, and smaller "teaching" and larger "research" colleges and schools of pharmacy were interviewed. A collaboration of 6 members of the AACP Academic Leadership Fellows Program (ALFP) and the group's dean facilitator initially discussed the survey and developed an outline of logical interview items in August 2008. The discussions led to the formulation of the interview instrument for dean perceptions of succession planning. This instrument was used to survey 15 US pharmacy school deans as to the presence, extent, and value of succession planning at their institutions.

Discussion at the initial ALFP retreat (August 2008) first provided an outline of logical interview items. Online succession planning literature was reviewed and the instrument was refined at the November 2008 ALFP retreat, and via occasional group conference calls. IRB approval at all 6 ALFP group member institutions was obtained for the final version of the instrument. All data collected during the interview were de-identified and responses are presented in aggregate form. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via conference call. Although the hope was to interview deans at schools that had a thoroughly established succession planning program, no pharmacy school was identified that explicitly contained succession planning in its strategic plan or other documents concerning the faculty. Four deans recognized for their efforts in promoting succession planning to the academy were identified and had been able to implement elements of succession planning at their schools; however, they could not claim system-wide implementation or acceptance of the approach.

PHARMACY SCHOOL DEANS VIEWS ON SUCCESSION PLANNING IN ACADEMIC PHARMACY

Responses varied widely on the necessity for succession planning. Some deans thought the standard hiring procedure that required a national search to be conducted to fill all faculty positions, and especially leadership positions, was not conducive to succession planning. Because of this, many deans felt that succession planning was restricted to grooming faculty members for acting/interim positions. Others admitted to an informal, subtle, almost subconscious succession planning process in which the dean noted those faculty members with leadership promise and inconspicuously steered those individuals toward more responsibility. One dean was more overt about the succession planning process, devoting mentoring time and resources toward his/her potential successor. Most of the deans who were interviewed thought succession planning was required at some level for a successful educational program, with 1 dean stating that it was essential to implement succession planning across the entire organization. Another dean offered the caveat that turnover of pharmacy practice faculty members is so rapid that it is difficult to bring faculty members through a proper succession planning program. It was opined that most deans begin their new position overwhelmed due to the absence of succession planning at their last institution, and that the trend of creating associate dean positions is a step toward correcting this deficiency.

Succession planning was defined by one dean as "… preparing the institution for continuous leadership and continuous flow of talent into the institution so that it remains viable." Another dean preferred the phrase "transition planning," described as preparing for a set of evolving events, with the focus not so much on individuals as the process itself. The emphasis is on planning for change, as opposed to allowing unforeseen events to overtake the process. As motivation for developing a strong succession planning philosophy, 1 dean discussed the need to constantly prepare for the next appointee or likely candidate for a leadership position.

None of the deans surveyed could report that their college or school's strategic plan included succession planning, although 1 dean noted that a variation of the phrase "succession planning" appears in his/her school's strategic plan. This pharmacy school had developed programs with the business school and outside organizations to develop in faculty members those business and other skills necessary for leadership. Beyond this, the closest approximation to succession planning in a college or school's strategic plan was that the strategic plan called for recruiting and retaining the best and brightest, and moving such individuals into administrative positions at the appropriate career point. Two deans planned to bring succession planning into the next strategic plan. Most of the deans had no plans for a succession planning protocol, 1 dean's proposal for this had not been adopted by the college, and another dean hesitated to implement such a plan because of the possible perception that candidates were being pre-selected. Others already had a succession planning protocol, had a succession planning protocol in development, or had plans to develop a protocol.

None of the deans surveyed claimed that an emergency succession plan was in place. Two deans felt that their school was prepared for this scenario by cross-training faculty members to compensate for the loss of a faculty member in a leadership position. In the event of an unexpected departure, the deans typically appointed an internal interim leader while a formal search was conducted. One dean acknowledged the seriousness of this problem in that nonclinical faculty vacancies could be reabsorbed by the university. Another dean viewed such departures as opportunities on both ends, and stated that mid/senior-level faculty members are recruited with the idea that they can move quickly into leadership positions. All of these deans felt that they had successfully introduced succession planning to their executive teams, but expressed doubts that all of their faculty members accepted or understood the philosophy. The deans emphasized that succession planning must be considered a priority of the school before it could gain a foothold.

IDENTIFICATION OF POSITIONS FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING

The consensus among the deans interviewed was that key positions within the organization should be identified for succession planning and the desired skills and qualities for each position should be defined.[6] Succession planning also should be used for difficult-to-fill middle management jobs (eg, department chairs and program directors) in areas critical to the future success and long-term health of the organization.[15] Regarding the positions targeted for succession planning, most of the deans answered "all," and 3 deans answered "none." Some deans limited their focus for succession planning to the department chair and assistant dean levels.

The consensus among the deans for the determination of faculty leadership candidates was that the future leaders would self-identify, and more than 1 dean mentioned that these were usually the same individuals recognized early on as possessing leadership potential. The possibility of a leadership role also surfaces or even develops after annual or semester one-to-one meetings between the dean and faculty member. The majority opinion was that everyone should initially have equal opportunity to advance, but those who display the interest and aptitude to lead should be mentored for this. Thirteen of the 15 deans stated that the executive team was involved in the process of identifying and developing potential successors. Of these 13 deans, some made a conscious effort to include their assistant and associate deans and department chairs in the process, while others felt that it was understood that the executive team knew to provide input without being asked. It was mentioned that the existence of vice-chairs represents succession planning at the chair level, although 1 dean cautioned that holding this position was no guarantee of promotion to the chair position at some point. Only 2 of the 15 deans employed professional third-party reviewers or consultants in the planning process. A dean who did not take this route agreed that such third-party assistance was a good idea, budget permitting. One dean employed a search firm to recruit adjunct and preceptor faculty members.

There are many advantages and disadvantages in selecting internal versus external candidates for leadership positions.[2] Regarding preferences of the deans interviewed for external or internal candidates, the common thread in the responses was that the best-qualified candidate should be sought and hired, regardless of where he or she currently worked. Responses were otherwise mixed and complex. One dean saw preference as irrelevant given that the position would be nationally advertised; the successful candidate should be chosen without consideration

of internal/external status. Another dean stated that the preference depended on the newness of the position. An external candidate would be preferred for a newly created position (eg, an associate deanship), while an internal candidate would have a better chance at a well-established opening (eg, a department chair). The preference also may be unstated so as not to bias the process. A second dean viewed the decision as position-specific, preferring external candidates for department/division chairs, especially if a shake-up was needed to increase faculty performance. Internal candidates for program directors and assistant and associate dean positions were preferred because of their likelihood of possessing a broad horizontal view of the organization. This dean viewed program director positions as especially important for succession planning to combat the vulnerability to loss of institutional memory. One dean hoped that at least 1 internal candidate would emerge who had the mentoring and experience to fill the position. Two deans mentioned that they would rather look outside only if no strong internal candidate existed.

In support of hiring from within, the deans pointed out that the candidate is a "known quantity." As one dean phrased it, "One knows what one has bred" with respect to background, values and abilities. The internal candidate knows the history of the institution, can preserve its time-tested traditions, and is already aware of its strengths and weaknesses. The candidate knows of the approaches that have not worked in the past, and can determine more quickly which faculty members are best suited for a committee or project. The internal candidate is likely to be more patient in problem solving because he or she knows the cast of characters, while an external candidate may become frustrated that things are not progressing fast enough. The in-house candidate is generally cheaper, and for this reason an internal hire may be the default position for some schools. Considering the perceived dearth of pharmacy faculty candidates, a college or school hiring its own graduates after a 2-year internship may be unavoidable when adding or maintaining experiential sites, for example.

Overall, the deans nevertheless expressed a slight preference for external candidates, chiefly because these candidates would bring a fresh perspective and new ideas that outweigh the steeper learning curve they require. In fact, at least 1 of the institutions represented had mandated that a certain number of its future hires come from outside the institution for this reason. The external candidate also brings less "baggage" in the way of alliances with, or aversions to, certain departmental faculty members. One dean preferred external candidates in hopes of reversing negative aspects of the current culture. Another dean saw a middle road, viewing internal candidates who had arrived only a few years ago as internal/external

hybrids who possessed the advantages of both populations and would acclimate best to the new job. Another dean offered the caveat that a faculty search can be hard on unsuccessful internal candidates, suggesting that all internal faculty members should understand their institution's hiring process thoroughly, as well as its priorities and preferences. Finally, 1 dean opined that the institution's entire academic community that interfaces with the position in question should be involved to some extent in the hiring process.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

All but 1 of the deans participated in at least 1 formal leadership training program outside of the host institution. AACP-sponsored events were frequently mentioned (10/15; 67%), particularly the Gallup program for new deans. Other programs cited included those by the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy, Women's Academic Leadership, American Council of Education, American Management Association, EDUCAUSE, and FranklinCovey Company. Many of the deans had participated in internal leadership programs or workshops at their universities (10/15; 67%).

When candidates for additional leadership development are identified, they typically are given more responsibilities to observe how they respond and to prepare them for new positions. All deans viewed committee work as a starting point in providing opportunities for development and in assessing leadership potential. The assignments give the executive team a chance to observe candidates' problem-solving skills and whether they are competent, even-tempered, and fair. A candidate's role on a given committee can be a more prominent one as a candidate proves himself/herself, and may include heading a special project, chairing the committee, or serving as vice chair of the department. Most deans encouraged promising faculty members to take part in leadership development programs (evidenced in part by the participation of the authors in the ALFP); however, one dean warned that these additional duties carry the risk of overtaxing and burning out the brightest lights on the faculty. Another dean admitted targeting specific faculty members for leadership development, as opposed to mentoring all faculty members similarly.

Service to the university and national service are also encouraged, especially service related to the AACP. Some of the deans met with leadership candidates at some point in their development to discuss the faculty members' goals and progress more directly. Another dean mentioned using a systematic, evidence-based approach in selecting candidates to groom for leadership roles that included taking into account the junior faculty member's enthusiasm for committee work and college initiatives. At 1 school, faculty members know to approach and work

with the department chair if they are interested in leadership opportunities.

SUCCESSION PLANNING AND FACULTY RETENTION

Only 1 dean expressed concern that succession planning could develop his/her top people to the point that the competition could lure them away, mentioning that the school had lost up-and-coming stars in this way. Still, this dean stated that although solid mentorship ironically leads to the departure of top people, offering less leadership training is not an option. Most of the deans were not concerned about losing top people in this way, recognizing that their leadership development programs rendered their protégés viable candidates at other institutions. One went as far as to say that if their candidates were not recruited, something was wrong with the leadership training. Lacking an opening for in-house advancement, candidates could not be blamed for trying to move up elsewhere. The deans expected their faculty members to improve their professional station, saw the need to "cross-fertilize" the academy, and felt a responsibility to do so. They viewed such exchanges as opportunities for building goodwill among academy members.

Whenever possible, however, the protégé should be given new challenges and an atmosphere that entices him/her to stay. Two deans admitted using a succession planning strategy to keep faculty members from leaving, either to another pharmacy school or elsewhere in the university. Enrollment in the ALFP was mentioned as a succession planning component aimed at retaining selected faculty members. Given the "shared governance" mindset of the typical university, a school's top faculty members should be participating in decision-making. Coupled with the transparency of this process, this should produce a more vested faculty member who is less likely to leave compared to their private-sector counterpart. Finally, 1 dean offered the following advice to his/her leaders-in-the-making: "Don't ever go to another institution when you are hungry; go when you are satisfied."

MENTORING

Deans who were either retiring or stepping down identified mentoring as a primary theme for supporting the development of potential leaders.[16] A strong mentoring program can facilitate learning experiences and expand professional networks.[6] There have been increased calls for more development and mentoring programs to help address the shortage of potential leaders in academic pharmacy.[16] Most deans have relied upon mentors and on-the-job training for development of their managerial and administrative skills.[14,17] Mentors can also help individuals take ownership and responsibility for their own career progression.[18] The success of mentoring programs depends upon the level of its organizational value and the mentoring skill development of its current leaders.[19]

Two deans stated that mentoring was provided upon request by the self-declared leadership candidate. Two deans made it clear that while a faculty member might be mentored for a leadership role, no promises of internal advancement were offered.

OVERVIEW OF NON-ACADEMIC SUCCESSION PLANNING

While the deans interviewed all seemed to agree that succession planning is or will be necessary within the academy, opinions differed with respect to how succession planning should be modeled in academic pharmacy. As stated previously, succession planning is much more prevalent and an accepted practice in both business and military organizations. Thus, one needs to look no further than to non-academic literature to find the components necessary for successful implementation. Succession planning models found in the business literature identify several key components for a successful program. These components include identifying positions that would fit well with the timetable and goals of succession planning, identifying potential candidates for leadership positions, leadership development, and mentoring of these candidates, and continuous review of the succession planning process to identify areas for improvement. To be effective, the program needs to be easy to implement, responsive to user needs, and provide current and reliable information to both the candidate and executive team.[15] The succession planning selection process should be transparent to employees, and the candidacy requirements for leadership positions should be clear.[15] The senior administrative team of the organization must be committed to the succession planning program.[6] The blueprint for succession planning must clearly identify the factors to be addressed and the process to be followed for retaining or replacing individuals in leadership positions.[3] Creating a succession plan should include not only the traditional "vertical" growth but also "horizontal" growth, ie, lateral personnel moves to compensate for a sudden loss.[3] A final point to consider when implementing succession planning initiatives is generational stereotypes. Age-based values and work attitudes can vary with each generation, potentially creating misunderstandings that may lead to promising candidates being overlooked for further development.[20]

Perhaps the most distinct difference between the military and the corporate world is how leaders are trained and identified. The military must develop leaders from a diverse manpower pool. The US Army, for example, is the largest training organization in the world, and trains and develops more leaders than all other institutions in our

society.[9,10] The corporate sector, on the other hand, has the opportunity to be much more discerning when leadership training selections are made and leadership opportunities granted.[11] Once the determination of skills desired for succession planning positions is completed, potential candidates can be identified. This aspect of the process requires assessment of not only candidates' current skill levels and potential to acquire new skills, but also cultural competencies such as the ability to minimize conflict and disruption, as well as the ability to quickly establish critical relationships.[21] The candidates' professional interests and potential abilities also can be assessed as they serve on committees or as a leader on smaller projects.[19] Use of standardized instruments (eg, Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory, Conflict Style Inventory, Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, etc) is another method that can be used to assist in identification of potential talent.[6,22]

Leadership development plans, based on the assessment criteria and the desired skills defined by the executive team, can then be established for targeted individuals. The design and implementation of these plans should include both generic and individualized components that are systematically assessed to determine whether the candidate is ready to lead or needs additional developmental opportunities.[6] Technical, leadership (vision, people skills, political savvy, and values/integrity), and management skills should be developed in individuals through the succession planning process.[19] A key component of any plan should be inclusion of learning projects in which the candidate is required to look beyond functional silos to solve major strategic problems.[15] These also provide the individual opportunities to meet a variety of leaders or managers and learn about their roles and responsibilities within the organization.[6] Other developmental tasks can include key committee assignments, board presentations on key initiatives, and internships/fellowships.[23] The use of technology in the administration of leadership development plans can enable these individuals to be exposed to ongoing development activities rather than disjointed planned events, and also facilitates querying and reporting for managers' use.[15]

PROCESS REVIEW

Continuous review of the succession planning process should be conducted to ascertain the success and effectiveness of the program. Although human resources departments can administer the program, it is important for the executive or management team to own the program because they determine the skills required in future leaders, provide developmental opportunities, and deliver feedback to the employees.[24] Feedback from current leaders on program improvement, refinement of tools to strengthen mentoring programs, and development of robust resources such as Web sites are examples of opportunities to facilitate the process.[19] Metrics should also be established to assist with program evaluation.[6] They can be used to identify the size of, and any underrepresentation in, the candidate pool, and ensure that people are moving into the right jobs at the right time.[15] Evaluations should also be conducted when a high-performing candidate leaves the organization to assist in identification of areas requiring additional management attention.[23]

SUMMARY

Succession planning entails identifying and training individuals with leadership potential to position them as successors of the organization's current leaders. Succession planning is a well-established approach in the military and business sectors, but among health care professions, only the nursing field appreciably documents this practice. Interviews of 15 current deans at US colleges and schools of pharmacy revealed that the institutions they represent employed elements of succession planning, but a formal succession planning policy was not in place, nor was succession planning typically part of the strategic plan. These deans uniformly saw the value of structured succession planning, and several deans acknowledged that succession planning would be especially useful in the event that a key senior administrator departed unexpectedly. The deans also recognized that succession planning could render a promising faculty member an attractive candidate for leadership roles outside of the institution. Altruistically, this risk was accepted, indicating that such an outcome reflected proper mentorship that the deans wanted to see their protégés advance, and that such "cross fertilization" of the academy was necessary. In conclusion, although only 15 deans were surveyed here, no evidence was collected to suggest that *bona fide* succession planning is prevalent within the academy. Based on predicted retirement rates for current administrators and the continual increase in the number of US colleges and schools of pharmacy, succession planning, in conjunction with robust leadership development programs and opportunities, is necessary for the continued success and viability of the academy.

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