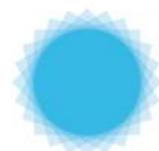


Succession Planning – Preparing a New Generation of Artists and Cultural Managers: A Proposal

Susan Annis, Executive Director, Cultural Human Resources Council

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Note to the Reader from the CPAF Secretariat

Please note that the following document was presented at the Canadian Public Arts Funders (CPAF) Annual General Meeting, Future Directions in Public Arts Funding: What Are The Shifts Required?, on November 16-18, 2011, in Whitehorse, Yukon and was intended to serve as information for a discussion on the theme of the meeting.

The views expressed by the author(s) are based on their interpretations from a variety of sources of information and do not necessarily represent all points of view, or the current program structures and policies of the membership of CPAF.

The reader is invited to provide feedback to this report by contacting Melanie Yugo, Partnership and Networks Officer, CPAF Secretariat, at melanie.yugo@canadacouncil.ca or 1 800 263 5588 ext 5144.

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Organizational continuity/succession planning/mentorships

- Building continuity into an organization is fundamental to its health and vitality.
- Thoughtful succession planning is the way to do it.
- And, it will be argued here, mentorships are key to success in succession planning and thereby, continuity of organizations.

Succession planning on the radar

The pressing need for good succession planning is increasingly apparent in Canadian cultural organizations and artistic companies. Warning bells have been sounding for the past decade at least, as a generation of managers takes its leave after building and maturing our cultural infrastructure; as iconic artists take final bows and their companies seek new identities going forward.

In 2002, in order to focus attention on this endemic problem and steer people's thinking towards solutions, the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA) commissioned a paper on [*Sustaining and Renewing Professional Management for the 21st Century*](#). This served as a "point de depart" for a roundtable discussion among cultural leaders and managers from across the sector. It asked: "How can we keep our current experienced managers in the sector and provide for their professional renewal, and how [can we] attract, develop and retain a new generation of committed managers to continue the work of our present leaders?"

On the creative side, how do artists replace themselves as they seek to pass their art forms and unique artistic expression on to posterity? How much do dance and theatre companies, orchestras and ensembles build from within? And how much do they rely on external talent for renewal to keep them on the "cutting edge"?

We are now a decade into the new century. We have collectively experienced the digital tsunami, which was only a gentle wave lapping at our shores in 2002. It has changed the landscape significantly, but the issue of succession planning is as pressing as ever.

Succession planning and mentorships

Both the Canada Council and CHRC have addressed this issue of succession planning in recent publications: the Canada Council in its report on [Legacy, Transition, Succession](#) by Roy MacSkimming, and CHRC is its HR Tool entitled [Coaching, Mentoring and Succession Planning](#).

Mentorship features in these documents, and the CCA report, as an important vehicle to accomplish sound succession planning. It has long been recognized that “hands-on learning” is the way people in the cultural sector learn best. Only so much can come from text books. Experience trumps knowledge. And mentorships are the natural way of teaching through experience.

Mentorships need to be encouraged so their full benefits can be strategically tapped for good succession planning. And succession planning needs to be shaped with good mentorships.

CHRC and mentorships

CHRC has witnessed successful mentorships first hand. For over fifteen years, it has managed a [Youth Internship Program](#) (YIP) on behalf of Human Resources and Skills Development (HRSDC) and the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH). Despite restrictions (e.g. the internships are only for youth up to 30 and must be their first work experience), the program has been very successful and always over-subscribed – an indication of its value to up and coming artists and cultural workers, and to cultural employers. Understanding the need for cultural organizations to use these opportunities to launch the next generation of leaders, CHRC has directed the YIP participants to arts practice and cultural management positions, and has integrated an important mentorship component into the criteria.

Based on years of experience with this program, CHRC is strongly urging funders to encourage, and cultural employers to adopt, mentorship practices as primary tools in succession planning. Dropping the restrictions in the current YIP program, these mentorships should provide much needed work-based training to mid-career as well as emerging artists and managers. Furthermore, they should identify senior artists and managers as formal mentors.

The bonus of reverse mentorships

With the fundamental changes to the creation, production, presentation, distribution and preservation of all art forms in the wake of digital technology, succession has taken on a new face. It of course means preparing the next generation to assume leadership roles. But it is also about ensuring that the organization is adapting to the new leadership. The skills transfer from the senior and experienced to the emerging cultural workers and artists can benefit from a reverse learning flow.

Rather than being simply about filling up a fresh new artist or cultural manager with tried and true corporate knowledge and modus operandi, and equipping them with skills to manage the ‘old’ way of doing things, succession involves weaving into current practices the digital and social media skills that young cultural workers and artists have grown up with and are equipped with to apply to their work reality. Good succession planning helps organizations to adapt to the digital age, while simultaneously preparing the leaders to carry them forward.

In addition to training the next generation of leaders, mentorships for emerging artists and cultural workers can provide opportunities for senior managers and artists, and organizations, to learn from emerging artists and managers who bring new thinking, new skills and new perspectives. In our times of rapid change, this is a vital way of maintaining currency for artistic practices and organizational functioning. While it is generally acknowledged that this type of reverse mentorship often “just happens”, there would be value in articulating it, documenting it, and shaping it so that it works to everyone’s best advantage.

A model to encourage mentorships

The model program to encourage mentorships as vehicles in sound succession planning and best HR practices, is simple.

How it works: A coordinating body will receive applications from mentor/protégé teams from either the artistic or the management side of an organization. Those applications are favoured which clearly demonstrate the value of the mentorship in terms of succession planning; and which demonstrate a learning exchange between mentor and protégé in both directions. A small honorarium for the mentor could provide a useful incentive and serve as an important recognition of the role of mentor.

This program can reach beyond merely coordinating the mentor/protégé teams to developing tools to support the teams: e.g. facilitating workshops for training the mentors, based on CHRC’s mentorship competency chart and profile; and creating networking opportunities for the protégés and the mentors, to allow them to share experiences and learnings. Inasmuch as the protégés are being groomed to be the next generation of leaders, these networks will serve them well in the future and strengthen the cultural sector in an ongoing way.

Why it works: Preparing the next generation of cultural leaders in both artistic creation and management is undoubtedly of serious concern to cultural organizations. Addressing this strategically through succession planning is sound HR practice. Mentorship programs which are tied to succession planning are proven vehicles to achieve this. CHRC has seen a shift in mindset over the past decade to a greater understanding of the importance of sound HR practices in the cultural sector. Cultural organizations will “get it” if funders of mentorship programs tell them for example to demonstrate sound HR practices by linking their applications to succession planning.

Furthermore, mentorships that benefit entry and midcareer artists and managers have the advantage of bringing in new blood and fresh thought, and/or giving incentives to experienced artists or managers who are in line for leadership positions. This is about both recruitment and retention.

Finally, providing honoraria to senior artists or managers acknowledges the value of their experience and expertise. There is also an opportunity through such partnerships for these leaders to be influenced and taught by the protégés and to influence their organizations in future directions.

It's a win/win/win

The CCA report mentioned above provides a great example of mentorships being effectively used to facilitate succession planning. It was described as the “Triple Win” Program: Combining Mentoring, Career Advancement, and Sabbatical Opportunities.

“I would like to have the opportunity to have a younger theatre administrator, from our company or another, shadow me and be mentored by me for the cycle of the company’s work – say 8-9 months – learning how to be the general manager of this organization. At the end of that time, I would take a 6 months sabbatical at reduced salary, and the person I mentored would act as the GM. I would have time off to be reinvigorated and refreshed; my company would be in secure and competent hands during my absence; and an emerging leader would have the benefit of on-the-job mentoring and career advancement - it’s a win-win-win situation.” GM of a Vancouver theatre company

In summary – the impact

Preparing the next generation of cultural leaders to ensure the continuity of cultural organizations is the objective of sound succession planning. Mentorships help to achieve this. The impact of mentorships on succession planning and the continuity of organizations is on:

- Senior cultural artists and managers who act as mentors as they move into retirement, remain engaged in their practices and organizations, and are recognized for their talent, knowledge and experience (and can stay in tune with the times through what they learn from their protégés!).
- Emerging and mid-career artists and managers who will advance in their careers, with the benefit of hands-on experience with senior role models.
- Creative and performing companies which will reinvigorate and build on their creative histories; and cultural organizations and businesses which will prepare for succession in their ranks, and retain and build on corporate knowledge.

A win – a win – and a win.