#### DEVELOPING FUTURE MANAGERS FROM TODAY'S WORKFORCE

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### **ABSTRACT**

In order to address current employee turnover issues due to the exodus of the Baby Boomer generation, East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) in Oakland, California implemented its supervisory and manager employee development programs. With the success of the Leadership Academy and Superintendent Pathways programs (both programs are described in the August 2006 issue of WE&T), EBMUD implemented the next phase of the overall program to address development of future managers.

In January 2006, EBMUD inaugurated the Management Leadership Academy (MLA) to develop the skills of potential future division managers and other upper-level management candidates. As with the first two programs, the MLA was developed in-house with the input and cooperation of departments across the District. Unlike the previous programs which targeted Operations and Maintenance (O&M) staff, the MLA was designed to address knowledge and skill development for key management positions District-wide.

The program consisted of the following components:

- Competitive selection
- 360° and personal assessments
- Individual development plans
- Group leadership sessions including structured classroom training and facilitated group discussions
- Coaching by members of the Senior Management Team
- Special 6-month "Action Learning" project assignments

Over 60 District employees competed for 15 full participant training positions. Comprehensive assessments included an analysis of each participant's skills and areas for improvement. After analyzing the participants' profile, individual training plans were developed, supplementing program components. An additional 11 participants were also accepted into the program as partial participants since they already occupied manager-level positions. These participants participated in the seminars and group discussions.

The first group of graduates completed the program in December 2006.

### **KEYWORDS**

Workforce planning, workforce development, succession management, training program.

#### INTRODUCTION

In 2002, East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) identified several potential staffing challenges in its supervisory and management staff related to projected employee turnover. Early projections indicated that more than 40% of the District's managers would be eligible to retire by 2010. To address the projected staffing challenges and prepare existing employees to fill these positions, the District instituted initiatives from which workforce development programs were developed and implemented.

In 2005, following the successful implementation of its first- and second-level supervisory development programs (Lead Academy and Superintendent Pathways), the District implemented the third phase of its workforce development initiative to address anticipated retirements throughout the District's management staff, the Management Leadership Academy (MLA).

The focus of this program is to enhance employees' general management skills and help them compete for future management positions.

## **CHALLENGES**

Unlike the Superintendent Pathways program that addressed supervisory needs for two specific departments, the MLA was designed to address management positions throughout the District. Potential candidates came from a variety of backgrounds across multiple disciplines and departments. As such, one of the challenges was to develop a general leadership competency model that would address district-wide needs across different disciplines.

A second challenge was a lack of vacant positions for MLA classifications where program participants could be placed temporarily in order to obtain hands-on experience performing the duties of the positions. The program developers had to find a way to give the participants manager-level experience without adding new positions or increasing participant salaries. The implementation of the 15 concurrent high-level projects was extremely challenging from a workload perspective.

As with the previous two programs, there was a high level of interest in the program. Due to the available resources, the program could accommodate no more than 15 full participants. While the program, similar to the other programs, did not guarantee promotion, it gave participants an opportunity to develop and enhance skills deemed necessary for success as a manager at the district. Those who were not selected into the program were told that participation in the program was not a prerequisite for eventual promotion.

Other major challenges were to obtain enough senior management coaches who would commit to the program for an entire year and to identify manager-level projects and project sponsors that would fit each participant's developmental goals as well as being a part of the District's overall business plan.

#### DEVELOPING THE MANAGEMENT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

With the successes of both the Leadership Academy and the Superintendent Pathways Program, the general framework of the MLA had already been established and the program had the support of the District's upper management.

The first step in developing the program was to develop a leadership competency model. This model was developed by Human Resources staff in consultation with senior management staff from a variety of departments. Developers had to ensure that the model was broad enough so that it would the model could be applied to any managerial position at the district. The result was a five competency model (see Figure 1).

## Figure 1. EBMUD Leadership Model

With the underlying premise that "Effective Leaders Achieve Results Through People," the following five competencies were developed:

# **Integrity and Stewardship – Public Trust**

- Clear Values and Mission
- Courage under pressure
- Customer Focus

# **Personal and Interpersonal Skills**

- Manages diverse relationships
- Organizational savvy
- Self-management
- Political acumen

### **Strategic**

- Grasps current and future industry challenges
- Strong conceptual thinking
- Assesses complexity and makes high quality decisions
- Plans and organizes

### **Leading and Managing Others**

- Clear direction and delegation
- Resolves technical and people challenges
- Inspires and motivates
- Collaborates effectively

### **Business Acumen**

- Focused on top priorities
- Functional, operational and financial understanding
- Technological savvy

The MLA program was piloted by the Human Resources Department in 2004. The pilot participant was assigned to establish a framework for the MLA program using what was learned from the existing programs (Lead Academy and Superintendent Pathways) that would fit the guidelines established by the steering committee. As a result of this assignment, a five-component program was developed. These components were as follows: Skills Assessment, Individual Development Plans, Group Leadership Sessions, Coaching, and "Action Learning" Projects.

The Skills Assessment, Individual Development Plan and Coaching components were based on similar components of the Superintendent Pathways Program. Potential "Action Learning" Projects were identified by the pilot participant under guidance of the steering committee. These projects had to be management-level projects and support the District's overall Strategic Business Plan. The 15 "Action Learning" Projects were then selected from this project list.

The Skills Assessment was used to identify each participant's development needs. The results of the assessments helped each participant to identify strengths and areas of further development in several leadership dimensions.

Following the Skills Assessment, Individual Development Plans (IDP's) were developed to serve as a guide for each participant's learning, to provide structure to their coaching meetings, to help focus their learning and practice, and help build skills through their project assignments.

Group Leadership Sessions were scheduled bi-weekly where participants attended formal university-based leadership classes and participated in other group learning activities. Courses were administered in cooperation with University of California at Davis and other providers to deliver a comprehensive and customized academic program that offered the latest coursework in leadership development.

Each participant was assigned to work with a senior management staff coach for the duration of the academy. Coaches were trained and helped participants apply their leadership skills, gave advice and feedback, and supported their progress through program completion.

The "Action Learning" Projects were designed to reinforce their IDP identified learning objective and build participant skills in the EBMUD Leadership competencies. The duration of each project was three to six months and each participant was assigned a project sponsor who would serve as the technical advisor for the project. Upon completion of the project, each participant summarized the project results in a written report and gave a presentation to the GM Staff, Senior Management Team or Board of Directors, as appropriate.

While much of the program occurred during working hours, participants were also required to attend courses and group meetings on their own time.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

There were more than 60 applicants for the MLA. Written supplemental application questions and interview questions were used to assess each applicant's preparation and motivation for the

program. Based on candidate responses to the written and oral questions, 15 were selected to participate in the full program. An additional 11 division managers were also allowed to participate on a partial basis in the Group Leadership portion of the program. Since they were already working in manager-level positions, it was not necessary for them to complete action learning projects. Participants had a wide variety of backgrounds that included finance, engineering, human resources, operations, maintenance and administration.

Once the 15 were selected, a battery of assessments were used to identify strengths and areas of development. Assessment instruments included:

- a leadership profile survey completed by participants, supervisors, peers and subordinates; and
- self-surveys to understand leadership style and learning style.

The results of these surveys and exercises were discussed by each participant, an assigned representative in EBMUD's Human Resources Department, and the participant's coach. The participants then created their IDP's to focus on areas identified for improvement and develop competencies in preparation for manager-level positions.

Throughout the year, management courses were administered to all 26 participants of the program. A total of 11 days of training were scheduled for all to attend (see Figure 2). All courses were conducted in the district's training resource center after hours.

The 15 full participants were assigned coaches to help them attain the goals they had established in their IDP's. Coaches and participants met on a regular basis so that coaches could facilitate the learning/development process, monitor progress and provide independent feedback.

### **SUCCESSES**

Of the 15 participants who completed the full MLA program, four have been promoted to manager level positions and two of the 11 division managers were promoted to senior-level managerial positions. Additionally, two of the graduates of the program were hired in management positions at other agencies.

Feedback from the graduates of the program was positive overall. The general theme was that the District valued its employees and that the MLA was valuable in their professional development. Additionally, the program provided employees with networking opportunities, a broader perspective of the District's mission and new resources from with they draw from in completing their work.

The development of this academy required a substantial corporate investment. As a result of successful implementation of this academy, the District has a comprehensive program that addresses its future supervisory and managerial staffing needs.

Figure 2. Management Leadership Academy Curriculum	
Course description	Duration
	(days)
Using Emotional Intelligence (EQ) in Leading Organizations	2 Days
Explores the relationship between emotional intelligence and managerial success	
and looks at ways that EQ affects communication, performance management and the	
most important area of EQ, self-management of motivation.	
Emotional Intelligence Applied to Leadership and Diversity	1 Day
Gives leaders the concepts, tools, and skills to build and emotionally intelligent work	
environment that gets the best from all staff.	
The Art and Styles of Leadership	1 Day
Explores the idea of leadership, and presents practical steps to take to increase	
leadership effectiveness.	
Mental Models and Interest-Based Problem Solving	1 Day
Focuses on identifying an organization's mental models, thinking from a systems	
view, and solving problems from an interest based perspective. Also examines ways	
to think more creatively, question ways of looking at issues, and engage dialog that	
fosters long-term systemic solutions to problems facing today's organizations.	
Building Smart Teams	1 Day
Provides participants with key insights about teams and gives them tools to unlock	
the potential in every team, the ones they lead and those they participate on.	
Systems Thinking: Principles and Practice	1 Day
Explores how to use systems thinking as a method and tool for managing change,	
solving complex problems, and creating individual and team learning.	
Strategic Planning and Thinking	1 Day
Helps participants acquire an understanding of strategic planning and its	
components, as well as tools and methods required to implement a sound strategic	
plan.	
Leading Organizational Change	1 Day
Covers Kotter's Eight Steps to Effective Change model, as well as Duck's model to	
manage change that emphasizes the change leader's role in balancing the dynamics	
of change.	0.70
Crucial Conversations	2 Days
Introduces the principles and skills required to handle vital but sometimes	
challenging conversations.	