

A WAVE IS COMING

THE CASE FOR PRIORITIZING SUCCESSION PLANNING IN AMERICAN PORT
AUTHORITIES

AN AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PORT AUTHORITIES (AAPA) PROFESSIONAL PORT MANAGER (PPM)
PROGRAM CAPSTONE PAPER

BY

MICHAEL BOMAR, CHIEF ECONOMIC STRATEGY OFFICER
PORT OF VANCOUVER USA

JULY 28TH, 2024

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	7
METHODOLOGY	9
SECTION I: UNDERSTANDING SUCCESSION PLANNING.....	10
A SHARED DEFINITION OF SUCCESSION PLANNING	10
THE WHY BEHIND SUCCESSION PLANNING	10
HOW TO BEGIN SUCCESSION PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION.....	11
THE ROLE ELECTED OFFICIALS PLAY IN SUCCESSION PLANNING.	13
THE ROLE OF PORT STAFF IN RECRUITING OR RETAINING ELECTED OFFICIALS.....	14
CONSIDERATIONS FOR HIRING FROM WITHIN VERSUS CONDUCTING A WIDE SEARCH	14
THE ROLE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER IN SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR THEIR POSITION	15
AN INTENTIONAL APPROACH TO SUCCESSION PLANNING.....	16
SECTION II: AN ASSESSMENT OF AMERICAN PORT AUTHORITIES AND THE STATE OF SUCCESSION PLANNING	18
QUESTION 1: SUCCESSION PLAN STATUS	18
QUESTION 2: TENURE OF CEO.....	18
QUESTION 3: INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL HIRE.....	19
QUESTION 4: INVESTMENTS IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	19
QUESTION 5: AVAILABLE FOR FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW	20
SECTION III: A DEEPER DIVE INTO SUCCESSION PLANNING AT THREE PORTS	21
INTERVIEW A:	21
INTERVIEW B:	24
INTERVIEW C:	25
SECTION IV.....	29
A SUCCESSION PLANNING PATHWAY FOR PORT LEADERS	29
CONCLUSION	31
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.....	31
REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING.....	32
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	33
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:.....	34
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	35
APPENDIX I:.....	36
SURVEY EMAIL AND FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	36
INTERVIEW RESULTS MATRIX (CERTAIN DATA OMITTED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY):	37
APPENDIX II:	38

SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ASKED DURING MS TEAMS CALLS).....38
INTERVIEW A REFINED NOTES:38
INTERVIEW B REFINED NOTES:40
INTERVIEW C REFINED NOTES:41

Abstract

The following research presents a case for broad succession planning through a three-step approach. First, this paper reviews the state of the maritime workforce and examines successful strategies for succession planning generally. Next, it presents the results of a brief survey of ports related to this topic. Third, it dives into a more detailed review of existing succession planning strategies from three noteworthy ports. The deeper exploration of three case studies highlights ports' unique challenges when implementing succession planning and the impacts of a well-executed plan. The case studies include a mix of port types ranging in size, governance structure, and focus areas.

The paper concludes with a pathway to build a strong succession plan created with insights from the interviews and three case studies. This list will serve as a resource for port executives and other leaders as they work to ensure the long-term success of the port they manage and the broader maritime community. Furthermore, evidence will demonstrate that a systemwide investment in professional and career development, industry information sharing, and an intentional focus by port leaders around succession planning is essential for ports to be better positioned to take on the challenges of the future.

Acknowledgments

Two things have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of career advancement and leadership. The first is that a commitment to lifelong learning is essential. We must continue to evolve as individuals to remain relevant and capture all that life has to offer. Thank you to Shannon McLeod, Julie Barelak, and Captain Jeffrey Monroe, MM, AMPE, whose partnership with AAPA, enhanced the program with an addition of the International Association of Maritime and Port Executives (IAMPE) Certification. These mentors and instructors not only delivered quality content that is relevant and essential for today's port leaders, but they also demonstrated authentic care and understanding for me as an individual throughout the process. My gratitude extends to the AAPA team and Board of Directors for investing in the PPM Program, and to the Professional Development Board for their commitment to excellence in the port and maritime industry. As an industry, ports should be proud of and utilize the resources made available through the AAPA and its many partners.

The second principle that I have embraced is that leadership is not about one person. I have yet to see any leader of impact or title be effective without a strong, capable team around them. I am grateful to have a long list of leaders who have both taught and inspired me to seek out new resources and ways of thinking with which to enhance my understanding of my profession, and the world in which we operate. This work has been inspired by the many supervisors, coaches, and teachers I have had along the way; each exceptional in their impact on those they have mentored. For me, some of these leaders include David Roewe, Mark Stephan, Carolyn Long, Don Freeman, Joe Castleberry, Carolyn Bomar, Larry Dennis, Amy Davis, Ron King, Tracey Malone, Tim Schauer, Casey Wyckoff, Lisa Lowe, and Julianna Marler.

As is the case in any good leadership program, the course content is only a part of the value. Through this training experience, I am so grateful to have built a strong network of colleagues that I now call friends from across North America. Leaders who will build the next generation of strong ports, and those who I will continue to call on regularly as we tackle the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow. I will cherish the memories we have created and look forward to celebrating past, current, and future cohorts as they continue to shape the industry with their many talents. I am also thankful for the many who responded to my requests for information related to completing this research paper and to those who were willing to follow up and explore their own succession stories in more depth. The level of responsiveness is a testament to a port culture that works together to advance professionalism in the industry, even as we compete for business and cargo.

Above all, I am blessed with an amazing partner in Audri Bomar, who assisted with this project and continues to create the space for me follow my passions as we build a life and family together. Finally, thank you to those who take the time to read this and other PPM capstone papers. I encourage you to build upon these findings to advance our industry and understanding of our field.

Executive Summary

A wave is coming. The U.S. Department of Maritime Administration (MARAD) notes:

Over the past 10 years, the maritime sector has seen a steady decline in personnel due to a myriad of factors, including retirements, career changes, and hiring and funding challenges. As a result, an inordinate amount of institutional knowledge has disappeared from federal, state, and local maritime transportation departments, and within the private sector. Workforce development, therefore, has become a hot topic and critical need to attract and retain talented employees. (Maritime Workforce Development, 2024)

Ports are an essential driver of the North American economy. In the United States (U.S.) alone, ports support 2.5 million jobs in 44 states and transportation of \$2.1 trillion worth of goods (40% of all U.S. goods). Additionally, a port & maritime worker makes an average wage of \$98,000, \$16,000 more than the average U.S. worker. (U.S. Port & Maritime Industry 2024 Economic Impact Report, 2024) Because ports have such a large impact on their regional economies, leaders must be well-trained in organizational best practices in addition to the technical expertise needed to run a port. Given the current state of the maritime workforce, it is imperative that port executives prioritize succession planning and make it a consistent part of their organization's culture and practices.

In support of this call to action, this paper examines succession planning best practices and applies them to the current state of port and maritime workforce demands. Through reaching out to over 92 ports and examining dozens of responses, it found that, overall, North American ports, while generally supportive of professional development investments within their organizations, lack the type of comprehensive succession planning strategies that the shifting maritime workforce demands. The analysis of port workforce transition readiness varied greatly from those who have little or no focus on career and professional development efforts, to those who are utilizing many tools within an intentional system to provide for employee readiness for advancement. In all cases reviewed, ports can benefit from a deeper understanding of succession planning pathways and practices to smoothly navigate transitions in key positions at their organization. Port executives must take immediate action to prepare the next generation of leaders to handle future challenges, which will lift the competency of the maritime industry overall by enhancing the attractiveness of port jobs to an emerging workforce seeking purpose and impact. (8 ways Gen Z will change the workforce, 2024)

Digging deeper into the stories of three ports and their approach to succession planning, this work revealed that ports can learn a lot by sharing best practices and adopting processes that have been proven to work in similar organizations. Each port had valuable insights into the urgent need to address succession planning in the maritime industry. Their leaders also highlight some of the challenges that small and medium ports may face in these efforts. This includes employees staying in key positions for very long periods of time, and having less resources to staff a Human Resources department capable of implementing all the necessary tools and processes to address gaps in talent.

The analysis of succession planning literature and insights from port authorities in this work leads to a recommended pathway port leaders can utilize to assess their currently succession planning readiness, and to continue the journey to prepare themselves for anticipated transitions in key roles. This pathway begins with support and focus from the CEO, leading to investment in the staff and tools needed to foster a strong talent development business culture. These consistent investments allow for leaders and talent managers to make informed and courageous decisions that will support a human-centric approach to building a sustainable and successful port.

Following the research and recommendations is a statement of implications for the practice and reflection on learnings provided by the author. These reflections are meant to help port leaders understand the importance of knowledge-sharing within the industry and to guide future American Association of Port Authority (AAPA) Professional Port Manager (PPM) candidates with suggestions to either carry this topic forward, or to inform strategies for capstone papers more broadly.

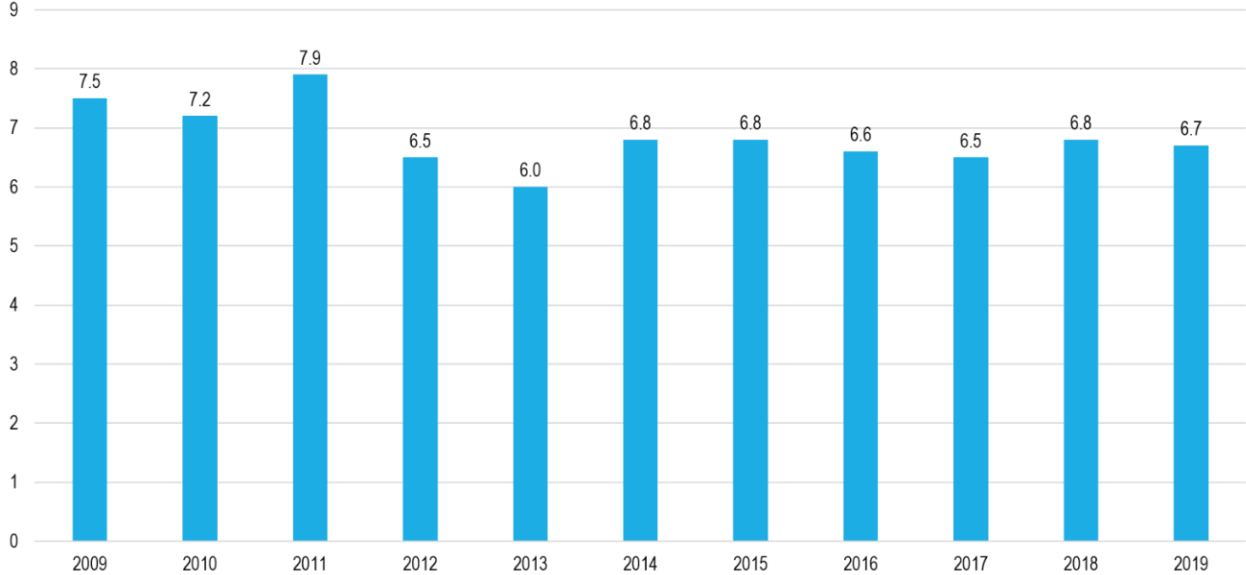
Introduction

What is succession planning? It is often mistaken for popular culture’s obsession with who will rule the masses next. Whether it is the U.S. Presidential election or entertainment such as the HBO series *Game of Thrones* or Disney’s *The Lion King*, the focus is on the next top leader. However, for succession planning to be an effective leadership tool, it must address all facets of the organization from executive leadership all the way through entry-level positions.

Port and maritime industry leaders are faced with a constant barrage of challenges and crises that can cause succession planning to take a back seat to the fires of the day. Over the past century, ports have also enjoyed a great deal of loyalty and lack of turnover in its workforce. However, things are beginning to change. As more leaders in key positions are now approaching retirement age (Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Household Data Annual Averages 18b. Employed persons by detailed industry and age. Water Transportation Industry, 2024), it is imperative that ports renew their commitment to build a system that can withstand, and even thrive, in the face of change.

In addition to the challenges that a looming wave of retirees presents, employee loyalty to a single company or even career continues to wane. As Figure 1 shows, in 2019, the average tenure of a port director was 6.7 years, a downward trend from a decade prior. (Katz, 2022)

Figure 1: Average Tenure (in years) of Port Director American Ports. (Source AAPA)



Talent managers are looking for more ways than ever to attract and retain good talent. This includes the need to fill key roles that currently do not exist, to elevate leadership traits that can’t be replaced by artificial intelligence, and to ensure a diversity of thought that reflects a changing maritime industry. (Amdur, 2023) The approach to talent management must be a living and ever-changing strategy, not a static document on a virtual shelf.

While each port is unique in core competencies as well as governance structures, a standard range of tools and practices can assist port leaders in developing a plan that is both unique to

their situation as well as relevant to the entire port community. Sharing of information and best practices throughout our organizations and across the industry segment will continue to promote the resiliency and professionalism that is both required and expected of today's ports.

The primary objective of this work is to create a resource for port executives and other port leaders as they work to improve succession planning in their organization and to inform the industry broadly about succession planning considerations as they relate to ports. A secondary objective of this work is to raise awareness of the need for succession planning in the port industry and to serve as a catalyzing product that generates additional interest and research in this field of study.

As we explore this topic, we will look at both the academics and anecdotes (real stories of port professionals grappling with succession planning) as we build a recommended pathway to advance smooth and effective leadership transitions in our organizations. This paper will show that succession planning is an intentional set of policies, processes, and practices that allow an organization to consistently identify and develop talent to fill key roles from a qualified pool of internal candidates.

Methodology

During consideration of the topic for this paper, I received unsolicited comments from several port executives expressing concerns they had over upcoming transitions in key roles at their port, and uncertainty about the ability to backfill these positions with internal candidates. Additionally, I attended several state and national conferences and trainings where hearing similar comments and concerns were becoming increasingly common. There was an obvious need to increase an understanding of succession planning generally among port leaders and to provide insights into ways in which ports can address this issue.

The methodology used for this paper starts with defining succession planning and making the case for why it is critical, especially for today's ports. Utilizing research from reputable industry sources to demonstrate that the combination of an aging workforce and a decrease in average employee tenure are compounding the challenges of finding and elevating top talent in an already historically constrained talent market.

Following establishing a shared definition of succession planning, along with dispelling myths or misconceptions around the purpose of incorporating these processes into an organization, is an analysis of maritime workforce data highlighting why implementing strong succession planning practices is critical for port authorities. The study will then explore several aspects and best practices of succession planning as they relate to common challenges ports face in this topic area. Next is an examination of survey results illuminating how a variety of ports are incorporating (or not) succession planning into their overall organizational strategy. This will be complemented with a deeper dive into the stories of three ports that have existing approaches to succession planning to support and establish a pathway through succession planning for port leaders engaging in this work.

Finally, the paper will reflect on the findings of this study as they relate to the Professional Port Manager program and explore ways in which future port leaders may build on these findings and research. Unless explicit permission is granted, specific individual and port names are removed from the final version of this paper to protect the confidentiality of candidly shared information. Only members of the Professional Development Board will have access to the contacts solicited for this work.

SECTION I: Understanding Succession Planning

A Shared Definition of Succession Planning

In preparation for this paper, I reached out to several dozen port professionals to ask some basic questions about succession planning. Public port authorities are typically very process-driven organizations with generally strong commitments to equitable access in hiring practices. It quickly became clear that there are often strong misconceptions about what comprehensive succession planning is, and what it is not. For many I spoke with, succession planning recalls a CEO grooming a favored coworker to be promoted into executive leadership or management without having to go through a job opening process. That type of favoritism is not what this paper is about. The type of succession planning I will argue for, which is critical for ports to engage in, is a thorough process that will strengthen engagement and resiliency across an entire organization, whether key positions are filled externally or from within the organization's existing talent group. Our shared definition of succession planning for the purpose of this paper is the creation and implementation of an intentional set of policies, processes, and practices that allow an organization to more consistently identify and develop talent to fill key roles from a qualified pool of internal candidates.

Succession planning as presented in this work, aims to strengthen the organization and the industry at large by developing strong leadership and engagement at all levels of the organization, and by bringing intention to ensure that those chosen for key positions have the skills necessary to be successful in moving their organization closer to its stated goals. Tamara Kennedy, Chief of Staff with the Port of South Louisiana said, "We are operating in constant crisis mode day in and day out. We need to have a succession plan, not just a plan for when people retire. A top-down plan with functions and duties for everyone in the organization." (Kennedy, 2024)

The Why Behind Succession Planning

The maritime industry faces significant challenges in recruiting and preparing a skilled and diverse workforce. Maritime academies, despite strong efforts, still struggle in recruiting a diverse range of incoming students. (Massachusetts Maritime Academy: Maritime Demographics & Diversity Report, 2024) (SUNY Maritime College Demographics & Diversity Report, 2024) Additionally, in 2027, it is expected that up to 65% more people could retire than previously retired in 2012. (Retirement Trends in United States, 2000-2022. Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. U.S. Age distribution 2012, 2022) Despite the obvious wave of retirements coming, coupled with the challenges of inspiring and preparing an emerging workforce, succession planning in the port industry has not been a priority. Deloitte released a study in 2015 showing that "86% of companies believe leadership development is one of their most important challenges, yet only 10% believe they have a succession program that works." (Timms, Succession Planning That Works: The Critical Path of Leadership Development, 2016) Succession planning is something port leaders know they need, but very few have taken the time and focus needed to make it happen.

A company culture built around career development planning can yield benefits beyond just building a better talent pool to draw from. Research by Gallup found that “nearly nine out of ten employees who report having someone at work who encourages their development are classified as engaged”. (Gallup, 2013) A good succession plan will have the extra benefit of reducing costly turnover in an organization. Linda Kearschner, Principal at Odgers Berndtson, a notable executive search and recruitment firm, stresses the need to establish clear pathways for progression and growth within the organization. She notes that employees in the seaports industry feel there are insufficient opportunities for career progression. (Kearschner, 2024) Generally, 40% of middle managers express concern about the lack of upward mobility. (Deloitte, 2022) As we dig into the elements of a succession plan further, we will find that ports can improve employee retention and engagement in a proactive way, rather than reacting to a problem that has already infected the organization.

How to Begin Succession Planning Implementation

While the Human Resources department (or individual) will likely do a lot of the leg work for a comprehensive succession plan, an effort cannot be successful without the full buy-in and support of the Chief Executive Officer. Succession planning literature emphasizes that “executive buy-in is by far the most important factor in successfully establishing and sustaining succession planning.” (Timms, Succession Planning That Works: The Critical Path of Leadership Development, 2016) For port leaders looking to improve their organizations through succession planning, step one is to stress the benefits of building and sustaining a plan with the CEO. Only a leader in this position can ensure that the effort permeates throughout the entire organization. (Kelly, 2022)

Once support from the top has been established, the next step is the Human Resources (HR) department. Many HR departments are tactical and reactive. This means that they focus on documenting employee reviews, ensuring that legal compliance is met (which is critically important), onboarding, terminating, and responding to complaints. While these tasks must be completed, an HR department that only does these things is falling short of its potential. To build a strong company culture in today’s work environment, the HR team must be strategic, intentional, and proactive in supporting an organization’s succession planning model. This means that in addition to reviewing each employee’s performance in their current role, time must be made for supervisors to discuss career advancement aspirations and to work with management to identify key positions and the necessary characteristics or skill sets that lead to success in those positions. A consistent mistake noted in the literature around this topic is when managers promote a high-performing employee because of success in their *current* position, not because they demonstrate the skills and qualities needed for the *next* role.

While there is plenty of research on what qualities are necessary for a good manager, the next step in building a strong plan is to affirm the organization’s core values; values that each employee should strive to embody. My employer, the Port of Vancouver USA, documents four areas of focus, each with their own set of core values. In total 23 values are presented within a framework of Organizational, Environmental, Safety, and Operational success. These values are reviewed between the employee and supervisor twice a year. In addition to values being front

and center in the periodic review process, each role has a job description that identifies the skills and traits necessary to be successful in each respective role. A quality succession plan leans on strong documentation of both organizational values and the competencies needed for each position in the organization. This provides clarity to the employees and supervisors on what traits and skills are required for advancement within their specific organization. The next step is to utilize this information to maximize employee engagement, retention, and readiness to move up in the organization.

It is one thing to have a great plan. It is another thing entirely to operationalize it with consistency and sincerity. A natural tendency is for employees to operate in a way that makes them irreplaceable. This may benefit the employee's compensation leverage and sense of importance in the short term, but it will inevitably damage the organization in the long run. In large, critical, and complex organizations like ports, allowing silos of talent and information can be extremely damaging to the port's ability to provide consistent and meaningful benefits to their communities. While a good system for retaining and tracking information is certainly helpful, often our organizations are too big and complex for an outside person to easily pick up where another has left off in key positions. Without a culture of mentorship and advancement, significant amounts of institutional knowledge and organizational value will be lost.

Ensuring continuity of operations is both a data problem and a people problem. From executives to entry-level positions, everyone in the organization must feel the responsibility of mentoring someone and seeking a mentor who holds the position they want to move into in the future. (Doyle, 2018) Even the CEO should seek mentorship from other port executives or community leaders. For entry-level employees, it may mean focusing on helping the future workforce (i.e., students outside the organization) see the path to entering the field. The point is that every member of the team must see themselves as both a mentor and a mentee for succession planning to become woven into the fabric and culture of an organization. If successful, when transitions happen, there is clarity on what actions need to be taken to keep the entity moving forward.

Once the process is in place and managers have what they need to build a succession plan, the next step is to fill in the blanks. This can be a more sensitive document, and should be treated as such, as it highlights the readiness of high performers in the organization to take on more senior roles or duties. This tool is even more critical for larger organizations tracking a significant number of leadership positions. For example, in a recent conversation, Ron Prill, a former President of Target Corporation's Financial Services Division said:

“There was a period of 7 or 8 consecutive years when Target was opening plus or minus 100 new stores per year and we had to have that many additional store management teams ready (4 executives per store). As some of the existing store managers and subordinates would retire, quit, etc. each year, we would also have to backfill existing store leadership positions. So while 100 new stores per year made it necessary to have 400 additional store leaders ready to go, backfilling for the 5,000 or so base store leadership positions that had some turnover, really meant having to have more like 700-800 new people trained and ready.”

Mr. Prill also noted that at the higher levels, they were required to identify at least one potential successor and they would even hire an executive coach at times to help them improve on a variety of soft skills needed in those roles (personal and email communication, July 20, 2024).

As you can see in Figure 2, rarely does an organization have a high performer ready to fill each key position at a moment's notice. This work, however, does assist in building a strategy of when an external candidate may be necessary (or more appropriate) and which departments may need more focus on succession planning within an organization. This exercise should not only include the C-Suite but also every key position within the organization that may benefit from continuity of institutional knowledge and a high level of expertise.

Figure 2: Sample from a Port HR Department's 2022 Succession Plan

	Executive	Operations	Commercial	Administration	External Affairs	Human Resources
Position	CEO	COO	CCO	CAO	CEA	Dir HR
Current <i>Tentative Retirement Date:</i>	Jenny Major	Korey Clout 12/31/23	Sandy Sales	Enaily Graspenz	Reggie Hope	Job Fynder
Up-Next - Ready Now						
Ready Next - (1-3 years)	Jane Smith				Xavier Candu Jorge Wildu	Xiu Liu
High Potential Future (5+ Years)		John Doe				
			Samantha Longbot			

Figure 2 also shows that a succession plan may identify that more than one individual is prepared to take on a vacated role. In this situation, managers may want to look at ways to elevate or expand the roles of candidates that are not successful in advancing if they are nonetheless identified as a top performer in the organization. This type of planning will assist in retaining good talent that may be well-positioned to advance at a later opportunity.

The Role Elected Officials Play in Succession Planning.

Port authorities have a wide variety of governance structures that determine who the policymakers will be as well as who chooses the top executive at the organization. In most public ports, the Board of Commissioners (or equivalent governing body) is either elected from the port district or appointed by a Governor or other high-ranking official(s). While it is typically not the role of elected or appointed officials to lead or develop succession planning efforts within the organization, these leaders can and should build a review and discussion of succession planning efforts into the CEO annual evaluation process. As noted in the introduction, the average tenure of a port director has decreased to 6.7 years. Port officials, now more than ever, must understand how leaders beyond the CEO are being prepared to have the skill set and the unique organizational knowledge necessary to provide continuity of leadership.

A strong CEO succession plan will help provide a Board of Commissioners clarity as to whether there is a qualified internal candidate or if a wider search and more intensive transition plan is required as it will document existing staff qualifications. This will ensure any internal candidates being considered is someone who meets all the criteria needed to effectively manage a highly complex organization. Encouraging staff leadership to document and implement the plan will help elected or appointed officials in making important hiring decisions. Additionally, in the case that an internal candidate is not prepared to step into a CEO role, consistent communication

around what steps still need to be taken to achieve that competency may lead to the retention of key performers even if they aren't selected for the top job.

The Role of Port Staff in Recruiting or Retaining Elected Officials

It may go without saying that a CEO should not be directly engaged in supporting or favoring a particular candidate running for port office. That said, port executives also should not treat their elected or appointed positions as outside of their succession planning efforts. Beyond the roles identified in the previous section, elected or appointed officials can provide tremendous value by meeting with those seeking office to discuss key port initiatives as well as inform candidates about the role ports play and the unique value each port brings to a community. Elected port officials should also invest in their own continuing education through association training as well as internal leadership development offerings. Through a better understanding of the port industry and best practices in their respective roles, these leaders will be able to shape better policies that will meet the needs of the port and the community at large.

Even though a CEO and executive leadership should not engage in recruiting specific individuals for elected or appointed office, they do have a role to play in ensuring that all port elected officials are as effective and prepared as possible. Port leaders should consider offering port tours and briefings for all candidates (sometimes it may be best to offer this after a primary election has occurred) to give whoever is running direct information about what the port is and is not doing to benefit the community. Controlling the narrative in campaigns is becoming increasingly important. This practice will also reduce onboarding gaps for newly elected officials and carries the added benefit of relationship building between the CEO and all candidates running for office.

Additionally, for those ports that have elected seats, general messaging around the value of running for port office is a key component of both community outreach and a succession plan. Too often, elected port seats only see significant interest when there is a controversy or other concern at the port that is making the headlines. This can lead to years of policy leadership that is reactive and punitive rather than proactive and growth minded. By consistently stressing both the value that the port provides to its community as well as the benefit that individuals can bring by running for office, ports can ensure a steady talent pool not only in their workforce but also in their governing bodies. A key component of this effort is to ensure that all messaging and outreach is done without favoring or focusing on one key constituency over another. All stakeholders must feel equally encouraged to be a part of a port team that is bringing quality jobs and environmental stewardship to their community.

Considerations for Hiring from Within Versus Conducting a Wide Search

As we will see in the following sections, ports take different approaches when it comes to hiring internally or externally for the CEO position. While this next section applies to all key positions at an organization, the Chief Executive Officer role is often the focus and can have wide-reaching consequences depending on the approach a hiring body takes to fill this position. The answer to the question is not a simple yes or no, but rather an assessment of how successful succession planning efforts have been in preparing internal leadership to take on the top role. Harvard Business School professor Boris Groysberg argues that “it’s not whether you build or buy, it’s figuring out under what conditions you build or buy.” (Groysberg, 2010)

Organizations should not hire from within simply because someone is next in line for a key role. While it may seem like rewarding an employee for commitment and longevity is a good thing, promoting an individual who hasn't demonstrated the competencies required to be successful at the next level can be both damaging to the organization and embarrassing or demoralizing to the individual. On the other hand, hiring externally without being able to document or demonstrate why internal candidates were not considered can result in disengagement or even losing otherwise high-performing team members to competitors. So, when should an organization hire externally over internal candidates?

There are significant and tangible benefits for an organization to hire internally when possible. Hiring from within sends a signal to the entire organization that advancement is possible without leaving the company. The process of hiring internally is typically more streamlined and can save the port time and money by avoiding hiring a recruiter or advertising broadly for a position. Internal candidates also often have the advantage of already understanding the complexities and culture of the organization and have proven to be a good fit within the group. They may already know various aspects of the new role, including who to talk to or where to get information, and may be able to significantly reduce the amount of onboarding time needed. When an organization is thriving and good succession planning practices have been in place, internal hiring practices hold a strong advantage over recruiting outside the organization to fill key roles.

However, hiring internally isn't always the best approach. If hiring practices fail in bringing in diverse and varying backgrounds and perspectives, an organization can suffer losses in innovation or in its ability to represent the community. Particularly for the maritime industry, which suffers from a lack of diversity in leadership, ports may want to seriously consider bringing in diverse perspectives with benefits that may exceed the additional cost of external recruitment. A port may also consider favoring an external candidate approach if the organization is undergoing a key strategic or cultural shift to bring in fresh energy and perspectives to build a succession plan or company culture that may not currently exist. (Krell, 2015) External hires can also be more desirable in larger organizations that have well-developed job training, integration, and skills development programs in place.

Overall, having a strong succession planning culture in place will save ports time and money, as well as improve engagement by developing leaders from within who are ready to take on key roles as they are vacated. This preference must be driven by an intentional strategy to prepare employees with the competencies needed to succeed at the next level within the organization. By building a strong succession plan and documenting the performance and readiness of each team member, hiring leaders can more easily determine whether they should hire from within or take the time and resources needed to do an external search. This approach will have the added benefit of ensuring high-performing employees understand why they may not have been chosen for advancement and the path they need to pursue to be able to get there.

The Role of the Chief Executive Officer in Succession Planning for Their Position

A good manager feels both a strong desire to help their team members be successful in career advancement and has a strong sense of ownership for the success of their organization. While these qualities are critical to a leader who is currently performing in their role, they can be

detrimental when navigating the hiring process to fill their own position. A departing CEO may carry a bias toward the internal candidates who they have mentored and supported in their aspirations to be the next CEO. If a departing leader advocates too strongly for their replacement because of a relationship built, and not the demonstrated capacities of the candidate, individuals may be promoted to a position they are not ready for, which hurts not only the organization but also the promoted individual's confidence and career advancement potential.

A second mistake executives make when leaving an organization is staying active in the organization too long as an advisor after the position has been filled. Leaders care deeply about the organizations that they helped grow and sustain. It is often difficult to hand over control of something that one feels deeply attached to and accountable for. Organizations can suffer when there is not a clear transition of authority, and employees hold onto old lines of decision-making and practices. While some transition time is appropriate to get a new executive up to speed, outgoing leaders must focus on being available, but not intrusive in the handoff of leadership of the organization. This difficult task can be made much easier by developing a strong succession plan within the organization. This will ensure that company culture persists and is not defined by any one individual, but rather through an intentional process that values people and protects the mission and values of the entity.

An Intentional Approach to Succession Planning

The key message in all of this is that succession planning is not just a document or set of policies; it must be felt as a key part of company culture, one that values personal and career development alongside organizational resiliency and efficiency. Here is a recap of the key components of succession planning identified in the literature and in this work:

1. Succession planning starts at the top. Without the complete support of the CEO, succession planning cannot be successful.
2. Succession planning is not the same as employee evaluation. Take the time to assess each key role and the competencies needed to be successful in those roles. Document these competencies and then train high performers to be able to demonstrate these traits as positions become available.
3. Invest in high-performing team members and understand that not everyone who is succeeding at their current role is ready (or interested) to succeed at the next level. Document and regularly assess the readiness of those slated to advance.
4. Hire internally when there is an internal candidate prepared for the role and when succession planning efforts have been successful. Hire externally when there is not an internal candidate prepared (yet) to take on the role, when the organization needs more diverse perspectives, or when the organization is undergoing systematic change that requires different skill sets or new strategic direction.
5. Build a company culture around comprehensive succession planning. Every person in the organization from elected officials to entry-level workers has an important role to play in

learning from their supervisors and mentoring those who will come behind them. This is a message that must be consistently and continually delivered over time to build the kind of processes and engagement that such a plan requires.

SECTION II: An Assessment of American Port Authorities and the State of Succession Planning

So far, this paper has focused on the field of succession planning and best practices that could apply to most if not all entities that engage in hiring and promoting. The next section will look at how ports are currently implementing (or not) talent management best practices in their organizations.

In May of 2024, I reached out to 92 port representatives associated with the Professional Port Manager (PPM) Program sponsored by the American Association of Port Authorities (AAPA) to ask questions about their organization's approach to succession planning. It is important to note that there was a significant selection bias in this approach as it is inherently likely to overrepresent ports that invest in some level of professional development. However, given the size of the group relative to the overall number of port authorities in the Americas, this sample still represents a broad cross-section of various-sized ports, governance structures, and lines of business. Nineteen responses were received, representing a range of port sizes and types. Each port was researched and put into a category of Large (eight), Medium (eight), or Small (three). Each port was also categorized by primary business lines (a difficult task for those who understand the complexity of ports and their operations). Nine were identified as "Bulk/Breakbulk" ports, five as "Mix (Bulk, Breakbulk and Container)", four as "Container" ports, and one as primarily a "Cruise" port. In this report, the names of the respondents have been withheld to protect the privacy of candid feedback.¹

Here are the results of the survey:

Question 1: Succession Plan Status

Does your port authority have an existing succession planning strategy document or official policy? If so, are you able to share it?

For this question, only two of the 19 ports had or knew of, an existing succession plan for their organization. This is a very low number, but it is also surprisingly consistent with the Deloitte survey results mentioned previously showing only 10% of companies have an actual succession plan in place. It is also important to note that the subsequent questions asked revealed that while most ports do not have a detailed succession plan in place, many did engage in at least one of the elements listed in the previous section that improve an organization's ability to withstand transitions in key roles. In any case, this result demonstrated that there is an opportunity for ports and their supporting trade associations to continue to focus on improving succession planning in the industry and sharing best practices.

Question 2: Tenure of CEO

How long has your current CEO been in the position (years)?

¹ Source data was made available to the AAPA's PPM staff and Professional Development Board only to verify the validity of the findings.

This survey showed an average of 6.4 (compared to the stated 2019 average of 6.7) years between all 19 respondents. That number is a bit misleading however as the standard of deviation was quite large, ranging from 19 years and going strong to a CEO holding the position for less than a year. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median years of tenure with a current employer overall has declined from 4.6 years to 4.1 years between 2012 and 2022. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012-2022) It is also widely known that the nature of work has changed over the past 50 years as loyalty to a single employer over a career has significantly declined. (Wartzman, 2017) The median length of port CEO tenure for this survey was six years. These results may represent a mix of some ports still experiencing strong loyalty and commitment from their top leaders while increasingly more are facing challenges with increased frequency of turnover. The next question may help strengthen the argument that a lack of succession planning is leading to ports needing to seek external candidates to fill key positions, risking additional turnover if the candidate is ultimately determined to not be a good fit for the organization.

Question 3: Internal or External Hire

Was your current CEO hired from within or outside your port?

Of the 19 respondents, 11 hired their current CEO from outside their port team. Eight were hired from within. The ports that hired externally saw an average tenure of 5.4 years, while those who hired internally had an average tenure of 7.8 years. While the sample size is admittedly small, it does tend to support the arguments that hiring from within can have advantages in reducing turnover costs. While all respondents noted some level of training available to employees (especially given the sample pool), the several respondents that noted very limited or unorganized training offerings. All these respondents had hired their current CEO externally. It is possible that an external candidate, given they were hired from outside the organization, may see less value in promoting and implementing a robust internal succession plan. Whether this is true or not, leaders within the port must engage a new externally chosen CEO about the importance of succession planning for retention and resiliency benefits.

Question 4: Investments in Professional Development

In what ways does your port invest in professional development (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, shadowing, internal mentoring, training, other)? Who in your organization has access to professional development programs supported by your port?

As previously mentioned, and expected, all the respondents noted that some level of professional or career development was available to employees. It's important to note the distinction between professional development and career development. Professional development includes investments or experiences that help improve the employee's performance in their *current* role. Career development represents investments that help prepare the individual for their aspirational roles. Professional development may include seminars, conferences, and programs that are specifically relevant to the current role of that employee. Career development can occur at all levels within the organization and can range from internships and shadows for incoming or new workers to programs like AAPA's Port Professional Associate (PPA), Port Professional Executive (PPX) Credential programs, and the Port Professional Manager (PPM) Certification program,

designed to prepare port leaders to continue to improve the state of the port industry while also preparing them to advance in their careers.

While qualitative, the responses did bring to the surface several themes:

- Responses that indicated the employees had to advocate for their own training and career development indicate that perhaps the CEO is not fully bought into the importance of succession planning.
- Programs that reimburse employees for continuing education can be beneficial to the organization if tied to a specific career development plan. Without this intention, the port may be investing in encouraging its key performers to leave the organization for another career or endeavor.
- Regardless of the size or nature of investment ports make into their employees, it must be tied to either the documented professional or career development goals of the organization to have a positive and meaningful impact.

Question 5: Available for Follow Up Interview

Would you be willing to spend 15 to 30 minutes to discuss succession planning at your organization in more detail?

The American port industry is known for its willingness to collaborate with its counterparts, even as we compete for various cargoes. Not surprisingly, 15 of the 19 respondents expressed a willingness to spend additional time discussing their succession planning practices. The remaining four did not reject the opportunity but noted some hesitation in the value it would bring to the study given their lack of (or perceived lack of) efforts around this topic. From the 15 ports willing to discuss their efforts further, three were chosen for a more in-depth interview on the topic. The following section will explore deeper, the practices of a few ports that have some robust examples and best practices that may benefit the port industry.

SECTION III: A Deeper Dive into Succession Planning at Three Ports

Interview A:

The first port authority interviewed was a large West Coast port with an impressive succession planning process in place. While none of the ports that responded to the initial request had a document entitled “succession plan”, this port had the most robust strategy in place to ensure career development opportunities exist, along with an assessment of key areas of strength or vulnerability for each position to prepare for employee transitions. This port recently had a change at the CEO level and was able to successfully replace a 12-year veteran with an internal candidate who has worked with the port for more than 25 years. The process included a comprehensive and competitive search facilitated by an outside firm. It also involved stakeholder panels that met with and provided feedback on each finalist. We will now examine what steps were taken to allow for an internal candidate to be prepared to successfully take on the lead role at this port.

The port is governed, and CEO is selected by, an 11-member board that is appointed by regional governments. This system creates many constituencies and interests overseeing the selection of who will run the day-to-day operations of the port. For most large entities, it is best practice to cast as wide of recruiting net as possible and to create an objective process (outside firm assistance) to ensure that no single stakeholder or inside individual has undue influence on the process. This organization has improved its internal recruiting and hiring team over recent years, but still uses an outside firm for all vice president or executive position openings. They also used outside firm assistance for director-level positions until recently. Without a strong and clear succession planning strategy in place, the transition of the CEO could have led to a significant amount of organizational disruption and uncertainty.

The most obvious factor that set this port up for success was a clear standing commitment from executive leadership to invest in succession planning processes and to look beyond any self-serving interests to prepare the organization for a new generation of leadership. This port uses what is called the 9-box grid (See Figure 3), created by management consulting firm McKinsey in 1970, to assess employees’ current and potential contributions to the organization. (Society for Human Resource Management, 2023) One axis represents potential while the other is an assessment of whether the employee is below, at, or exceeding those performance expectations. This tool is incorporated into a broader Talent Management Strategy that includes a focus on learning development (improving performance in a current role), leadership management (developing leaders across the organization), and a career development strategy (what is needed to advance to the next level).

Figure 3: [Enduring Ideas: The GE–McKinsey Nine-Box Matrix | McKinsey](#). (Živković, 2024)



In addition to having a strong process in place to understand which key roles have internal candidates prepared to take-on the position, this port also has well-structured funding mechanisms to ensure funding for individual career and professional development. Two percent of employee salaries is placed into a learning pool. Employees use these funds to work with their supervisors in defining an educational budget for the coming year. In addition to this system, the organization has a Learning Request Form for management to consider ad hoc programs or activities. The port also sponsors professional development classes that have limited slots for

employees. Finally, the port has an online learning form for new and continuing education on topics and areas relevant to the port.

Succession planning at this port also goes beyond just the top position. Vice Presidents engage in providing feedback on directors, and directors provide feedback on managers that is incorporated into an overarching assessment of readiness for the organization in key positions. This approach has been useful in their current situation as an internal CEO was selected, leaving a vacancy in a key VP position. Beyond these levels in the organization, there are likely other positions that require a significant amount of institutional knowledge and organizationally specific expertise that could benefit from succession planning processes as well. These could include key legal, real estate, and engineering roles within the port that don't have a manager or director title associated with the position.

A final and important standout practice for this port is their commitment to diversity and equity in the hiring process. This organization uses DDI's Targeted Selection® (TS®) system to reduce bias and highlight the skills and attributes that matter most in a specific position. (Targeted Selection® Behavioral Interviewing System, 2020) Human Resource professionals know that the challenges of attracting, retaining, and engaging a diverse workforce is a complicated and evolving endeavor. Responsible approaches to hiring a diverse workforce go far beyond simply trying to hire a certain number of people who look or present a certain way. The maritime industry is incredibly diverse, but has glaring inequities in leadership positions, especially when considering factors such as gender and race. Using systems such as Targeted Selection® is just one component of a long-term commitment to reducing the inefficiencies and lost opportunities caused by a lack of diversity in port leadership today.

For each of the ports interviewed, I asked for words of wisdom or lessons learned from their experience with succession planning efforts. The interviewee for this port noted a tale of caution, advice and a call to action. First, this person noted that in the last organization they worked for, management hired for a key position based on a good relationship with the candidate, not an assessment of their skills related to the job. This disrupted the organization for years and led to a negative experience for that individual. They noted the importance of putting development plans in place for those employees who are not ready to take on a higher role but show potential. This shows support for the employee, while not putting them in a position to fail. This also creates a less threatening way for an external candidate to serve as a mentor to the internal candidate who did not get the position.

Additionally, this port recommends utilizing the 360-degree feedback model (Zenger, 2020), and taking it seriously. A 360-degree feedback model is “a process through which feedback from an employee's subordinates, peers, colleagues, and supervisor(s), as well as a self-evaluation by the employee, is gathered.” (360-degree feedback, 2024) This approach creates a deeper understanding of an employee's readiness level and engagement and provides supervisors with valuable feedback on how they can better support their direct reports and colleagues.

The last piece of advice is that succession planning is critical to business success. Ports should be thinking about strategic workforce planning with a five-year horizon. This approach sets a

learning culture where people can develop, grow, and make mistakes. Commitment to this approach starts with the leadership team.

Interview B:

The second follow-up interview conducted was with a mid-sized east coast port. Like the previous port, this organization has an 11-member board representing labor, business, local and state government recommendations, approved by the Governor. The current CEO has been in the role for more than seven years and was hired from another port on the west coast. They do not have a succession plan in place or robust succession planning practices, but recognize the need for one, as a significant number of their workforce is nearing retirement age. Many employees in key positions at this port have been there for decades. While the long tenures have created stability and other benefits, it has created challenges in creating an atmosphere where new talent sees a pathway for career advancement.

Despite not having robust succession planning practices (yet), port leadership strongly supports professional development programs for key staff members. This includes the American Association of Port Authorities' (AAPA) Professional Port Manager (PPM) program as well as regional Maritime Exchange (Delaware River 101 & 102: General Port Awareness Training, 2024) courses to help employees better understand the maritime and regional trade economy. They have also supported employees in continuing education but with questionable success. They noted that one employee had their MPA paid for and then left the organization shortly after completion. For a port with less than 50 employees, opportunities to move up are limited given the lack of turnover. Strategic professional and career development may be one way to increase employee engagement even in what is perceived as a lack of advancement opportunities in the short term. Implementation of a strong succession plan process may also signal to employees that the current situation is something that is anticipated to change soon.

This port selectively uses outside search and hiring firms for those positions that receive significant numbers of applications. The firm is utilized to narrow the pool of candidates down to the most promising ones, and then the port uses its internal hiring processes from there. Currently, director and manager positions are not engaged in succession planning strategies for the port. While hiring internally is a first choice, leadership recognizes the importance of hiring for the right technical experience and other attributes that will most likely lead to success in the position.

The CEO offered a lesson learned and observations about changing workforce expectations in the industry. When they first joined the port, they were tasked with significantly downsizing the workforce, reducing the employee count by about half. The port has had the benefit of recent growth and low turnover and is quickly approaching the need to once again increase staff. Understanding the personal and human costs of layoffs, this port leader has learned to take a measured approach to increasing the payroll. The port has also benefited from recent hires who have turned out to be top performers, but the organization continues to struggle with attracting diverse and young workers to the team. Generational challenges around the workplace and

scheduling expectations have also become an increasing challenge. The emerging workforce tends to favor remote work and more structured work/life balance commitments. Many positions in the port industry, by their nature, cannot meet these demands.

The good news for this port is that they are not alone. Many ports in this study reported that they are facing similar challenges both in succession planning and workforce retention and attraction. This case study highlights the need for ports to work together to share information about best practices and to work through their respective associations to build a library of tools and resources that will help to advance these efforts. American ports have a long tradition of working together for the betterment of the industry and this situation provides a great opportunity to continue that trend.

Interview C:

A mid-sized West Coast break bulk port was selected for the third in-depth discussion for this report. The final port has also enjoyed stability in the CEO position for the past eight years. Their current CEO was hired internally after an extensive search and a robust stakeholder engagement process. They also have succession planning tools built into their employee review process and utilize a grid-like Figure 3 to determine employee advancement readiness and identify gaps in succession for key roles. A key difference between this port and the port in Interview B is that it is governed by just three elected officials with six-year terms. The three commissioners are responsible for selecting the next CEO. This underscores the importance of having a process in place to inform and guide a small number of decision-makers to reduce bias and favoritism.

The number and variety of professional development programs offered by this port make them stand out among their peers. In each budget cycle, directors and managers discuss with their teams what training is needed and desired in the coming year. This is assessed both in terms of professional development (what do we need to learn now), and career development (what do top performers need to learn to demonstrate an ability to advance in the organization). Some programs, such as diversity training, international business protocols, and Merchants Exchange (Industry Outreach and Education, 2024) courses are available to all and encouraged, especially for new hires. Others are limited in availability and based on nominations from directors and selection by leadership. This includes nominations for the AAPA PPM program, a local leadership academy, and a formalized tuition reimbursement program. Consistent with other interviews, this port has experienced mixed results from the tuition reimbursement program and is considering moving away from this investment to other focus areas.

The port is now considering developing an internal educational program that would build in core and elective course offerings. This program would include courses that would be required periodically for all employees to familiarize themselves with the port and the maritime industry, but would also include courses focused on communications, leadership, team building, and other skills that would be necessary as part of consideration for advancement. While it seems like building a program like this could be daunting, the approach this port is taking would be to integrate many of the things they are already doing into a more organized and tracked structure.

One example would be to take new hire department orientations and turn them into periodic seminars open to all employees. This can improve career and professional development for the entire team while meeting orientation goals and saving department leads time by doing fewer orientation meetings overall. Where existing internal or partner courses are not already offered, the port already has a history of contracting with specialists in the topic areas needed for overall leadership development. Finally, the port is considering integrating participation in industry and trade association conferences as part of the overall curriculum requirements. This helps to broaden the network of team members and expose them to industry topics and current challenges at the same time.

This port has 125 direct employees. Succession planning includes assessments and feedback at every level in the organization. This does not, however, include the elected commissioners. Port staff does not engage in recruiting candidates for office but does proactively reach out to the community to educate the public about the port business and opportunities to engage. In this governance structure, stakeholder groups may wish to fill the role to recruit and train candidates who support the mission and goals of the port, ensuring qualified candidates are aware of and seek these seats.

Search firms are rarely used by this port, limiting them to the CEO role, to positions that have had trouble finding candidates through the normal process, and when the number of applications received is extraordinarily high. Recently, the port received over 800 applications for one position. In this case, online tools and outside firms can be used to limit the pool of reviewed candidates to those who truly meet the basic requirements of the position.

Diversity and equity are also top priorities for this port. While a DEI lens is applied to many aspects of port operations, for hiring and promotions, this port ensures that positions are broadly advertised, including to culturally specific groups and workforce development organizations. Historically, few women have applied for certain positions, especially those in security and maintenance. Recently, however, through intention and collaboration with labor partners, the port has seen an increased number of women in apprenticeship programs and has already hired several from this group. In addition, the port has a DEI Committee that consistently reviews best practices and provides recommendations to improve hiring practices as well as diversity in leadership advancement at the port.

The port generally prefers to hire for key positions from within. There are several reasons for this. Internal candidates are known by port managers for their strengths, weaknesses, and traits such as reliability and work ethic. The Human Resources Director at this port noted, “No matter how good an outside candidate looks on paper, there is always some risk in bringing on an external candidate to fill the role.” Additionally, hiring from within sends a message to the rest of the team that career advancement is possible at this organization and the port is invested in their future success. However, like other case studies, this port emphasizes that an individual must have the right training and attributes that fit the role as a top consideration. They must also demonstrate an authentic interest in the higher-level position. Some organizations make the mistake of promoting team members into roles they don’t want to be in, simply because they are

technically capable and next in line on the organizational chart. Genuine interest must be evaluated before promoting from within.

Leadership encourages directors and managers to actively listen to their direct reports and to appropriately apply the training they need based on their skill gaps and professional desires. Supervisors are encouraged to be straightforward during the review process to identify gaps in advancement readiness along with opportunities to improve performance in their current role. The more this is spelled out and understood by employees, the less likely they are to leave or be resentful if they are not selected for a job that they haven't demonstrated readiness for. This approach helps to maintain morale and provide guidance to employees and supervisors alike.

This port had a lot of advice to offer in succession planning from both the HR Director and the CEO. Here are some of their recommendations:

- If you invest time, energy, and money in employees, you should have a place for them to go. It's important to align investments in career advancement with upcoming opportunities to the extent possible.
- Don't try to do training all at once. Spread opportunities out throughout the year. Flooding employees with waves of training creates less retention and more educational fatigue.
- Open orientation activities to a broader group of employees. Departments change, people change, and tools and approaches change over time. It's important to re-orient employees to other activities within the organization periodically to improve awareness and connectivity within the organization.
- When advancement opportunities aren't currently available for top performers, consider ways to expand opportunities and responsibilities with their current role. This could include special projects or collaborations with other departments on key initiatives.
- Too often succession planning is discussed by leadership either every few years, or only when there is a major transition. Succession planning should be considered a couple of times every year. This helps the organization understand weak spots before they become a crisis.
- Understand your weak spots and act. This port recognized a looming transition in a key position in their real estate department and was able to hire for a similar position that created redundancy and allowed for the transfer of important institutional knowledge.
- Not everyone wants to be or has the right skillsets to manage or lead the organization. However, it is important to invest in technically capable people who aren't interested or able to take on these roles and ensure that they are respected and supported in the same way as they bring equal or more value to the organization in the long run. Subject matter experts are great additions to a well-rounded team.
- Don't go through the motions when it comes to mid-year and annual reviews. Train your supervisors on how to get the most out of these conversations, how to assess for both professional competency and career readiness and how to view employees as people first. It's important to ask both "How can we support you now?" AND "Where do you see yourself going in five years?".

- Encourage partners and trade associations to provide and share the cost of succession planning training. This is a great way to save money and learn from your peers.
- This port had over five retirements from key positions this past year. They were able to hire all the C-Suite vacancies from within and most of the director-level positions as well. This could have been a major shock and setback to the organization, but thanks to years of consistent succession planning efforts, this transition was smooth, and organizational morale remains very high.
- People talk. The more a port invests in its people, the more attractive it will be for top performers looking for a place to build their careers. Strong succession planning is not only good for the existing team but for recruiting efforts as well. The port has also seen former interns come back to apply for jobs, and one was recently hired. The Port is developing a strong reputation within the K-12 and college-level schools as a top employer in the region

These case studies present just a few of the insights that can be gained from learning from peers in the industry on how to set up a succession planning program that is right for your port. Not every port has the resources or capacity to implement all the ideas presented, but every port should consider overarching themes that can help set their organization up for long-term success and a workplace that fosters a pathway to leadership for top talent.

SECTION IV

A Succession Planning Pathway for Port Leaders

The following is a recommended pathway for ports to engage in healthy organizational development. The pathway is based on both succession planning literature as well as the findings of outreach to the port community for this study. This pathway is presented in order of priority. Ports will find themselves at different places along this path and should consider where to start without skipping key steps.

- 1. Start Now.** Nearly every port leader has a tremendous amount of pressure to address the issues of today and ensure the efficient operations of their port in the moment. Developing or maintaining comprehensive succession planning strategies must be seen as urgent and critical in a port environment where a large wave of retirements is coming soon. The sooner you start, the more prepared your organization will be to handle the change.
- 2. Your CEO is the Champion.** Comprehensive succession planning takes focus, energy, time, and resources. Without the CEO's full support, efforts to understand needs and act will fall short.
- 3. Transform Your HR Department.** Is your HR department (or lead) designed to ensure compliance and react to problems or to build your leaders of tomorrow? Empower your HR professionals to be proactive in enabling your organization to withstand change.
- 4. Build a Toolbox.** Take the time to figure out what software, training and processes you need to successfully identify job readiness skills, track employee performance, and build out a strategy that supports top performers and addresses gaps in key roles (See Figures 2 & 3). This toolbox should also include policies or strategies to support building a pool of qualified appointed or elected officials, and developing current board members, while staying within the appropriate legal and ethical framework based on your port's governance structure.
- 5. Make Career Development Consistent and Intentional.** Whether it is combined with employee reviews or a separate process, ensure that supervisors have the right forms, training, and ability to collect information about their employee's career readiness and interests. This needs to then be communicated to the lead HR professional to ensure that a succession strategy is current and accurate. Ports should also invest consistently and intentionally in educational opportunities for their employees. Smaller ports can leverage existing programs, while those with larger training budgets can implement a full training program tied to competencies needed for every employee as well as advanced learning for key roles. When possible, leverage existing association programs and conferences to meet these educational goals.
- 6. Get Feedback from All Directions.** Make sure that employee reviews include peer reviews, self-assessments, and opportunities for employees to provide feedback on their

supervisor's performance. This creates a better team atmosphere and more accountability across the organization.

7. **Create a Plan.** Even though it can be difficult to discuss areas of improvement or skill sets that are lacking, an honest approach benefits the organization by creating more certainty around readiness. It also benefits the employee by giving clear guidance on what needs to be improved to be considered for advancement.
8. **Promote, Develop, or Let Go, but Don't Ignore.** Use the previous steps to understand which employees warrant career or professional development in investment in the organization and identify those who may be better served in another position or even organization. Build a culture of growth with multiple pathways and don't be afraid to let employees go quickly if they are not helping to build a positive culture in the organization.
9. **Communicate.** Utilize exit interviews and circle back with internal candidates who apply for advancement but aren't selected. Top performers must understand where they did not meet the qualifications needed for advancement and what steps they need to take to be considered the next time a position is open.
10. **It's About People.** At the end of the day, the most important thing is to be a people-first organization. A proper succession planning strategy recognizes that people are important and deserve respect from their organization's leadership. People-first organizations don't promote individuals because they are next in line, but because they have been successfully supported along their entire career path to help align passion with capability.

Conclusion

This paper examined workforce transitions in the port industry and identified the need for succession planning as a top priority in the industry. An aging demographic and lack of diversity in leadership creates a need for ports to better understand succession planning and how it can make their organizations more resilient and diverse. While succession planning for public port authorities is different than succession planning for a small family business, many of the same principles still apply. Succession planning requires a commitment from leadership, an organized and consistent approach, and the recognition that serving people and honoring them as individuals is a must.

Interviews and follow-up discussions with port CEOs and HR leaders revealed that even those ports that invest in educational programs and professional development for their employees are not taking advantage of the benefits of a comprehensive succession strategy. It also revealed that there are many misperceptions about the nature and use of succession planning to support favoritism rather than a tool for organizational resilience. Succession planning can serve to increase the collective competency within an organization and across the industry over time. It improves the connectivity between supervisors and their direct reports as well as communication across the organization and lifts the morale of the team while building a growth-minded culture. It is indeed the highest calling of port leaders to grow and develop their people.

The deeper dive into three port stories revealed opportunities for ports to continue their development of talent strategies no matter how much they are currently doing in this regard. These insights led to the development of a recommended succession planning pathway that all ports can tailor to meet the needs of their unique operations and governance models. By prioritizing these efforts, the port industry will become more attractive to new, diverse and talented workers who want to advance within their organizations. This more engaged and capable workforce will lead to a port team that is more effective and productive as we seek to work together to move our communities ever forward.

Implications for Practice

The primary purpose of this work is to serve as a resource for port and maritime leaders as well as aspiring port executives. The desired outcome for this effort is that port leaders can move beyond a general awareness of the workforce challenges and transitions that ports are facing to implementing practical solutions that can help keep their ports on track now and in the future. The tools used for succession planning are not overly complicated and are standard across industries. Building a comprehensive succession strategy, however, does take time, focus, and resources. It also takes consistent energy to maintain records and assess situations and scenarios. This paper, and other resources available through the bibliography, serve to guide leaders and make it easier to take these important steps.

Leaders should consult with their organization's Human Resources professionals to determine which tools and practices are best for their port and to determine how to maintain confidentiality in succession planning strategies to protect employee privacy and strategic confidentiality. A candid and consistent assessment of skill sets relative to key roles is essential to reducing hurt feelings and providing clarity to those employees seeking advancement. A well-executed

succession plan should benefit everyone within the organization, whether they are advancing or not.

By elevating succession planning as a management priority, ports will benefit from having more top performers in key roles. This will allow ports to focus more on their key mission deliverables, such as international trade, economic development, environmental stewardship, and tourism promotion. When leaders have taken the proper steps to ensure a robust talent pipeline, they can spend less time reacting to people problems, and more time advancing the mission.

Reflections on Learning

I chose to take on this topic for my capstone project after consulting with my port's CEO and others in the industry about a wave of upcoming retirements and how our organization was prepared for the transition through succession planning tools and strategies in place. In the process of pursuing my PPM through the AAPA, I experienced first-hand the benefits of succession planning as I was promoted from Director of Economic Development to Chief Economic Strategy Officer. The lessons I learned from this research helped me to think about succession planning not as an abstract concept, but now as a concrete approach to strong organizational leadership that builds a positive company culture.

When I initially began to survey and interview other ports, I expected that at least a handful of ports would have a documented succession planning program. What I discovered is that the ports that are best positioned to handle transitions in key roles, don't have a plan document, but rather an active strategy and real-time dashboard defining key roles in the organization that is regularly assessed for gaps and opportunities. Strong HR departments lean on evolving best practices to improve their processes and to better support their workforce in their professional and career development efforts.

Admittedly, this paper focuses on strategies and recommendations that are easiest to implement for medium or large-sized ports. Small ports can still utilize the overall philosophy of mentoring and finding a mentor but may simply lack the number of employees and resources to successfully carry out many of the recommendations listed in this paper. Small ports may also be able to bring in external candidates with less disruption if that candidate has either a strong understanding of the industry generally or the needs of the local community.

I have also gained a greater appreciation for succession planning and the depth and breadth of the topic. I found that there is so much more in this area which could benefit port leaders that is not able to be covered in this work. I hope that future port leaders or PPM© candidates expand on this work to further elevate the importance of succession planning and inform the industry on specific steps that can be taken in this area of interest.

Beyond the topic of this paper, I also found a renewed desire to consistently focus on my own professional development in ways that keep me up to speed with current tools and techniques. I had not written a paper in APA format since college, and I appreciated the challenge as well as the opportunity to familiarize myself with some additional tools that MS Word provides. I was also able to strengthen the process I use to organize my thoughts in a way that will benefit the advocacy and strategy work I do regularly in my current role.

Bibliography

- Maritime Workforce Development*. (2024, April 19). Retrieved from U.S. Department of Maritime Administration: <https://www.maritime.dot.gov/maritime-workforce/maritime-workforce-development>
- 360-degree feedback*. (2024, July 21). Retrieved from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/360-degree_feedback
- 8 ways Gen Z will change the workforce*. (2024, February 14). Retrieved from Stanford Report: <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2024/02/8-things-expect-gen-z-coworker>
- Amdur, E. (2023, December 24). *6 Ways Succession Planning Must Change In 2024*. Retrieved from Forbes: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eliamdur/2023/12/24/6-ways-succession-planning-must-change-in-2024/>
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012-2022). *Table 1. Median years of tenure with current employer for employed wage and salary workers by age and sex, selected years*. Retrieved from Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.t01.htm>
- Delaware River 101 & 102: General Port Awareness Training*. (2024, July 21). Retrieved from Maritime Exchange for the Delaware River & Bay: <https://maritimedelriv.com/dr101>
- Deloitte. (2022). *Leadership Opportunities and Retention*. New York, NY: Deloitte.
- Doyle, S. (2018, May 30). *The Leadership 'Secret' That Smart Leaders Have Known for a Century*. . Retrieved from Entrepreneur: <https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/the-leadership-secret-that-smart-leaders-have-known-for-a/313359>
- Gallup. (2013). *Managing For Engagement Resource Guide*. Omaha, NE: Gallup.
- Groysburg, B. (2010). *Chasing Stars: The Myth of Talent and the Probability of Performance*. . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Industry Outreach and Education*. (2024, July 21). Retrieved from Merchants Exchange: <https://www.pdxmex.com/education/>
- Katz, D. G. (2022). *Port Management, Governance and Leadership. Port Economics, Management and Policy*. (Chapter 4.6 3B Tenure). New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. Retrieved from <https://porteconomicsmanagement.org/pemp/contents/part4/port-management-governance-leadership/>
- Kearschner, L. (2024, June 11). Track 3: The Middle Management Challenge: Motivation and Knowledge Transfer for a Hybrid and Changing Workforce. Miami, FL, USA: 2024 AAPA Port Administration Management Conference.
- Kelly, M. C. (2022). *Who Comes Next?: Leadership Succession Planning Made Easy*. Shippensburg, PA: Sound Wisdom.
- Kennedy, T. (2024, June 11). Track 3: The Middle Management Challenge: Motivation and Knowledge Transfer for a Hybrid and Changing Workforce. Miami, FL, USA: 2024 AAPA Port Administration Management Conference.

- Krell, E. (2015, January 7). *Weighing Internal vs. External Hires*. Retrieved from Society for Human Resource Management: <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/hr-magazine/weighing-internal-vs-external-hires>
- Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey, Household Data Annual Averages 18b. Employed persons by detailed industry and age. Water Transportation Industry.* (2024, January 26). Retrieved from Bureau of Labor Statistics: <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18b.htm>
- Massachusetts Maritime Academy: Maritime Demographics & Diversity Report.* (2024). Retrieved from College Factual: <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/massachusetts-maritime-academy/student-life/diversity/>
- Retirement Trends in United States, 2000-2022. Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau. U.S. Age distribution 2012.* (2022, June 27). Retrieved from Congressional Research Service: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11959>
- Society for Human Resource Management. (2023, March 30). *Succession Planning: What is a 9-box grid?* Retrieved from Society for Human Resource Management: <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/tools/hr-answers/succession-planning-9-box-grid>
- SUNY Maritime College Demographics & Diversity Report.* (2024). Retrieved from College Factual: <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/suny-maritime-college/student-life/diversity/#overview>
- Targeted Selection® Behavioral Interviewing System.* (2020). Retrieved from Development Dimensions International, Inc.: <https://www.ddiworld.com/solutions/targeted-selection>
- Timms, M. M. (2016). *Succession Planning That Works: The Critical Path of Leadership Development*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press.
- Timms, M. M. (2016). *Succession Planning That Works: The Critical Path of Leadership Development*. Victoria, BC: Friesen Press.
- U.S. Port & Maritime Industry 2024 Economic Impact Report.* (2024). Retrieved from American Association of Port Authorities: <https://aapa.cms-plus.com/files/2024-Economic-Impact-Study.pdf>
- Wartzman, R. (2017). *The End of Loyalty: The Rise and Fall of Good Jobs in America*. New York, NY: PublicAffairs.
- Zenger, J. a. (2020, December 23). *What Makes a 360-Degree Review Successful?* Retrieved from Harvard Business Review: <https://hbr.org/2020/12/what-makes-a-360-degree-review-successful>
- Živković, M. (2024, February 7). *9 Box Grid: What It Is & How to Use It For Hiring.* . Retrieved from toggl blog: <https://toggl.com/blog/9-box-grid>

Additional Resources:

1. Lewis, Nicole. (2023, October 30). Succession Planning is Back in the Spotlight. Society for Human Resource Management. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/organizational-employee-development/succession-planning-is-back-in-the-spotlight>
2. Wellbrock, Linda. (2018, September 26). *LWE 2018 Top 25 Intrapreneurs: Lise Stewart of EisnerAmper.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5GpboJJ6Ew&ab_channel=LeadingWomenTV.

About the Author

Mike Bomar has served as the Chief Economic Strategy Officer for the Port of Vancouver, USA since June of 2024. He joined the port as Director of Economic Development in May of 2018. His responsibilities include leading strategic planning; implementing appropriate initiatives and projects for the port district and Clark County; providing strategic leadership on transportation planning; seeking public and private partnership opportunities to achieve cargo growth and new industrial business; and developing and maintaining strategic partnerships in the community.

Mike currently serves on several professional and nonprofit organization boards, including the Greater Portland, Inc, Board, Washington Public Ports Association Economic Development Committee (Co-Chair), and Ridgefield Main Street Board (Immediate Past-Chair). He is also a Past President of the Vancouver Rotary Club in 2022/23 and was the Washington Economic Development Association's Board Chair in 2021.

Mike previously served as President of the Columbia River Economic Development Council (CREDC) for more than four years. Prior to joining CREDC, Mike served as the executive director of the Southwest Washington Contractors Association for three and a half years and spent six years with the Building Industry Association of Clark County in various Public Affairs roles.

Mike joined the Charlie cohort of the American Association of Port Authorities' (AAPA) Professional Port Manager (PPM®) Program in 2022. He holds a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from Washington State University Vancouver and a bachelor's degree in Political Science and Communications from the University of Washington. He is a graduate of the US Chamber of Commerce Institute for Organizational Management, Turbo Leadership Systems, and Leadership Clark County.

Mike is a long-time Southwest Washington State resident and currently resides in Ridgefield with his wife Audri and their three children. In his free time, he enjoys coaching baseball, participating in various outdoor recreational activities, and spending time with his family.

Appendix I: Survey Email and Follow-up Interview Questions

Port of Vancouver USA email dated 5/21/2024 at 11:52am. Sent to 92 past and present PPM participants

Hello PPM friends!

As part of my Port Professional Manager [PPM](#) Capstone project, I am seeking feedback from various ports on their current succession planning documents and/or practices. Could you please take a few minutes to answer these questions and/or forward this to your Executive or Human Resources Representative who would oversee succession planning at your port regarding succession planning at your port?

1. Does your port authority have an existing Succession Planning Strategy document or official policy? If so, are you able to share it?
2. How long has your current CEO been in the position?
3. Was your current CEO hired from within or outside your port?
4. In what ways does your port invest in professional development (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, shadowing, internal mentoring, training, other)? Who in your organization has access to professional development programs supported by your port?
5. Would you be willing to spend 15 to 30 minutes to discuss succession planning at your organization in more detail?

Responses to these questions and the additional interview discussion will be aggregated and not attributed to any single port without expressed written consent. I will be collecting initial responses until **Friday, May 31st**. Thank you in advance for your time and feedback. I look forward to sharing my findings with you and with the broader port community.

Please reach out if you have any questions and thank you in advance for your insights and for your consideration of this request.

Best regards,

Mike Bomar
Director of Economic Development
3103 NW Lower River Road, Vancouver, WA 98660
(C) 360.839.3577; (Internal) 5300

mbomar@portvanusa.com | www.portvanusa.com | [available port properties](#)

Leadership | Stewardship | Partnership



Interview Results Matrix (certain data omitted for confidentiality):

1. Does your port authority have an existing Succession Planning Strategy document or official policy? If so, are you able to share it?	2. How long has your current CEO been in the position? (Years)	3. Was your current CEO hired from within or outside your port?	4. In what ways does your port invest in professional development (e.g. apprenticeships, internships, shadowing, internal mentoring, training, other)? Who in your organization has access to professional development programs supported by your port?	5. Would you be willing to spend 15 to 30 minutes to discuss succession planning at your organization in more detail?	Port Size	Port Type (Primary)	Interview Followup?
No	1	External	The only investment in professional development is	Yes	Large	Bulk/Breakbulk	Maybe
No	12	External	Training	Yes	Medium	Mix (Bulk Breakbulk and Container)	Maybe
Yes	11	External	All employees are encouraged to and able to	Yes	Large	Mix (Bulk Breakbulk and Container)	Yes
No	16	Internal	Port allows interested individuals to attend	Yes	Medium	Bulk/Breakbulk	Maybe
No	1.5	External	Our port encourages professional development	Yes	Medium	Bulk/Breakbulk	Maybe
No	6	External	Every one of our employees has access to professional	Yes	Small	Bulk/Breakbulk	Yes
No	1	External	Limited. Port XXXX Environmental section (XXXX)	No	Large	Container	No
No	13	External	Classes through AAPA, AMI, University of XXXX	Yes	Medium	Cruise	No
No	6	Internal	1) XXX has hosted several interns, though not	Yes	Small	Bulk/Breakbulk	Yes
Yes	8	Internal	We're in the process of rebuilding our professional	Yes	Medium	Bulk/Breakbulk	Yes
No	1	Internal	We budgeted specifically for training and professional	Yes	Small	Bulk/Breakbulk	No
No	3	External	We have hosted IAMPE on a few occasions (XXXX)	Maybe	Medium	Mix (Bulk Breakbulk and Container)	No
No	3	External	Internships, internal/external training, career	Yes	Large	Container	Yes
No	19	Internal	All administration staff has the ability to do	Maybe	Medium	Bulk/Breakbulk	No
No	8	External	Other than ongoing Legal accreditation and	Yes	Large	Container	Maybe
No	0	Internal	We have student worker, internship, mentor	Yes	Large	Mix (Bulk Breakbulk and Container)	Yes
No	0	External	Trainings, apprenticeships, internships, career	Yes	Large	Container	No
No	11	Internal	a. Trainings and certifications typically made	Maybe	Medium	Bulk/Breakbulk	No
No	1	Internal	On an annual basis, the port authority establishes	Yes	Large	Mix (Bulk Breakbulk and Container)	Yes

Appendix II:

Sample Follow-up Interview Questions (asked during MS Teams calls)

1. Does your port engage in efforts to encourage people to run for elected or appointed positions?
2. Does your port hire a search firm to assist with hiring for key positions?
3. Does your port identify critical roles within the organization that require redundant expertise or training to ensure business continuity? Similarly, how do you ensure that institutional knowledge is retained for key positions?
4. Are director or manager-level employees encouraged to engage in succession planning strategies for their teams? Do employee reviews create space for discussions around professional development interests?
5. Does your port give preference to hiring or promoting from within or casting a wide external net for bringing in new talent? Are Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategies incorporated into your succession planning efforts?
6. Do you have any lessons learned or pieces of advice to share from your port's experience in succession planning successes or failures?

Interview A Refined Notes:

1. Does your port authority have an existing Succession Plan strategy document or official policy? If so, are you able to share it?
 - a. The port uses a 9-box grid to identify employee readiness to move up and current performance. This is a standard industry practice.
 - b. The port is developing a comprehensive Talent Management Strategy. This includes a:
 - i. Learning Development Strategy
 - ii. Leadership Management Strategy
 - iii. Career Development Strategy (Already in Place)
2. How long has your current CEO been in the position?
 - a. Previous CEO – 12 years, New CEO 1 year
 - b. The port did a full screen of candidates.
 - c. The port is now thinking about replacing his vacated position
 - d. The Board of Directors hires the CEO and the CEO hires everyone else.
3. Was your current CEO hired from within or outside your port?
 - a. Internal candidate – Has worked at this port for 25 years

4. In what ways does your port invest in professional development? Who in your organization has access to professional development programs supported by your port?
 - a. The port has a collective bargaining agreement with employees that dedicates 2% of employee salaries into a learning pool. That pool defines the budget, then supervisors work with employees to select relevant courses. This port also has a learning request form that employees can fill out for consideration. They also provide custom courses with limited slots. They have an online learning platform as well.
5. Does your port engage in efforts to encourage people to run for elected or appointed positions?
 - a. No, the port is led by a mix of appointments representing labor and local or regional governments.
6. Does your port hire a search firm to assist with hiring for key positions?
 - a. A search firm has typically been brought on for all CEO, Vice President and Director positions. The internal team is now prepared to handle director level positions internally.
7. Are director or manager-level employees encouraged to engage in succession planning strategies for their roles?
 - a. Directors provide feedback on managers and Vice Presidents review directors. Managers do not provide feedback on their reports.
8. Does your port give preference to hiring or promoting from within or casting a wide external net for bringing in new talent?
 - a. For CEO and VP's the positions are always advertised externally.
 - b. This port incorporates a panel review process for top candidates. Staff meets with the candidates. They also sit down with the review panel for feedback.
 - c. The port uses the Targeted Selection (TS) Process to improve objectivity and DEI practices.
9. Do you have any lessons learned or pieces of advice to share from your port's experience in succession planning successes or failures?
 - a. The last organization he worked for suffered from favoritism. They glossed over the work requirements, the person went into the role and they weren't successful. This really disrupted their department for years. The company had to put a development plan in place to help them succeed. A clear mandate with the coach is necessary. 360 reviews are phenomenal as well. When you can't hire internally, information is available for the external hire to be a mentor.
 - b. Succession planning is critical to business success. Strategic Workforce Planning (5 years out) is so impactful. It also sets learning culture where people can learn

and grow and make mistakes. This is most important, especially within leadership team.

Interview B Refined Notes:

1. Does your port authority have an existing Succession Plan strategy document or official policy? If so, are you able to share it?
 - a. No
2. How long has your current CEO been in the position?
 - a. 7 Years (8)
3. Was your current CEO hired from within or outside your port?
 - a. External. Worked for a west coast port prior to coming to this one.
4. In what ways does your port invest in professional development? Who in your organization has access to professional development programs supported by your port?
 - a. They participate in the AAPA PPM program and this is supported by leadership.
 - b. They have also supported tuition reimbursement programs but noted one person who got their MPA and then left the organization.
 - c. Their workforce average age is around 50 years old, and most employees have been there 13 or 14 years. A significant number of staff are getting close to retirement age. They only employ 45 people so advancement opportunities are rare.
 - d. They encourage employees to attend Maritime 101, 102 courses.
5. Does your port engage in efforts to encourage people to run for elected or appointed positions?
 - a. No. They have an 11-member board, 4 members appointed by Governor, 3 counties recommended, then approved by Gov. Maj/Min leaders in Senate/House. Lawyers, ILA, Teamsters, Independent. They are unpaid.
6. Does your port hire a search firm to assist with hiring for key positions?
 - a. They use a mix of consulting services, primarily for screening. In one position posted on Indeed, the received nearly 10,000 applications.
7. Are director or manager-level employees encouraged to engage in succession planning strategies for their roles?
 - a. Not currently.
8. Does your port give preference to hiring or promoting from within or casting a wide external net for bringing in new talent?
 - a. Most of the jobs, internal candidates are a first choice. For some jobs, you just don't have technical experience needed already on staff.

9. Do you have any lessons learned or pieces of advice to share from your port's experience in succession planning successes or failures?
 - a. Involved in major down-sizing, group almost cut in half.
 - b. Currently looking in bringing in additional talent.
 - c. Recent hires have been good hires.
 - d. Need to prioritize diversity.
 - e. Finding people who want to work even 4 days a week is challenging.

Interview C Refined Notes:

1. Does your port authority have an existing Succession Plan strategy document or official policy? If so, are you able to share it?
 - a. This port uses succession planning tools but not a specific policy or strategy document.
2. How long has your current CEO been in the position?
 - a. 8 years
3. Was your current CEO hired from within or outside your port?
 - a. Internally
4. In what ways does your port invest in professional development? Who in your organization has access to professional development programs supported by your port?
 - a. Currently, each department determines what training is important for them for the next year.
 - b. The port uses formalized tuition (tuition only) reimbursement. One or two employees at a time get bachelors or masters tuition reimbursement. Degree must be related to current job or desired port role.
 - i. Results have been a mixed bag. It creates a risk of leaving and is expensive. It also only hits a handful of people. The port is looking at broader program for development. This would include courses in communications, leadership, and teambuilding.
 - c. The port supports a student for XXX (Local leadership organization) annually
 - d. They also partner with consultants and a local university partner offering trainings
 - e. New employees take Maritime Exchange 101 and 201 and 301 courses. This is used sporadically, but likely to be incorporated into a larger program.
5. Does your port engage in efforts to encourage people to run for elected or appointed positions?
 - a. Not individually, but they provide community education about what ports do and encourage people to learn more.
6. Does your port hire a search firm to assist with hiring for key positions?
 - a. They rarely do it. They only use a search firm when they haven't been successful with internal recruiting efforts.

- b. They used a search firm to focus applicants when they received 800 for a spot.
 - c. Diversity is important to this port. They broadly advertised and expanded outreach to include as many underrepresented communities as possible. In Security and Maintenance departments, very few women will apply. To address this, they utilize intentionality in their apprenticeship program. This has led to more women participating and they have already hired several. They also have a standing committee looking at best practices to encourage diversity in hiring.
7. Are director or manager-level employees encouraged to engage in succession planning strategies for their roles?
- a. Yes, less formal than for C-Suite. Same principles apply. They ask managers, are you listening to what people want to do and apply training appropriately?
8. Does your port give preference to hiring or promoting from within or casting a wide external net for bringing in new talent?
- a. They take any opportunity to promote from within. These individuals are a known quantity. External hires always carry some level of risk. Hiring internally also sends a message that others have an opportunity to advance. When skillset or interest doesn't exist, external hires are made.
 - b. More you prepare and discuss in advance, the better opportunity you have to hire from within.
 - c. Sometime people apply because they don't like what they're currently doing, but don't have a specific interest in the open position.
9. Do you have any lessons learned or pieces of advice to share from your port's experience in succession planning successes or failures?
- a. If you invest time, energy and money in people, you should have a place for them to go. Double edged sword.
 - b. Orientation activities open to a broader group of employees, not just new hires. Timing is important. Don't flood employees with too much information all at once.
 - c. When managers are having conversations about advancement opportunities, then people get impatient. They look elsewhere if next level position doesn't open. Growing current role or giving special projects is a good strategy to keep engagement.
 - d. Succession planning should be done a couple times/year, not every two years. Often, it's a one-off conversation that doesn't lead to action. Understand weak spots before they become a crisis. Know your highest risk factor. Example: Real Estate – single person. A lot of institutional knowledge. Able to hire second person with role to learn.
 - e. There are two tracks to a career. Leadership skillsets are not for everyone. However, highly technical employees can advance in a role that fits their skillset. Subject matter expert.

- f. How to have conversations about Career development? Organizations need to make reviews a priority. First to support the individual, “How can we support you now?”, and “Where do you see yourself going?”. It becomes part of the process.
- g. They have been talking about succession planning for years. A lot of change happened recently in short time but it was a rewarding feeling to see the fruit of succession planning efforts as the transition was smooth. It could have been major shock, but didn’t feel as much of a hit as it could have been.
- h. Word gets out. Top talent hear from other people about their experience at this port and that helps with external candidate recruitment. Former interns are also coming back and applying for entry level positions.

Extra question: Do you combine professional development with career development?

- i. Yes, they are discussed at the same time during employee reviews.