

Managing the Future:  
Why Some Ontario Municipalities Are Not  
Engaging In Succession Planning

MPA Research Report

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Based on a survey of the Ontario Municipal Human Resources Association, a professional association of human resources, labour relations, and senior management professionals employed within the local public sector in the Province of Ontario, this major research paper examined why some Ontario municipalities choose not to engage in succession planning. Succession planning is defined as specific actions taken to ensure continuous staffing in an organization by identifying how positions will be filled. Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis is the lens applied to the research. The results of this study indicate that most Ontario municipalities are not engaging in succession planning because other immediate organizational challenges taking priority. However, Ontario municipalities are engaging in recruiting initiatives. This suggests that Ontario municipal staff (such as top executives/senior managers and/or elected council members) may value recruitment initiatives over succession planning initiatives. Nevertheless, it is clear that the participants of this study believe succession planning is important, which leaves a potential pathway for Ontario municipalities to change their current attitude regarding succession planning.

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**I never think of the future. It comes soon enough.**  
*- Albert Einstein*

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1.1 Succession Planning in the Local Government Context**

Local government is a broad term that includes municipalities and special purpose bodies such as agencies, boards and commissions. As noted by Tindal & Tindal (2004), most people tend to equate local government with municipal government; therefore, for the purpose of this research report, the terms municipalities and local government will be used interchangeably.

Municipalities provide common interest services for residents of the same local area. In Canada, these services include, but are not limited to, fire protection, public transit, water supply, sewage collection and solid waste collection and disposal. Municipalities are governed by an elected council and are also “creatures of the province,” dependent on provincial governments for permission to engage in certain activities (Tindal & Tindal, 2004).

Tindal and Tindal (2004) write that municipal government is important as it diffuses the power of government, allowing for local decisions to be made by local people. Therefore, local decision makers, such as those employed by the municipality in senior management roles, need to have the background and knowledge of local issues in order to make the best decisions. Thus, having experienced and continuous municipal staff (both at the top executive/senior management level and support level) is key for the success of municipalities. Experienced municipal staff may bring more local knowledge and experience to resolving issues, thereby allowing for better decision making. Thus, it can be argued that succession planning in municipalities is extremely important.

Succession planning is the process of identifying how key positions that will become vacant in the near future will be filled (McConnell, 2006). In simplest terms, succession planning allows for a smooth transition between staff and a process for knowledge transfer, where

knowledge regarding a job is passed on from one staff member to another (Singer, Goodrich & Goldberg, 2004; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2002). Succession planning can, therefore, assist municipalities in ensuring the right people are in the right positions and past mistakes are not replicated in future decisions. Succession planning can offer this by either identifying the ‘right people for the job’ currently employed in the organization or by recruiting staff with the skills and abilities needed for the positions (McConnell, 2006).

Succession planning is specifically important today for municipalities because Canada is facing a slower growing labour force and an aging work force, particularly in the public sector (HRDC, 2002). Also, municipalities face new and expanded responsibilities. This puts pressure on their need to spend in an environment where citizens are resentful about paying taxes (Tindal & Tindal, 2007). Succession planning will therefore help municipalities meet and prepare for these challenges.

## **1.2 Research Question**

The research question of this report assesses why some Ontario municipalities choose not to engage in succession planning initiatives. In particular, this study analyzes and compares data from municipalities on the degree to which municipalities in Ontario are addressing the challenge of identifying their next top executives/senior management. This subject was chosen because there is very little empirical research on succession planning in the local government setting. Particularly, there is no research regarding whether Ontario municipalities are currently engaging in succession planning initiatives focused on top executives and senior management.

Leaders, defined in this paper as top executive/senior managers, play a large role in the success of municipalities, as they are responsible for making the decisions that run a municipality. As such, it can be extremely difficult to fill top executive/senior management positions because of the experience and credentials needed (Schmalzried & Fallon, 2007). The survey for this

report addressed this issue, as well as aspects of current municipal succession planning initiatives.

The survey also requested information on the demographics of the individual municipalities.

The hypothesis of this report was Ontario municipalities that engage in succession planning are likely to have a large number of employees, have a large budget and serve a metropolitan area. It was proposed that the main reason why municipalities choose not to engage in succession planning is because of their size (defined by the number of staff employed in the municipality) and their financial constraint.

To explore this area, surveys were sent to members of the Ontario Municipal Human Resources Association (OMHRA). Members of OMHRA are employed in Ontario municipalities and local boards and commissions. OMHRA members provide human resources advice and assistance to their respective councils, boards and commissions as well as to senior administrative management in Ontario's local government (OMHRA, 2008).



## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Importance of Succession Planning**

A simple, clear definition of succession planning is provided by Schmalzried and Fallon (2007): “A proactive attempt to ensure that leadership in an organization will be continuous by identifying how these positions will be filled as both planned and unplanned departures occur” (p. 169). Succession planning is a way that an organization can plan for the future, by identifying positions that need filling in advance, thus helping to ensure the most suitable person is matched to the job. A formal approach to succession planning allows staff responsible for personnel to gain a clear understanding of employees’ skills and abilities, thereby identifying what skills are not held by staff and recruit as necessary (McConnell, 2006).

Succession planning has been identified as an important initiative for public, non-profit and for-profit organizations all over the world. In South Africa, for example, private family businesses are important contributors to the economic and social well-being of the country. Their lack of longevity is a major concern, as family businesses are touted as one of the country’s solutions for its unemployment. Therefore, succession planning has been brought forward as a way to assist the country’s family organizations in the future (Venter, Boshoff, & Maas, 2005).

In Taiwan, succession planning has been used to decrease the erosion of the workforce by reducing “job hopping,” where employees “hop” from one job to another in order to move into positions with more responsibility and higher pay. Instead, employees are shown what positions they could aspire towards if they stay and take part in training and other succession planning initiatives (Huang, 1999).

In North America and Australia, researchers believe that succession planning is a way to prevent a looming workforce crisis. According to the British-North American Committee (BNAC) (2001), in the next few decades, the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom and Canada will face a slower growing labour force and an aging work force, which

will negatively impact all organizations. Researchers predict that there will not be enough “new” workers to take over the vacant jobs in the workforce. These trends are also projected for Australia (Watt & Busine, 2005). Researchers believe that the declining birth rates as well as the aging post Second World War generation (also known as Baby Boomer generation) are why there is a declining pool of people (BNAC, 2001; Watt & Busine, 2005).

Specific to Canada, by 2011 approximately 41% of the working population will be between the ages of 45 and 64, compared to 29% in 1991 (HRDC, 2002). This is an alarming statistic when one takes into account the average age of retirement in Canada: 61 years in 1999 (HRDC, 2002). Therefore, it appears important that Canadian organizations engage in initiatives to prepare for changes in workforce demographics.

However, succession planning has its critics. For example, succession planning efforts can seem wasted when staff who have engaged in succession planning leave the organization or do not meet expectations (McConnell, 2006). As a counter argument, however, the literature points to the fact that organizations are forced to meet the challenge of a constantly changing environment including globalization and continuous technology and political change (McConnell, 2006). Meeting these challenges can be done by ensuring a supply of knowledgeable staff with the experience needed to support the organization in the future. Thus, engaging in succession planning is not a choice, but a necessity for organizational survival. “The organization that knows where it is going in terms of its leadership progression and can weather the inevitable changes in key management positions without loss of momentum, is sure to be a stronger competitor than one that is thrown into a fall back and regroup mode when a key person resigns, retire, or dies” (McConnell, 2006, p.93).

Furthermore, succession planning can help prevent the wrong person from being promoted. According to McConnell (2006), promotion because of title and salary often occurs; however, this does not always ensure the right person is promoted into the right job, as certain management skills may not be a part of the prior job competencies. In addition, McConnell

(2006) states that succession planning can help prevent organizational failure by ensuring an individual is not promoted until he or she has developed the skills and experience needed for the job.

Finally, McConnell (2006) points out the importance of staff believing they have an opportunity to move up in an organization. McConnell (2006) states that even though some employees may never pursue a higher position, having the potential to do so can act as a motivator, which will ultimately help retain them. If, however, employees believe there is no opportunity to move forward, they are likely to seek opportunity elsewhere. This may be a major issue in the future as the job market will likely be highly competitive with a smaller pool of applicants to cover available positions. Thus, it will be an employee's market, allowing employees to move to and from jobs of choice. By engaging in succession planning initiatives, such as mentoring, training and job rotation, employees will gain the perception that they have an opportunity to move up.

## **2.2 Succession Planning and Other Human Resources Initiatives**

In 2002, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat published a guide for managers and human resource specialists in the public service, which highlighted the importance of knowledge transfer and outlined specific ways in which an organization can engage in succession planning. The guide suggests that organizations make succession planning a priority in their long term vision for the future and that they create formal mentoring programs. The guide also suggests that organizations monitor their employee age demographics and identify positions or groups of positions that are likely to become vacant in the next five to ten years. Specifically, the guide suggests that organizations create formal succession plans targeting positions that are difficult to fill (such as executive and technical positions) and identifying skills and performance development programs needed to ready successors.

With a significant portion of the workforce due to retire, the HRDC (2002) recommends that organizations enhance their recruiting mechanisms to ensure current staffing levels. O’Kraftka (2006), the National Manager of the Canadian Association of Career Educators and Employers, agrees with the HRDC and states Canadian organizations must examine ways to recruit university and college graduates, as they are the next generation of workers. This is also supported by Dodge and McKeough (2003), who studied the Career Starts Program created by the Public Service Commission for the Province of Nova Scotia. According to the authors, co-operative education (co-op) and internships provide a mechanism for students to gain practical experience from paid, relevant work experience in their chosen field. Overall, they found that the program played a critical component in student development and acted as a succession planning tool for organizations planning professional and managerial succession.

However, recruiting workers who have been in the workforce for a few years requires different tactics than mentoring. According to Carless and Wintle (2007), applicants perceive job opportunities in an organization that offers flexible work as significantly more attractive than a position in an organization that offers a traditional work arrangement. Therefore, it appears that when recruiting applicants, it is important to provide flexible work arrangements.

The HRDC (2002) also suggests that in addressing the upcoming potential demographic challenges, organizations need to look at ways to entice older workers to continue working for their organizations. The HRDC (2002) specifically states that organizations need to offer alternative working arrangements that will provide flexibility to older employees, such as flexible work schedules (reduced, compressed and/or extended work weeks), job sharing, and providing the option for part time work. Furthermore, the HRDC (2002) suggests that organizations contract with retired staff, indicating that employees may want to work beyond age 65, depending on employer’s retirement policy.

According to Schmalzried and Fallon (2007), who studied top executive succession planning in American local health departments, grooming an internal person for a senior

management position is also key in succession planning. The authors state that health departments who hire externally to replace their Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) find maintaining financial stability more difficult than those departments who groom internal successors. Furthermore, the authors' state that those who hire an external CEO require six to twelve months to regain financial stability. The authors believe grooming an internal person helps an organization ensure that "institutional memories" will be preserved along with the department's strategic vision.

However, the authors also point out the pitfalls of grooming a successor. For example, internal candidates are often connected to social networks and have psychological ties with staff within the organization, thereby complicating potential organizational change efforts. Also, senior management/top executive positions often require special credentials that may not be held by current internal staff. Therefore, including grooming as part of succession planning becomes possible only when a larger pool of talent is available.

### **2.3 History of Succession Planning Research**

Although there is some controversy regarding the father of succession planning research, according to the 1995 review by Giambatista, Rowe and Riaz, Oscar Grusky is largely credited with moving the field forward. In 1960, Grusky argued in his paper called *Administrative Succession in Formal Organizations* that succession planning is a universal organizational process that requires systematic, empirical study. He concludes in his paper that staff turnover is highly disruptive to organizations and, therefore, succession planning must be better understood.

Bearing Grusky's (1960) argument in mind, Richard Carlson examined the variables of internal versus external successors. Carlson (1961) found that school superintendents promoted from within the organization were treated differently by staff than those hired from a pool of external applicants. Carlson concluded that staff label a superintendent who is promoted from within as adaptive, and those brought in from the outside as innovative.

Professor Donald Trow from Harpur College in New York examined factors that influence how well prepared an organization is for staff turnover in its top positions. Trow (1961) drew data from over one-hundred-and-eight small manufacturing companies. He found that the main factors influencing succession planning and organizational performance (measured as profitability) were availability and competence of a family member. He specifically stated that there was a strong association between succession planning and profitability: companies in which a successor had been chosen and trained appear less likely to suffer financial instability.

Trow (1961) also suggested that if there is no son (or son-in-law) to take over a family company, then internal employees were considered as possible successors. He found that larger, growing companies were able to find a staff member of “sufficient ability” to be considered as a successor and smaller family-owned companies had difficulty attracting managers. He concluded that because of the high cost of succession planning, smaller family-owned companies often procrastinated seeking a successor.

In the mid-1960s, three theories regarding staff turnover and its effect on organizational performance emerged. The theories stemmed from Grusky’s research, which analysed major league baseball clubs performance. The first theory, called the Common Sense One-Way Causality theory, is based on common sense; that is, judgements and decisions based on what people in common would agree on (Gamson & Scotch, 1964). For example, Grusky (1963) argues it is common sense that a field manager of a baseball team plays a large role in a team’s success. Therefore, when the team is not performing well, the field manager is held responsible and replaced. A new manager is then likely to raise the performance of the team, as he can benefit by avoiding the errors that his predecessor made (Giambatista et al., 1995).

A second theory is also proposed by Grusky (1963). The Vicious Circle (also known as the Grusky Two-Way Causality theory) proposes that the relationship between effectiveness and succession planning is reciprocal. To illustrate, the decline in a baseball team’s ability to win games (a decline in performance) causes the field manager’s dismissal (staff turnover) which then

disrupts routines and lowers morale. This increases financial instability within the baseball club and causes more staff to leave the organization (Giambatista et al., 1995).

In rebuttal of Grusky's 1963 theories, Gamson & Scotch (1964) offered a third theory called the Ritual Scapegoating No-way Causality theory (also known as Ritual Scapegoating theory). This theory states that while poor performance does lead to a loss of staff, performance improvements do not necessarily occur when new staff is hired. Therefore, according to the researchers, staff turnover is because of scapegoating, where (using the example of the baseball club) the club is trying to please frustrated stakeholders. The club uses the dismissal of managers as a way to show that the club is willing to make changes so the team will not continue to lose (Giambatista et al., 1995).

More recent work on succession planning has focused on whether specific family and non-family firms outside of North America are engaging in succession planning. For example, Kuratko (1993) explored succession planning in family businesses in Korea and the USA. While family firms are important to both economies, she found formal succession plans were rare in both countries. Furthermore, Kirby & Lee (1996) studied succession planning in family firms of Northeast England, and similarly found that succession is hardly ever planned in advance of an existing CEO's retirement.

Other researchers have examined the impact of organizational characteristics on succession planning. McConnell (2006) argues that size and financial resources play the biggest role in why an organization chooses to engage in succession planning. For example, some small organizations may believe they cannot afford to pursue initiatives that do not directly impact their ability to provide their product, program or service. This may be particularly true in a government environment, where personnel resources are often the first cut during restructuring. Furthermore, as discussed by McConnell (2006) and Holinsworth (2004), if an organization is very small, it may need to focus on hiring staff externally, as the internal pool of applicants may not have the qualifications needed to fill technical or managerial vacancies.

## **2.4 Succession Planning and Government**

Research to date on succession planning has focused mostly on the private sector. In fact, very little is known about the empirical consequence of top management change in public agencies (Schall, 1997; Boyne, Ashworth & Powell, 2001). This is a major issue, as early retirement is more common in the Canadian public sector. HRDC reports that in 1999, the average age of retirement was 58.5 years for employees working in the public sector, in comparison to 61.3 years for employees in the private sector and 65.0 years for employees who are self-employed. Therefore, it is possible that Canadian governments will face succession problems sooner than other Canadian organizations and companies. Furthermore, experienced and continuous leadership is important for strong responses to public crises like major disease outbreaks and natural disasters. Thus, having a succession plan in place that identifies how leadership will be filled will help minimize risks to populations in an emergency (Schmalzried, & Fallon, 2007).

The world economy has changed over the last few decades because of globalization. Globalization is the increased movement of labour, capital, goods, services and technology throughout the world. The process of globalization has led the way for multinational corporations to become transnational corporations with no particular home base or market (CBC, 2006). This has put pressure on governments in Canada to adjust to the interests of transnational corporations or risk losing their business to other jurisdictions (Tindal & Tindal, 2005). Thus, there is a political push in Canada to keep up with globalization, adopt private-sector management techniques (such as alternative service delivery) and focus more on becoming a major player in the world's market as opposed to providing social programs (Tindal & Tindal, 2004). Therefore, it is argued that succession planning should be made a priority by leaders, with a focus of re-evaluating the criteria for recruitment, development and promotion of public service employees in order to meet their new environment (Varette & Zussman, 1996).



Literature on government succession planning has shown that succession planning can help an organization survive government restructuring. Drawing from her experience as Commissioner of the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice, Ellen Schall (1997) notes innovations were put into place at New York Juvenile Justice by identifying talent in the levels below each unit. When the department was restructured and lost employees, the department was able to survive because staff had anticipated and planned how to fill the vacancies.

However, Schall (1997) suggests that it is difficult for government to engage in succession planning because executives are tied to their particular administration and vision. Therefore leaders are reluctant to engage in succession planning and instead request that staff take on other initiatives. She also notes that leaders tend to assume succession planning is beyond their scope of job duties, leaving it up to human resources staff that are often under funded and unable to pursue large scale initiatives such as job rotation for all staff. Nevertheless, she points out the importance of government engaging in succession planning, particularly because of the constant transition between elected and appointed government officials.

Finally, Schall (1997) states that because the public sector has more short-term leaders in comparison to the private sector, it is essential that government engage in succession planning focused on the administrative level who provide support to their top executive/senior management public employees.

More recently, Endres and Alexander (2006) examined succession planning in the United States Department of Agriculture/Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) and the United States Postal Service (USPS). Both agencies were identified as excellent research candidates as both organizations had engaged in succession planning initiatives. The researchers found that it was vital for senior management to become involved in succession planning or the initiatives never took flight.

Focusing on local government, it is clear that succession planning is part of superior municipal governance. As outlined by Tindal and Tindal (2007) in their *Guide to Good*

*Municipal Governance*, municipalities face a shortage of senior staff, which needs to be addressed. “We have an aging workforce and little in the way of succession planning. When faced with the need to replace a manager, we tend to rely on a ‘head hunting’ firm to lure someone from another municipality...” (Tindal & Tindal, 2007, p. 20). However, “robbing” from other municipalities is an unsustainable strategy, as there will be not enough staff to fill all the vacancies in the near future. Therefore, engaging in initiatives that address this shortage is vital for municipality survival.

Furthermore, as noted in the introduction, in the last decade municipalities have faced new and expanded responsibilities, particularly in Ontario (Tindal & Tindal, 2004). In the mid-1990s, the Conservative government of Ontario engaged government in a new service realignment. The Province of Ontario downloaded total responsibility of services including social assistance, public health, social housing, land ambulance and public transit. This placed a huge financial burden on Ontario municipalities in an environment already noted for cynicism towards local government (Tindal & Tindal, 2004; 2007). By engaging in succession planning, the municipalities in Ontario may therefore be better equipped at meeting these types of challenges by ensuring that the right people are in the right jobs and that the knowledge gained from enduring the downloading is passed down to future generations of staff.

However, succession planning in local government may be very challenging. As noted by Tindal and Tindal (2004), local government requires greater local knowledge of the situations of concern. Therefore, succession planning in local government may be difficult as the pool of applicants who have or are able to quickly gain the local knowledge of the municipality is much smaller.

Nevertheless, some local government have engaged in succession planning. For example, Holinsworth (2004) examined succession planning in Henrico County in Virginia, USA. She reported that the upper managers of Henrico County developed all of their staff (not only those who are identified as having potential), in order to ensure a large pool of candidates for

upper management vacancies. She further stated that the development of all middle and upper managers helped the organization by allowing for entire organizational development.

Also, a brief internet search indicates that some Canadian municipalities have identified succession planning as an important initiative. These included the City of Vernon (City of Vernon, 2008), the Municipal District of Rocky View in Alberta (District of Rocky View, 2007) and various municipalities in Ontario including the City of London, the Township of Schreiber, the Regional Municipality of Peel, the City of Greater Sudbury, the Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula and the City of Kawartha Lakes (Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, 2008). In fact, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MAH) in Ontario completed a Municipal Management Needs Assessment in June 2006, which showed that succession planning was a priority for many municipalities because of the impending retirement of many current leaders (MAH, 2006). However, no research has been done to determine why some Ontario municipalities are not choosing to engage in succession planning.

## **2.5 Effects of Non-Mandatory Retirement**

As noted above, employees may work beyond age 65, depending on employer's retirement policy. According to the HRDC (2007), Canadian labour laws do not dictate a specific retirement age for employees. Bearing this in mind, it is possible that municipal workers may be able to continue working after they retire, until they personally choose not to. Thus, one could assume that the shortage of the labour force may not be as urgent as what some of the researchers have led us to believe. What is important to remember, however, is the fact that government employees tend to retire well before those who work in the private sector or who are self employed (HRDC, 2002). Even if there is no mandatory retirement age in Ontario, government employees are choosing to retire early, thus creating the potential staff shortage.

Furthermore, even if a municipal worker chooses to continue working after retirement, that municipal worker may not continue working as long as a much younger worker because of

potential health concerns. As a person ages, so does their health care needs (British Columbia Ministry of Health Services, 2008). As some point, the retired employee will be unable to continue working; therefore, the municipality is only putting off the inevitable issue of the staff shortage.

## 2.6 Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis

In gaining an understanding of why some Ontario municipalities chose not to engage in succession planning, it is useful to understand the variables involved in planning and implementing change. Kurt Lewin's (1948) concept of Force Field Analysis offers a framework for visualizing the forces that impact an issue that involves change (Schwering, 2003).

According to Schwering (2003), Kurt Lewin's (1948)'s Force Field Analysis states that an issue is held in balance by two imposing forces, those attempting to keep the status quo (restraining forces) versus those attempting to seek change (driving forces). As organizations are a balance (or equilibrium) of forces that work in opposite directions, for change to occur, the driving forces must exceed the restraining forces, shifting the equilibrium.

The Force Field Diagram is a model built from Lewin's Force Field Analysis theory. The model examines the variables involved in change, including the issue's economic, social and political environment as well as the actors involved and their values that drive and restrain change (Schwering, 2003). The model can assist one to visualize the forces that are restraining the current situation and the forces driving it towards change.

Bearing in mind Lewin's theory and the Force Field Diagram, one can analyze the variables that cause the restraining forces impacting Ontario Municipalities' decision to engage in succession planning. This will help provide understanding as to what can be done to increase succession planning in Ontario municipalities. (Please note: the survey for this study focused on the restraining forces that affected Ontario municipalities, not the driving forces to engage in succession planning. Therefore, only restraining forces are examined below. However, I do offer

some theories stemming from the literature review on potential driving forces in section 5.5).

Please see Appendix B for a Diagram of Lewin's Force Field Analysis.

It is also important to point out that some factors are dependent on the actors to determine which force they will create. For example, it is possible that an elected mayor could value succession planning. If this is the case, then it is likely his or her attitude will create a driving force. However, the opposite is true if the elected mayor believes that succession planning would cause too much disruption to an already 'well oiled machine.' This attitude would create a restraining force. Keeping this in mind, it is important to recognize that the forces discussed below depend on the attitudes of the actors involved. To reduce replication, I do not show the driving side for every force.

As noted above, Ontario municipalities face a greater number of responsibilities because of changes brought in by the Province. Municipalities have to meet this challenge in an environment where citizens are known to be resentful of paying more tax (Tindal & Tindal, 2004). Therefore, there may not be enough funds for initiatives outside of directly providing programs and services, which could cause a restraining force.

Also, negative attitudes or reactions regarding succession planning can also create a restraining force. If, for example, a municipality begins engaging in succession planning and staff are not interested in taking part, then a municipality may be less likely to continue implementing initiatives. Furthermore, it is possible that unfairness could become an issue in an environment of fiscal constraint where staff cannot take part in succession planning initiatives. Trying to maintain fairness could then be seen as a restraining force, preventing succession planning in an Ontario municipality.

Along a similar vein, succession planning requires top executive/senior management and council support, since senior executive have to request budget dollars to allocate to succession planning and council has to approve the budget for initiatives. If top executives/senior

management and/or council believe that other immediate organizational concerns are a higher priority than succession planning, then it is likely this would create a restraining force.

Time may also be a restraining force. Staff may feel they do not have time to take part in succession planning initiatives if they already have a lot on their work plate.

In addition, succession planning can seem like a waste when potential successors either leave the organization or fail to live up to expectations (McConnell, 2006). Top executives/senior management and/or council may see succession planning as too much of a risk. This is particularly an issue because public tax dollars are used in municipalities. If money is spent on an individual who does not stay with the municipality, top executives/senior management and/or council could face public scrutiny.

Finally, the size of a municipality may also be a restraining force for the decision to engage in succession planning. If, for example, a municipality does not have enough employees with the credentials to take over a technical or top executive/senior management role, the municipality may be less likely to engage in succession planning.

Based on the literature discussed above, it appears that succession planning may help Ontario municipalities that face small budgets and large mandates ensure that the right people are in the right jobs and thereby preventing financial waste stemming from past mistakes being replicated because of an inexperienced workforce. This major research paper will use the items addressed in the literature to shed light on some of the restraining forces that are affecting Ontario municipalities' choice to engage in succession planning.

## **CHAPTER 3 - FIELD RESEARCH**

### **3.1 Research Design and Methodology**

A cross-sectional research design was selected to investigate the research question: why do some municipalities choose not to engage in succession planning? This type of design was chosen because of the number of variables needed to be measured at one time and the additional requirement to measure factors that staff view as reasons why a municipality does not engage in succession planning.

As noted in section 1.2, the hypothesis of this study is that if a municipality engages in succession planning then the municipality has a large number of staff members, has a large budget and serves a major metropolitan area. The hypothesis specifically stems from the arguments and research outlined by McConnell (2006), Holinsworth (2004) and Schmalzried and Fallon (2007), who state that size and financial resources play a large role in why an organization chooses not to engage in succession planning. However, it is important to note that the research stemming from these authors did not focus on Canadian municipalities, but rather private firms and American regional health authorities.

The research methodology consisted of developing a survey instrument that was facilitated and made available on-line by the University of Western Ontario, Social Sciences Network and Data Services at: <http://survey.uwo.ca/managingthefuture>. The survey was sent to members of OMHRA, a professional association representing human resources, personnel, labour relations, and senior management professionals employed within the local public sector in the Province of Ontario. OMHRA members were selected in hopes of gaining access to a cross-section of the municipal management community who may have knowledge of current succession planning initiatives taking place in their municipality. Succession planning traditionally falls under the human resources portfolio (Stewart, Belcourt, Bohlander & Snell, 2007). It was hoped that by gaining access to a variety of human resource specialists, the survey results would be

obtained from municipalities with many different characteristics that could help identify specific trends.

Kandy Webb, General Manager of Human Resources and Staff Development at Norfolk County, assisted in gaining access to the confidential e-mail address list of members of OMHRA. An invitation to participate in the survey was sent by Christine Ball, Executive Officer of OMHRA. Two invitations were sent out to OMHRA, one invitation to all members and a second invitation to members who had previously identified they would be interested in participating during an OMHRA workshop two weeks prior to the date of the survey release. The invitation included instructions on how to access the survey, available from May 6<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> 2008, as well as information on how to request a copy of a summary of the results.

To address the issue of confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, the e-mail was sent as a blind copy to all members of OMHRA. Furthermore, participants were told twice that their participation was completely voluntary (once during the invitation and once during the introduction of the survey). Data from the survey was stored electronically in a secure manner and no other person had access to the survey data.

### **3.2 Survey Instrument**

The survey instrument consisted of eighteen questions and was constructed in four parts: introduction, definitions, departmental succession planning efforts (question one through thirteen) and municipality data. The last question was reserved for additional comments.

The introduction provided instructions on how to complete the survey and reminded participants that their participation was voluntary. There was also a statement advising that participants could e-mail directly to obtain a copy of a summary of the results.

The definitions section provided details regarding specific terminology used throughout the survey. *Succession planning* was defined as any action taken by the participant's municipality to ensure continuous staffing. For example, developing a formal documented plan



on how retiring staff members will be replaced. *Formal mentoring* was defined as a formal documented one-to-one relationship between two staff members, or one staff member and a retired staff member. *Internship programs* were defined as entry-level employment opportunities that offer career development for new university or college graduates. *Co-op programs* were defined as paid employment opportunities for students currently completing a university degree or college diploma. *Top executive/senior management* was defined as a management position that included but was not limited to a Chief Administrative Officer, City/County Manager, General Manager, Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer, etcetera.

Question one specifically asked if succession planning had been identified as a priority in the participant's municipality's strategic plan. This question was chosen to determine if succession planning has been identified as a priority in Ontario municipalities' long-term plans, in accordance with Treasury Board of Canada's suggestion and Endres and Alexander (2006)'s findings outlined above. As noted by Bryson (2004), strategic plans are formed when staff identify organizational priorities. Once the priorities are adopted, it is necessary to ensure that the priorities are adopted in all other long term documents. Therefore, by having identified succession planning as a priority in the municipality's strategic plan, the municipality is ensuring succession planning will become part of its entire organizational vision, which will provide a framework for municipal decision making in the future.

Question two requested information on whether the participant's municipality had a succession plan in place specifically for top executive/senior management. Question three requested participants estimate the average number of years they expected their top executive/senior managers to serve in their present positions. These questions were asked because leaders play a huge role in the success of organizations. They are responsible for ensuring that their organization remains on track in meeting strategic priorities and goals (McConnell, 2006; Holinsworth, 2004). Furthermore, top executives/senior management positions can be difficult to fill because of the credentials needed (Schmalzried & Fallon, 2007). Therefore, this question was

chosen to shed light on whether Ontario municipalities have a sense of urgency to create succession plans for their executive.

Question four requested information on whether a staff member was being groomed to take over a top executive/senior management position. As discussed above, grooming an internal person is a potential succession planning initiative (Schmalzried, & Fallon, 2007). However, because grooming is also associated with pitfalls, I chose not to include this question as part of the statistical index to create the variable of succession planning. Please see section 4.2 for further information regarding the index variable.

Question five, eight and eleven asked participants if their municipalities were engaging in specific succession planning: question five asked if the participant's municipality had created a succession plan for all staff; question eight asked if their municipality monitored demographics; and question eleven asked if their municipality engaged in mentoring. These questions were chosen as they were outlined as specific initiatives that public service agencies should engage in, in order to facilitate knowledge transfer and succession planning by the Treasury Board of Canada.

Question six, seven, nine and ten requested information regarding the municipality's current recruitment planning initiatives: question six specifically asked if the participant's municipality contracts with retired staff; question seven asked if their municipality provided flexible working arrangements to facilitate the retention of experienced workers; and question nine requested information regarding whether their municipality provides alternative working arrangements to entice potential employees. These questions were specifically chosen in order to respond to the initiatives suggested by the HRDC (2002).

Question ten asked participants if their municipality provides internships or co-op opportunities for students. As noted above, Dodge and McKeough research found these programs were an excellent way for students to gain work experience and at the same time acted

as a succession planning tool for organizations planning for professional and managerial succession (Dodge and McKeough, 2003).

Questions twelve and thirteen were designed to gain an understanding about what factors and their restraining force influence a municipality's choice not to engage in succession planning. The options were chosen from the literature outlined above, therefore not all the potential restraining forces listed under section 2.6 (Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis) were examined. For example, McConnell (2006), Holinsworth (2004) and Schmalzried and Fallon (2007), suggest that size and financial constraint are the major reasons why an organization does not engage in succession planning. Schall (1997), however, indicated that other organizational concerns often take priority over succession planning and therefore, there is less time for staff to engage in succession planning.

The option of "fairness" was chosen after speaking with a senior staff member in the London Ontario police force. He indicated fairness was a factor in their succession planning initiatives, as they did not have budget to allow for all staff to take part in initiatives, thus only 'special' staff would be able to take part. This could potentially cause animosity between employees.

The option of "preference" was chosen based on the research outlined by Schmalzried and Fallon (2007) and Holinsworth (2004) that suggested a pool of applicants may not be big enough. I took this a step further and decided that an organization may realize this and therefore make a conscious effort to only recruit externally.

The last section requested information regarding the number of staff employed, the current total budget, and the population served. For the purpose of this study, a large municipality was defined as a municipality that has a large budget, has a large number of employees and serves a metropolitan area. A large number of staff members was defined as 150 staff members or more. This did not include contract staff. A large budget was defined as more than 1 billion dollars. The variable population served was divided into municipal characteristics,

as defined by Statistics Canada: major metropolitan area (population of 1,000,000+), a mid-sized metropolitan area (population of 250,000 to 999,999), a smaller metropolitan area (population of 50,000 to 249,999), a small non-metropolitan city/area (population of 20,000 to 49,999) or small town (population of less than and including 19,999). For the purpose of this study, this variable was broken into two parts: metropolitan area (defined as a population of 50,000 +) versus a non-metropolitan area (population less than 50,000).

## **CHAPTER 4 – SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Description of Survey Data**

Of the 160 survey invitations sent, a total of thirty-four respondents participated in the survey (N=160), resulting in a return rate of twenty-one percent. The on-line survey responses were summarized by Social Science Data Network Services (SSDNS) and provided in Statistical Program for Social Sciences format. The survey results were tabulated by SSDNS in the order in which there were completed.

### **4.2 Statistics**

Frequencies and cross-tabulations were conducted on coded data. For example, to gain an understanding of attitudes regarding succession planning as well as to determine the type of current succession planning initiatives that are priorities for municipalities, data was analyzed regarding why a municipality does not engage in succession planning as well as the types of succession planning initiatives being undertaken. To test the research hypothesis, the dependent variable, succession planning (represented by an index of question one, question five, question eight and question eleven), was tested via linear regression against three independent variables: number of staff, budget and population served. The number of participants that responded to a particular question was used to calculate percentages.

### **4.3 Demographic Profile of Participants**

Out of the thirty-four participants who responded to the survey, eight had the job title of Director of Human Resources, seven had the title of Manager of Human Resources, five had the title of Chief Administrative Officer, two had the title of Human Resources Coordinator and two had the title of Human Resources Planner. The rest of the titles included Chief Human Resources Officer, Manager of Organizational Planning, Labour Relations Officer, Human Resources

Advisor, Human Resources Officer, Manager of Employee Strategies, Manager of Corporate Services, Project Manager, Organizational Development Consultant and Employee Services Specialist.

The number of full time equivalent (FTE) positions of the municipalities surveyed ranged from 26 to 6000, with a mean number of 782.65. The budgets ranged from \$71,000 to \$2,000,000,000, with a mean of \$575,620,957.00. Please note, four participants chose not to provide their budget information, therefore the above number reflects the results of only thirty municipalities. Finally, the number of citizens the municipalities served ranged from 6000 to 1,200,000, with a mean of 210134.38. Please note, two participants chose not to include their citizen population; therefore, the above number reflects a range of thirty-two municipalities.

The estimated average number with respect to how long participants expected their current top executive/senior managers to serve in their present municipality had a range of zero to twenty years, with a mean of 7.72 years. Over one third of the municipalities indicated that they expected their top executive/senior managers to serve for another six years or less.

#### **4.4 Municipalities Engaging in Succession Planning Initiatives**

Twenty participants (58.82%) reported that succession planning was identified as a priority in their strategic plan. Thirteen (38.32%) reported that succession planning was not identified as a priority and one participant indicated they were unsure if it had been identified as a priority.

Six (17.64%) participants reported that a succession plan was in place for top executives/senior manager positions. Only four participants (11.76%) reported that a plan was in place for all staff members. Eleven (32.35%) reported that they currently monitored the age demographics of its employees and use this knowledge to project the number of employees that will be retiring in the future. Six (17.64%) reported that their municipality had a formal mentoring program in place. Finally, seven (20.59%) participants reported that one or more

internal staff members were currently being groomed to take over as Chief Administrative Officer or another top executive/senior management position.

Linear regression was run to test the hypothesis that if a municipality engages in succession planning then the municipality has a large number of staff members, has a large budget and serves a major metropolitan area. No significant results were found. However, when determining whether succession planning was identified as a priority in the municipality's strategic plan, it appears that the number of FTEs, budget and number of citizens are predictors:  $F(3, 33) = 3.544, p < 0.02$  and  $F(3, 33) = 7.00, p < 0.00$ .

#### **4.5 Types of Recruitment Planning Initiatives**

Twenty (58.82%) reported that their municipality contracted with retired staff and ten (29.41%) reported that their municipality provided flexible work arrangements for staff. Furthermore, twenty (58.82%) reported that their municipality provided alternative working arrangements to entice potential employees to work with their organization. Finally, twenty-three (67.64%) participants provided information that they provided internships or co-op opportunities for students.

#### **4.6 Factors for Why Municipalities Choose Not to Engage in Succession Planning**

The participant answers from questions twelve and thirteen were as follows: one participant reported that succession planning was not a valuable initiative, while twelve participants believed that financial constraint played a role in why their municipality did not engage in succession planning and fifteen believed immediate organizational challenges played a role. Thirteen participants believed that time pressure played a role and twelve believed it was the size of the organization that impacted the decision to engage in succession planning. Only four reported that they believed it was a preference to hire staff outside of the municipality and five reported that fairness was a factor.

Twelve reported that other factors were involved. These factors included currently being in the process of developing a plan (and therefore have yet to engage in succession planning), succession planning was not considered urgent, financial constraint, lack of understanding of the importance of succession planning, lack of leadership, no formal plan but informally identified in service plan, and union environment viewed mentoring staff as unfair to other staff or external potential candidates.

Immediate organization challenges were ranked as the number one reason why municipalities chose not to engage in succession planning. Twelve (35.29%) participants chose this factor as number one. Four participants (11.76%) chose “other” as a reason why their municipality chose not to engage in succession planning and provided further detail of their choice in their comments section (please see section 4.6).

Contrary to my hypothesis, financial constraint was reported as number one by only three municipalities (8.82%), as was size of the municipality. Time pressure was reported as number one by two municipalities (5.88%). Preference to hire staff outside of the municipality was never ranked as the priority. However, two municipalities (5.88%) ranked it the third reason (out of eight) as to why their municipality chose not to engage in succession planning. Finally, fairness was never ranked as a number one reason why their municipality chose not to engage in succession planning. However, one municipality ranked it as the number three reason why their municipality did not engage in succession planning.

#### **4.7 Participant Comments**

Five participants chose to provide optional comments regarding succession planning in their municipality at the end of the survey. One participant stated that it is very difficult to engage in succession planning for “department heads” as most departments have a limited number of staff. The participant also stated that usually the “department head” (top executive/senior manager) is highly qualified and subordinate staff do not have the academic



background or experience to fulfill his or her role. Two participants wrote that succession planning was identified as desirable in their municipality and that they will be working on a recommendation to council within the next year for a formal program for certain positions. Finally, two participants stated that their municipality did not have a “true” strategic plan but with pending retirements succession planning had been determined as a necessary priority.

## **CHAPTER 5 –DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **5.1 Succession Planning in Ontario Municipalities**

Succession planning helps organizations prepare for the future, which is necessary in today's changing political and economic environment. The HRDC (2002) suggests that succession planning in government is particularly essential, as government employees tend to retire earlier than individuals who work in the private sector or are self employed. Therefore, one could believe that it is common sense for a government organization to engage in succession planning, as outlined by Grusky (1963)'s One-Way Causality theory. However, this does not appear to be the case for Ontario municipalities.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that Ontario municipalities are aware that succession planning is important for their municipality, as over half of the participants reported that succession planning was identified as a priority in their strategic plan. One participant rated succession planning as not an important initiative for their municipality at this time. However, identifying succession planning as a priority does not necessarily indicate that a municipality has followed up with action. Results of this study show that most Ontario municipalities have yet to engage in succession planning initiatives.

Less than one quarter of the participants reported that a succession plan was in place for top executives/senior managers and just over ten percent reported that a plan was in place for all staff members. Just under one third reported that they currently monitored the age demographics of their employees and used this knowledge to project the number of employees that will be retiring in the future. Less than one quarter reported that their municipality had a formal mentoring program in place. Only one quarter of the participants reported that they were actively preparing for the departure of their leaders by grooming an internal person to take over. These results suggest that many Ontario municipalities do not have a sense of urgency to create formal succession plans.

The time remaining before a top executive/senior manager departs does not appear to be a compelling factor to create a succession plan, as over one-third of the participants reported that their top executive/senior managers will be gone within six years. The lack of urgency is further demonstrated by the fact that over eighty percent of the participants reported they did not have a plan in place for filling top executive/senior managers positions and ninety percent did not have a plan in place for all staff. Furthermore, eighty percent had taken no action in grooming a successor for top executive/senior managers.

Contrary to my hypothesis, size and financial constraint cannot be used to predict whether a municipality is engaging in succession planning initiatives for this study. Stemming from the literature examined in this research, larger municipalities should be more likely to have succession plans than smaller municipalities considering that larger municipalities generally have more resources (McConnell, 2006; Holinsworth, 2004; Schmalzried & Fallon, 2007). Instead, it appears the major reason why succession planning is not a priority for all municipalities' is because of other immediate organizational challenges.

Leaders play a major role in directing organizational commitments. It seems possible that it is the Ontario municipal leaders that are choosing to require staff to take on initiatives other than succession planning; which is underlying why other immediate organizational challenges are the main reason why municipalities are not engaging in succession planning. As discussed by Schall (1997), it is difficult for government executives to engage in succession planning because executives are often tied to their particular administration and make the assumption that succession issues are beyond the scope of their work.

Nevertheless, it does appear that financial constraint and size of municipality may play a role in whether they choose to engage in succession planning, as both were ranked by a few participants as major reasons why their municipalities chose not to engage in succession planning and were significant variables in predicting that a municipality would choose to make succession planning a priority in their strategic plan. This suggests that municipalities may need to be large

in order for succession planning to be identified as a valuable initiative in the municipality's long term vision for the future. It also seems possible that if a municipality has limited financial resources, then executive will choose to spend funds on a current 'crisis' to assist their situation today, as opposed to spending on initiatives that may help them in the future.

Time pressure was also identified by a limited number of municipalities as a reason behind why a municipality chooses not to engage in succession planning. This supports Schall's (1997) understanding that leaders chose not make succession planning a priority as they believe other initiatives are more important, therefore less time is dedicated to identifying positions that will need filling and creating plans to fill them.

## **5.2 Testing My Hypothesis**

As only one participant answered that succession planning is not a valuable initiative to their municipality at this time, it appears that many Ontario municipalities believe succession planning is important; however, the basis for deciding that a succession plan is important, is unclear.

As noted above, it does not appear that the size of the municipality (measured in terms of the number of staff that the municipality employs and the number of citizens the municipality serves) or budget of the municipality is a predictor for why a municipality engages in succession planning initiatives. However, these variables do appear to be factors in predicting whether a municipality chooses to make succession planning a priority in their strategic plan.

These findings suggest that there may be a range of external and internal factors involved in predicting why a municipality chooses not to engage in succession planning. For example, it is possible that executive attitude plays a role in whether a municipality engages in succession planning, as executives are responsible for choosing which initiatives to make priorities. Furthermore, there must be a high level of executive support to convince council that succession planning is important and that budgetary means should be set aside for succession

planning. Council is the body that approves municipal budgets, therefore dictating the various initiatives that a municipality will engage in over the following year. Thus, municipal executives need to support the importance of succession planning, to convince council that succession planning needs to be a priority.

Other factors that may also be involved include technology advances, particularly succession planning for positions that may become outdated because of new technology. Therefore, a municipality that has many positions that are no longer needed because of technology advances may chose not to engage in succession planning. Again, this area needs further research.

Furthermore, employee attitude and past experience may play a role. For example, a municipality may engage in succession planning that is not supported by staff. That is, employees did not wish to take part in any succession planning because of a negative attitude towards the initiative or because of lack of available time to commit to a succession planning project. Therefore, the municipality may not engage in further initiatives. This is an area in need of further research.

Finally, sample size may be playing a major role in these findings. As noted in the Research Design and Methodology 3.1 section, only thirty-four participants responded. Therefore, it seems possible that there was not enough statistical power for the study to yield significant results. Statistical power is the probability that a study will have significant results if the research hypothesis is true (Aron & Aron, 1999). Statistical power is directly affected by the sample size: the larger the sample size, the higher statistical power.

Surprisingly, however, it does appear that size and budget of the municipality are predictors for why a municipality chooses to make succession a priority in their strategic planning. This suggests that municipalities may need to be a large size and have a large amount of resources in order for succession planning to be identified as a valuable initiative. Unfortunately, no data were captured to determine how many municipalities created a strategic

plan. It appears possible that size and budget may predict whether a municipality creates a formal strategic plan. Therefore, it is possible that these results show municipalities that are large create formal strategic plans.

### **5.3 Municipalities with Recruitment Mechanisms**

It appears from the data that ensuring current levels of staffing and engaging in recruitment mechanisms are high priorities for most municipalities, with over half reporting that their municipality contracted with retired staff and almost one third reporting that their municipality provided flexible work arrangements for staff. Furthermore, over half reported that their municipality provided alternative working arrangements to entice potential employees to work for their organization. Finally, well over half indicated that their municipality provided internships or co-op opportunities for students.

It is clear from these results that recruiting and ensuring current staff levels of staffing are important priorities for Ontario municipalities. These initiatives are important not only to help phase out potential retirees (HRDC, 2002), but also to attract potential new staff. For example, the HRDC (2002) suggests that a person is more likely to work longer in an organization if they can work part time. Therefore, having a flexible schedule or an alternative work arrangement may encourage employees to stay longer at the municipality and lesson the urgency created by potential staff turnover.

Furthermore, over half of the municipalities engaging in succession planning provided an internship or co-op program. Students or recent grads will benefit from having a program that provides work experience and the municipality will benefit from the potential to hire staff they have groomed. Thus, again, it appears municipalities believe having a plan in place to recruit staff is an important planning initiative.

However, there are issues with only focusing on recruitment and maintaining current staffing levels. The major financial costs involved in these initiatives may be higher in the long

run, in comparison to spending money in preparing a municipality for the future. For example, a retired municipal employee receives a government pension. If a municipality contracts with a retired employee who receives a pension, then the government is, in sense, paying the employee twice. At some point the retired employee will stop working because of health care concerns. Therefore, contracting with retired staff is simply holding off filling the inevitable vacancy. It is possible, that in the long run, it may be more cost beneficial for a municipality to engage in a formal mentoring program to allow current staff to learn from soon to be retirees, rather than paying retirees twice who will eventually stop working. This is an area for further research.

#### **5.4 Participant Comments**

Five participants chose to include optional comments. It appears that the comments provided by the participants are consistent with the literature. As noted, one participant stated that it is very difficult to engage in succession planning for “department heads” as most departments have a limited number of staff. This supports the literature indicating that size plays a role in whether or not an organization engages in succession planning (McConnell, 2005; Holinsworth, 2004; Schmalzried & Fallon, 2007). Furthermore, participants commented that subordinate staff may not have the academic skills or experience to fulfill senior management roles. This supports the literature suggesting that the internal pool of applicants may not have the credentials necessary in order to take on a senior executive role (Schmalzried & Fallon, 2007).

Of note, two participants commented that succession planning had been identified as desirable in their particular municipality and that they will be working on a recommendation to council within the next year for a formal program for certain positions. This again supports the idea of the importance of executive by-in to support succession planning and the need to “market” the importance of succession planning to council.

## **5.5 Lewin's Force Field Analysis Applied to Results**

It is clear from the results that the issue of whether or not a municipality should engage in succession planning is being pushed more strongly by the restraining forces than the driving forces. Few participants reported that succession planning was a priority for their municipality. Also, very few participants reported that their municipality had succession plans in place, currently monitored the age demographics of their employees or provided a formal mentoring program for employees.

It appears the variable that is creating the strongest restraining force is immediate organizational challenges taking priority over succession planning initiatives. As discussed by Schall (1997), the underlining reason for this factor could be because of top executive/senior management and elected council members' attitude regarding succession planning. These groups are choosing to make other initiatives a priority.

Weaker, yet still important factors that create restraining forces include financial constraint and size of municipality, as well as time pressures. As discussed, Ontario municipalities face an era of fiscal constraint with additional responsibilities, which may make it impossible to take on initiatives outside of directly providing programs and services. Stemming from this, staff may not have time to dedicate to succession planning. It appears that if a municipality does not have enough employees with the credentials that enable them to move into a technical or top/executive senior management role, then a municipality may be less likely to engage in succession planning.

As noted above, this research report did not address the factors that may be creating driving forces for a municipality to engage in succession planning. Nevertheless, stemming from the literature and theories above, I can offer some suggestions as to what factors may cause a municipality to engage in succession planning.

The public sector faces an aging, slower growing labour force (HRDC, 2002). In fact, according to Tindal and Tindal (2007), Ontario municipalities already face a shortage of senior



staff. Therefore, the potential of having a small pool of applicants to fill a growing number of vacancies may drive a municipality to engage in succession planning.

Requiring special local knowledge may also be a driving force for engaging in succession planning. As noted, Tindal and Tindal (2004) believe municipal government requires local people who have resided in the municipality for a period of time to make local decisions. Thus, having experienced and continuous staff with local knowledge is important for municipalities. As noted above, succession planning can assist municipalities in retaining local knowledge through knowledge transfer between staff.

Meeting the challenge of globalization may also be another driving force. As discussed, ensuring an adequate supply of staff with the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to support the organization in the future may assist organizations to meet the challenge of the world's changing political, economic and social environment (Tindal & Tindal, 2004; McConnell, 2006).

Retaining staff may also be a driving force for engaging in succession planning. Organizations that demonstrate mobility and career enhancement within the organization are more likely to retain their employees (McConnell, 2006). This, as noted, will be essential in the future if there is a small labour force, as employees will be able to easily move from one job to another.

Utilizing the theories outlined by Grusky (1963), it appears the Common Sense One-Way Causality theory may not be at work in Ontario Municipalities. That is, even though it appears to be "common sense" those municipalities should engage in succession planning because they are facing a potential staffing shortage, they are not engaging in succession planning.

It is possible, however, that the Vicious Cycle theory may eventually explain why Ontario municipalities may eventually choose to engage in succession planning. That is, as decisions made by inexperienced workers could cause negative financial repercussions. This, in turn, may cause staff turnover, which disrupts routine and lowers morale. This then may cause more staff to leave the organization. Therefore, the municipality is forced to begin succession

planning in hopes of encouraging knowledge transfer between the staff that are left and preventing the cycle from continuing.

Furthermore, Gamson & Scotch's (1964)'s theory of the Ritual Scapegoating may also play a part in why a municipality chooses to engage in succession planning. If, for example, a highly publicized mistake occurs that causes a lot of public scrutiny, it seems possible that top executives/senior staff will be dismissed to show the public that the municipality is taking action to correct the mistake. If this is the case, then having a successor who is able to step into the top executive/senior staff role is essential, thereby forcing succession planning.

The results also suggest that there are variables at work that drive the municipality to engage in other types of human resources initiatives. For instance, many participants indicated that their municipality contracted with retired staff, granted alternative working arrangements to entice potential employees to work for their organization and provided internships or co-op opportunities for students. However, this research paper did not examine the driving forces for why a municipality chooses to engage in human resources initiatives. It seems likely that top executive/senior staff and council believe that allocating budget dollars for recruiting staff is better than allocating money on succession planning. Although in the short term this could be seen as positive, as bringing in staff now allows for new blood to bring in new ideas for innovation, it ignores the need for knowledge transfer (McConnell, 2006).

## **CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Summary/General Conclusion**

Succession planning may help Ontario municipalities that face small budgets and large mandates ensure that the right people are in the right jobs. Succession planning may also assist municipalities in reducing financial waste stemming from past mistakes being replicated because of an inexperienced workforce. This major research paper used the items addressed in the literature to gain an understanding regarding some of the restraining forces that are affecting Ontario municipalities' choice to engage in succession planning.

A cross-sectional study was used to capture the degree to which municipalities are identifying their next top executives/senior management. A survey measured current municipal succession planning efforts and factors impacting why a municipality was choosing not to engage in succession planning. The hypothesis was that Ontario municipalities that engage in succession planning are likely to have a large number of employees, have a large budget and serve a metropolitan area. Financial constraint and size were proposed as the main reason why municipalities chose not to engage in succession planning. This paper did not explore the driving forces for why a municipality chooses to engage in succession planning or other types of human resources initiatives.

The results of this study indicate that most Ontario municipalities are not engaging in succession planning because other immediate organizational challenges are taking priority. However, Ontario municipalities are engaging in recruiting initiatives. This suggests that Ontario municipal staff (such as senior executives and/or elected council members) may be making other human resources initiatives such as recruiting initiatives a high priority than succession planning. Nevertheless, it is clear that the participants of this study believe succession planning is important, which leaves a potential pathway for Ontario municipalities to change their current attitude regarding succession planning.

## 6.2 Recommendations for Ontario Municipalities

The results clearly indicate that Ontario municipal human resources staff and top executives who took part in this study are aware of the importance of succession planning. It is also clear that many of their municipalities are not engaging in specific succession planning initiatives suggested in the literature. This indicates that the opinions of the participants of this study regarding the importance of having a succession plan, may not necessarily reflect the opinions of their council or top executive/senior management, as their municipalities are yet to take action. This is further supported by the results stemming from the Force Field Analysis. As noted, the strongest restraining force appears to be other immediate organizational challenges taking priority, likely because of top executive/senior management and council attitudes that engaging in succession planning initiatives is not as important and engaging in other initiatives.

There is a silver lining emerging from these results. As staff do not have control over the size of the municipality or the budget, changing these factors in order for a municipality to engage in succession planning would be impossible. Instead, it appears that what is needed is a change in top executive/senior managers and council attitude, which is something that is doable.

It is my recommendation that municipal human resources employees and/or municipal executives interested in succession planning review the literature on succession planning and create a short presentation to council on the importance of engaging in succession planning initiatives, highlighting the upcoming labour pool shortage. Concurrently, I believe those interested in succession planning should create an action plan for how their municipality could engage in the process of identifying and preparing suitable employees - through mentoring, training and job rotation - to replace key players (such as technical and top executive/senior staff). Both the presentation and the action plan may benefit from staff reviewing the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's *Succession planning for corporate knowledge transfer: A guide for managers and human resource specialists*. It may also be beneficial to contract the services of a

succession planning specialist who may be able to provide practical guidance specific to the municipality.

To explore the elements that should be included in an action plan, I will use the information I learned from my Methods and Issues in Program and Policy Evaluation (MPA 9915A), as an outline for proposing how the plan should be implemented. According to McDavid and Hawthorn (2006), one of the first steps in designing and implementing an action plan is to have an agreed upon understanding of what the action plan is to accomplish. For the purpose of the municipal action plan, the goal would be to lobby the top executive/senior staff and council regarding the importance of succession planning. It would also be important for municipal staff to speak with other municipalities to determine what types of initiatives are currently being pursued and why.

The next step for Municipal Staff is to create a team to promote succession planning internally and to gain the support of elected officials. This would involve identify the actors involved in the decision making, identifying a top executive/senior manager who supports succession planning and identifying a change agent who can lead the group to bring about the change in the municipality.

Also, as discussed by Ms. Joni Baechler, guest speaker for my Local Government Management Class (PA9904) on February 12, 2008, if senior management is not on board, new initiatives will not take flight. Therefore, as part of the team, it may be beneficial to identify members on the committee who have a marketing background and that are charismatic, who would be able to “sell” succession planning. Finally, it would be also important to invite strong advocates of succession planning that hold a lot of clout to the team. For example, inviting some of the researchers, practitioners and authors identified in the literature review, such as representatives from the Treasure Board of Canada Secretariat and/or staff from the HRDC.

Following the creation of the team championing for succession planning, specific goals and targets should be determined, as well as a time line. Finally, reporting mechanisms (such as a

performance report that outlines how well each target is being met) should be established, where committee members report quarterly on their specific initiatives to ensure that everyone stays on track and issues are solved.

### **6.3 Lessons Learned**

The sample size for this study may not be large enough, which could have impacted the results. As noted by Aron and Aron (1999), generally, the larger the sample, the more accurate the results. If this study was replicated, one would want to ensure that second waves of e-mail reminders were sent to all participants, to encourage more participation.

Furthermore, it seems possible that some of the questions could have been misread by participants, particularly question three, which asks participants to estimate how long they expect their top executive/senior managers to serve in their present positions. Although this question was taken with permission from the 2007 study by Schmalzried and Fallon, it seems possible that some participants read it as how long their municipality expects a senior manager to work for the municipality, rather than how much longer their top executive/senior managers will work in their current positions, as four municipalities answered fifteen years and two municipalities answered twenty years, which seems unusual.

Additionally, it would have been beneficial to include a question asking participants if their municipality has or is currently identifying positions that will need filling in the next five years, as this is a strong example of succession planning. Along a similar vein, it may also have been beneficial to determine how many municipalities were engaging in informal succession planning. This information could have impacted the results, by providing an example of other succession planning initiatives that could have been included in the statistical index for the variable succession planning.

It may be false to assume that if a municipality views succession planning as an important initiative, then the municipality has identified it as a priority in their strategic plan.

Instead, asking participants if succession planning has been identified as a priority in any current planning initiatives such as during strategic planning, then the data may better capture if succession planning is a priority in the municipality.

#### **6.4 Additional Further Study Recommendations**

It does not appear that the size or budget of the municipality plays the largest role or is a predictor for why a municipality engages in succession planning initiatives. Instead, other immediate organizational challenges play the largest role. Therefore, further study may want to determine the exact organizational challenges that are being viewed as higher priorities and use this information to create a stronger argument for the importance of succession planning.

Further research is needed to determine what other factors are playing a part in why an organization is not engaging in succession planning. For example, it seems possible that individual attitudes regarding succession planning is playing a huge role. Therefore, future research may provide insight regarding why some leaders are choosing to embrace succession planning and the arguments used to encourage the adoption of succession planning initiatives specific to local government.

Exploring some of the factors outlined by the participants may also be beneficial for understanding why some municipalities are not engaging in succession planning, such as lack of understanding regarding the importance of succession planning. By learning what arguments and information have been used to influence leaders who believe succession planning is important, a stronger argument may be created for the importance of succession planning.

One participant commented that the union environment made it difficult to engage in succession planning. This links into the fairness issue. According to this participant, the union felt that identifying certain participants as “special enough” to take part in succession planning caused issues of unfairness. It might be important, therefore for municipalities to ensure that all staff are taking part in succession planning. This is similar to the suggestion made by

Holinsworth (2004): the development of all middle and upper managers helps the organization by allowing for whole, continual organizational development. Further research may want to examine how unions are responding to succession planning and what information or arguments could be presented to gain union support.

Future research may want to examine municipalities outside of Ontario. This would provide insight regarding what initiatives are being engaged in and why and help to determine benchmarks for the identification of the most effective succession planning initiatives for municipalities.

#### **6.4 Final Thoughts**

It is comforting that so many Ontario municipal staff rated succession planning as important as it would need to have the support of these individuals for the initiatives to succeed. It is now up to them to demonstrate to the importance of succession planning to other staff and leaders.



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## APPENDIX A

### Survey

#### Survey

#### Definitions

##### **Succession Planning:**

Any action taken by your municipality to ensure continuous staffing. For example, developing a formal documented plan on how retiring staff members will be replaced.

##### **Formal Mentoring:**

A formal documented one-to-one relationship between two staff members, or one staff member and a retired staff member. This relationship exists to provide training and learning for current employees. For the purpose of this study, this is an example of a succession planning initiative.

##### **Internship programs:**

Entry-level employment opportunities that offer career development for new university or college graduates. For the purpose of this study, this is an example of a succession planning initiative.

##### **Co-op programs:**

Paid employment opportunities for students currently completing a university degree or college diploma. For the purpose of this study, this is an example of a succession planning initiative.

##### **Top Executive/Senior Management:**

For the purpose of this study, a top executive/senior management position includes but is not limited to a Chief Administrative Officer, City/County Manager, General Manager, Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer, etc.

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For questions 1 through 11 please choose the response that best reflects your knowledge or opinion.

1. Has succession planning been identified as a priority in your municipality's Strategic Plan?

Yes

No

Unsure

2. Does your municipality have a succession plan in place specifically for your top executives/senior managers (for example positions including but not limited to: Chief

Administrative Officer, City/County Manager, General Manager, Treasurer, and/or Chief Financial Officer, etc.)?)

Yes

No

Unsure

3. On average how long do you expect the top executives/senior managers in your municipality to serve in their present positions?

years

4. Are one or more internal staff member(s) being groomed to take over as Chief Administrator Officer or another top executive/senior management position?

Yes

No

Unsure

5. Does your municipality have a succession plan in place for all staff levels (for example, positions including but not limited to: Clerks, Administrators, Managers, Directors, Coordinators, Analysts, Planners, etc.)?)

Yes

No

Unsure

6. Does your municipality contract with retired staff?

Yes

No

Unsure

7. Does your municipality engage in flexible working arrangements specifically to facilitate the retention of experienced workers? For example, engaging in phased-in retirement, where a staff member who will be retiring works part time before officially retiring?

Yes

No

Unsure

8. Does your municipality monitor the age demographics of its employees and use this knowledge to project the number of employees that will be retiring in the future (such as in the next 5 to 10 years)?

Yes

No

Unsure

9. Does your municipality offer alternative working arrangements to provide flexibility for employees as a way to entice potential employees to work with your organization? For example, providing a flexible work schedule, where a staff member can work additional hours during the week in order to take a paid day off?

Yes

No

Unsure

10. Is your municipality currently taking part in student internships and/or co-op programs?

Yes

No

Unsure

11. Does your municipality engage in a formal mentoring program?

Yes

No

Unsure

---

12. For what reasons does your municipality **not** engage in succession planning at this time?

*(Check all that apply)*

Not Applicable (my municipality engages in succession planning)

Succession Planning is Not a Valuable Initiative for my Municipality at this Time

- Financial Constraint
- Immediate Organizational Challenges Taking Priority
- Time Pressure
- Preference to Hire Staff Outside the Organization
- Size of Organization (too few staff to groom)
- Fairness (discouraging special treatment to specific staff members)
- Other (*please describe*)

13. Please rank the following reasons why your municipality does **not** engage in succession planning (**1 = biggest reason, 2 = 2nd biggest reason** and so on). Use the number zero (**0**) for all reasons that are not applicable to your municipality.

- Not Applicable (my municipality engages in succession planning)
- Succession Planning is Not a Valuable Initiative for my Municipality at this Time
- Financial Constraint
- Immediate Organizational Challenges Taking Priority
- Time Pressure
- Preference to Hire Staff Outside the Organization
- Size of Organization (too few staff to groom)
- Fairness (discouraging special treatment to specific staff members)
- Other (*same reason as in question 12*)

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14. Your job title:

15. Number of full time equivalent (FTEs) staff members employed in your municipality as of December 2007 (*not including contracted employees*):

16. Total corporate budget (operating and capital) for 2007:

\$  .00

17. Number of citizens in your municipality as of December 2007:

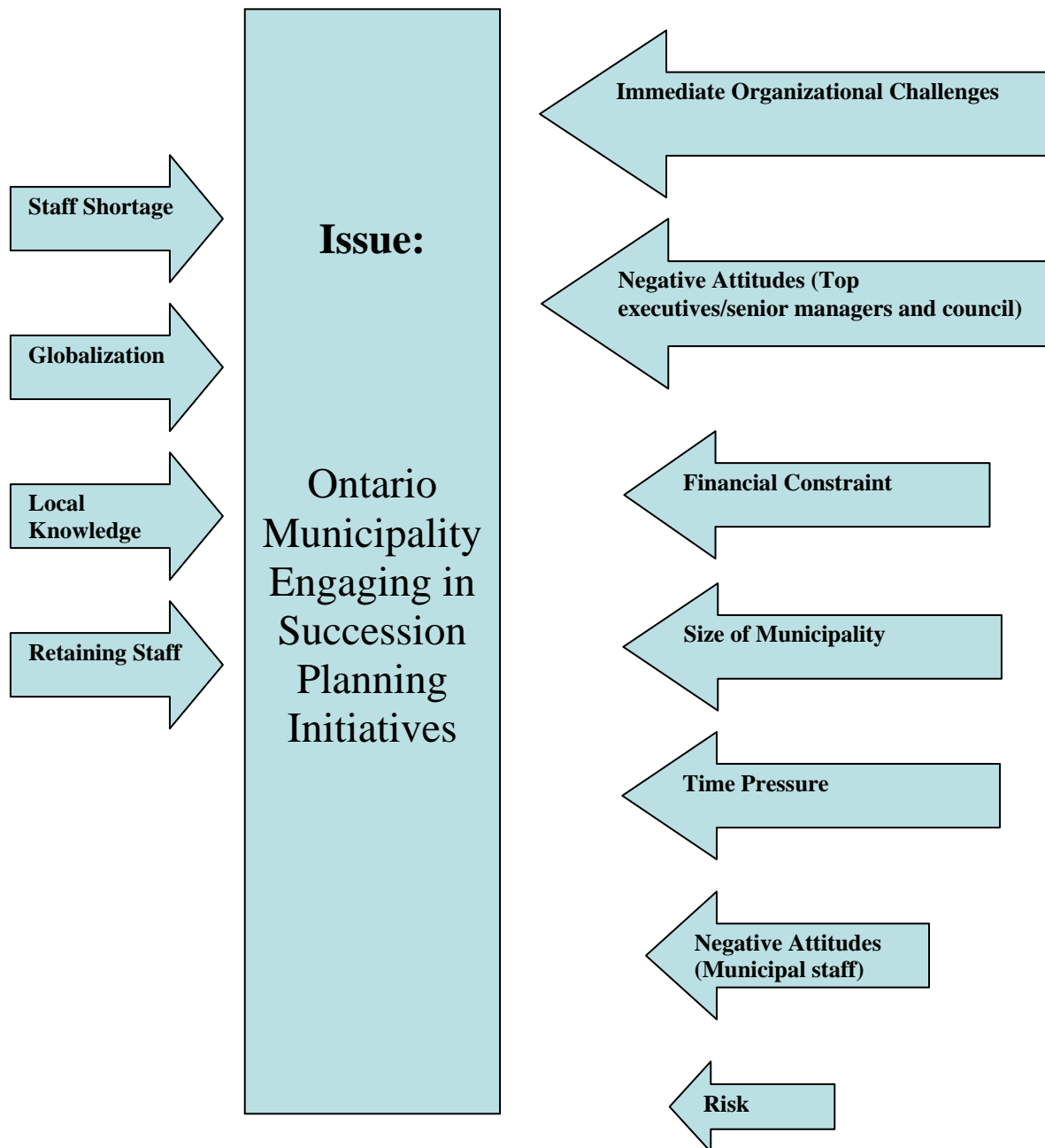
18. Comments:



**APPENDIX B**  
Lewin's Force Field Analysis

**<sup>1</sup>Driving Forces**

**Restraining Forces**



**\*Please note, the larger the arrow, the stronger the force as outlined in this study.**

<sup>1</sup> Suggested forces as per the theories outlined in this major paper.

**APPENDIX C**  
**Invitation Sent to Participants**

The below invitation was sent on Monday, May 5, 2008 at 19:08:37 to all the members of Ontario Municipal Human Resources Association. The same invitation (below) was re-sent on Friday, May 9, 2008 at 15:08:37 to participants who had signed up previously to take part.



**SURVEY - SUCCESSION PLANNING**

Dear Members of OMHRA,

I am asking for your participation in a web-based survey that will collect information and the opinions of OMHRA regarding succession planning. The information collected will be used to produce a major research report in fulfilling the requirements of a Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree for the Local Government Program at the University of Western Ontario. I believe the results of my study may be of assistance to members, as there is minimal empirical research specific to local government human resources practices.

The survey will gather data to determine why some Ontario municipalities choose not to engage in succession planning initiatives and what factors appear to influence why a municipality chooses to engage in succession planning. In particular, this study will analyze

The Board of OMHRA encourages you to complete this survey and assist one of our future employees!

the degree to which local government in Ontario is addressing the challenge of identifying their next top executives and analyze the types of initiatives Ontario municipalities are choosing to engage in. Information will also be requested regarding the number of staff employed, the current total budget, and the population served.

The survey will be facilitated by the University of Western Ontario, Social Science Network and Data Services department (SSNDS). Your participation is completely voluntary. Your response will be anonymous and remain strictly confidential.

Data from the survey will be forwarded to me by SSNDS and will be stored electronically in a secure manner. No other person will have or be granted access to the survey data. Electronic data will be wiped clean when the major research report has been approved.

A summary of the final report will be made available electronically after July 31st. For those who wish to obtain a copy, please e-mail me directly at [Jessie.Carson@hotmail.com](mailto:Jessie.Carson@hotmail.com).

It is estimated that the survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. **The survey will be closed on Friday, May 16 at 4:30pm.**

To participate in the survey "Managing the Future - Exploring why some Ontario Municipalities Engage in Succession Planning" please go to:

<http://survey.uwo.ca/managingthefuture>

(password is "future").

Please note, some e-mail clients will prevent you from opening this link directly. If clicking on this link fails to open a web browser window, you must open a browser yourself and copy or type this URL into your browser's address field.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to e-mail at [Jessie.Carson@hotmail.com](mailto:Jessie.Carson@hotmail.com) or call me at 519-857-8902.

Sincerely,

Jessie Carson  
MPA Candidate  
Local Government Program  
University of Western Ontario

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