

Succession Planning in Boys' Brigade

A report and analysis of succession planning's relevance, benefits, challenges, previous uses and potential uses within Boys' Brigade, and practical advice/tips on how it can be best used in the future.



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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Analysis of Questionnaire Data	2
Meaning, Value and Usefulness of Succession Planning.....	2
Benefits of Succession Planning	3
Challenges of Succession Planning	3
“How would you carry out succession planning for your role?”	4
Examples of Previous Succession Planning	4
Practical Ways to Succession Plan	5
Conclusion	7
Acknowledgements	7
Appendix	8

Introduction

Succession planning is a critical part of the leadership structure of many organisations. For a volunteer organisation such as BB, it can especially be important for ensuring leadership stability at a section, company, state or even national level, allowing for people to transition out of or into a role or position smoothly- passing on learned knowledge or experience to the next person in line and training them up to be ready to take over.

I decided to look into how and for what kinds of situations succession planning had been used in BB, as well as its benefits and challenges, and compile a report of my findings.

I highlighted things that had been done well with succession planning in the past and could be used as a template for future succession planning within BB, as well as things that could be improved upon with how succession planning had been used.

Through gathering data from answers to a set of questions which I sent to a number of current and former BB Officers who currently serve/have served in a variety of roles, such as Captain, OIC, State President, National President, and Leadership Course Coordinator, I was able to get a picture of succession planning’s utilisation within Boys’ Brigade.

Analysis of Questionnaire Data

Meaning, Value and Usefulness of Succession Planning

Across the responses I received, succession planning was described as:

- Something to use in order to shore up the future of a team, organisation or leadership role
- the training and preparing of people to take on/over a role or responsibility and ensure a smooth transition and continuity (for example in regard to goals, projects or plans)
- and the sharing or passing on of knowledge, skills, or learned experience to the next person or people in line.

It was described as being undertaken with the use of intentional plans and processes.

These included:

- Identifying people who are potential successors to a role or who have the potential to become one
- Determining important and key roles within a team that would need to be filled were that role to become vacant
- Having conversations with different relevant people such as those potential successors, other experienced BB leaders and the church where the company is located
- Planning the methods and timing for how the transition will happen (for example, when and how certain responsibilities are passed on to the successor)

Succession planning was considered throughout all of the responses I received as something of high importance, though depending on the role it had a higher or lower amount of relevance. For example, Captain and OIC were both roles where it was determined succession planning was of significant usefulness. This was especially true when it came to the stability and continuity of a local Boys' Brigade company, as the people in those roles are the ones "steering the ship", so to speak, of that company. Therefore, sudden large-scale changes that might come with the changing of leadership have the potential to cause a drop in the number of people attending BB due to the uncertainty or discomfort caused by that change, especially if too much of it happens at once.

On the other hand, some roles/ranks such as Warrant Officer or BB State Executive Committee representative do not have much need for succession planning due to things like the manner in which someone takes up that role or the general nature of that position lacking the complexity that succession planning would be useful for. Something else noted in a couple of the responses was that succession planning was not done a lot of the time, which could be due to reasons such as people not really knowing how to go about it or not realising how useful it could be.

Benefits of Succession Planning

There were various differing benefits mentioned regarding succession planning given in the responses I got, including a number of less obvious ones that I had not previously thought of.

Commonly listed benefits were again talking about continuity and allowing for a smooth and seamless transition, which as I touched on just before are considered key to ensuring stability at a BB company. The ways in which it can provide opportunities for development and growth, at both a personal level for those being trained up as potential successors in their leadership skills and through the building up of their character were detailed. Its benefits at a wider Company leadership level were also discussed, particularly about how it can improve upon the existing leadership base and skills, which means more people will be equipped to handle various responsibilities or situations where they may have to step up in leadership.

Other responses on the benefits of succession planning spoke about having a “safety net” in case of unexpected or unforeseen circumstances through the use of succession planning, the ability to bring in new ideas and approaches to Brigade, and the saving of time through passing on knowledge and experience directly to a successor.

Challenges of Succession Planning

Challenges around succession planning described in the responses revolved mainly around the challenges of finding the right person who can take over the role or position and how that has to be a continual process, or how the person you were preparing as a successor may no longer be the one to take over or experiences a change in their circumstances preventing them from being a suitable choice.

Also touched on within the responses, was the fact that Boys’ Brigade being a volunteer organisation means that people may leave and move on which creates gaps in the leadership group, needing to balance succession planning around other daily responsibilities (including other BB responsibilities), and having to work with limited numbers of leaders.

One thing that was commonly spoken of regarding managing the challenges of succession planning, however, was the need to be praying into and seeking out God’s guidance, wisdom and direction into those situations.

“How would you carry out succession planning for your role?”

One of the questions I asked in my questionnaire focused on how the person I was asking might go about carrying out succession planning for their role in the future. The responses I received varied in format from a list of steps in how they would undertake it, some key points for a more overall succession planning strategy, to an example of previous succession planning which combined the answer to this question and the following one into a single answer.

Some common methods and key elements suggested regarding future succession planning were around:

Identifying or assessing suitable potential candidates and having conversations with them to see if they had any interest in the additional responsibilities or role being succession planned for and providing opportunities to have some of that role's responsibilities in shorter experiences, such as an Acting Captain/ Acting OIC, or taking charge of a certain responsibility over a period of time, such as during a weekly Brigade night.

The taking of responsibilities on a more permanent basis, where responsibilities are handed over as part of the transition stage of succession planning was also mentioned by the respondents.

Other things described included:

- providing support and guidance to the person throughout the entire process to ensure they will be ready and able to take over when the time comes
- getting the person involved so they can see what goes on within that role and start to learn and gain experience of how it operates on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis (for example involving them in some of the planning processes which are done as part of that role)
- and providing that person with any training they might need to prepare them for the role.

Examples of Previous Succession Planning

Throughout the responses that I received regarding examples of succession planning that the respondent had either witnessed or been a part of, I noticed a few things that were similar across them.

For starters, a lot of them were about succession planning for the role of Captain, which makes sense, as that is one of the most major roles within a BB Company so it would be crucial to ensure that the transition from one person to another in that role goes as smoothly as possible.

I also saw how in those examples (as well as other examples for roles outside of Captain) there was plenty of notice given by the current Captain of an intention to step down allowing adequate time to put succession plans in place and act upon them.

Other important points included:

- engaging in discussions and conversations as part of the preparation process
- finding a suitable candidate to be the successor
- and praying into the situation allowing God to provide guidance and be at work throughout the whole process.

There were also examples showing how succession planning could be put to use in other kinds of roles within BB, such as State President/Vice President, which much like the role of Captain at a Company level has a high level of importance and a need for smooth continuity and stability.

Those last few examples also touched on how succession planning does not have to be a direct “one person to the next” kind of situation but can be formed from a chain of multiple people moving through the role or roles.

Practical Ways to Succession Plan

Through the data I gathered and the analysis I conducted, I have been able to collate some key points, tips and important steps to take to maximise the use of succession planning within the context of BB.

So, here are some of the main things that should be considered when succession planning in Boys’ Brigade:

- **Find and identify suitable potential candidates**

Finding the right person (or people) for the role can be a challenge sometimes.

That is why it is important to be: constantly on the lookout for potential succession candidates (especially for roles such as OIC or Captain), praying to God for guidance and that He will help find the right person for the job, role or responsibility, and seeking advice or observations from other experienced leaders within the Company to gain additional perspectives on suitable people to consider.

- **Conversations are important**

Having conversations with other Brigade leaders, particularly ones who have been leading for a long time can help provide useful insights in preparation. Conversations with potential candidates, the local (i.e. host) church and other leaders in the Company as part of the succession planning process are also quite important to have.

- **Transition period/Opportunities to take up responsibilities**

Providing potential candidates with the chance to have some initial responsibilities for short periods, over time increasing those opportunities, the amount of time the person has those responsibilities, and the amount or

significance of those responsibilities is a good way to start the process of succession planning and guide or mentor someone.

This is especially helpful if they have limited leadership experience, through learning about the role's responsibilities "on the job" and somewhat in isolation to each other instead of all at once.

Another important part of the transition stage involves permanently handing over responsibilities to the successor at a suitable and gradual pace, helping to give them further practical experience at levels that they are able to manage without being in over their head. This provides the added benefit of a smooth, seamless transition period for the successor taking over the role, and for the outgoing person concluding their time in that role.

- **Ensure enough notice is given (where possible)**

Having adequate time to prepare for and enact succession plans is highly important, as a rushed succession plan will likely be detrimental to everyone involved.

It could even be a risk to the survival/continuation of a BB Company for several reasons, such as not being able to find the right person to take over, disruptions to the running of the Company due to a less-than-seamless transition of the role's responsibilities, or sudden/unexpected changes by the new leadership causing people to leave and attendance to drop.

On the other hand, allowing or having enough time between being made aware of someone's intention to step down from a role allows for a thorough succession planning process and ample time to ensure enough preparation has been done to make the transition as smooth as possible and maintain some continuity within the Company.

Timing can be crucial, and having plenty of notice means the people involved in the succession planning will have an increased freedom of choice regarding when key stages of the plan are set to occur.

However, it is not always possible to have a large amount of notice or warning given, and in those situations, it is key to adapt and find ways to work through challenges and utilise the resources available, such as fast-tracking of the transition process, which when executed well can result in similar levels of success to succession plans that had larger timeframes of notice to work within.

- **Support and guide the person throughout**

It is also incredibly important that the person who is being succession planned to take over the role or responsibility receives continued support across the entire process.

This could look like providing information that is important to the role they are moving into, or having check-ins with them to see how they are feeling about the plan's progress or personally around their own development or preparedness to take up certain responsibilities, for example.

Another method of support is guidance and mentoring. Usually performed by the person currently in that role, it can take the form of sharing things like the format and structure of a Company night or a Company's history, teaching the successor about what the role involves through demonstration and coaching them on the best ways to tackle certain aspects or responsibilities, or giving them chances to take the lead while they step back and provide assistance behind the scenes.

Conclusion

In short, the research I have done has helped me see how succession planning has been put to use within Boys' Brigade, how a lot of the work that goes into it happens behind the scenes and found out what benefits and challenges there are when using succession planning in an organisation such as BB.

It has also allowed me to identify key methods, techniques, strategies, ideas and concepts that make up a well-executed succession planning process, and create practical tips, key points and important things to remember that can be used to better undertake succession planning in Boys' Brigade.

I believe the process of completing this project, and the things I learnt along the way have increased my appreciation for some of the work that happens to keep the Boys' Brigade running. I hope that the work I have done will help improve the usefulness of succession planning and the ways that it is conducted.

Acknowledgements

Questionnaire Respondents

Chee Ngui – Current Captain of 33rd VIC Boronia and BB Australia National President

Craig Avery – Current BB Vic State Executive BBA representative and former Captain of 21st VIC Mitcham

Craig Dean – Current Warrant Officer and former OIC at 33rd VIC Boronia

Darren Ngui – Current Juniors OIC and Lieutenant at 33rd VIC Boronia

Gary O'Regan – Current Captain, former Seniors OIC and Officer at 17th Vic Mooroolbark

James Lake – Current Captain of 21st VIC Mitcham and BB Victoria State President, former Captain of 24th VIC Darebin and BB Victoria Vice President

James Woodthorpe – Current Coordinator of Personal Development leadership course, former Seniors OIC at 18th VIC Berwick

Phillip Lang – Former Captain and Anchors OIC at 33rd VIC Boronia

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Appendix

Question List Template/Example (Used for collection of data)

BBK Project Succession Planning Questions

Part A: About the Interviewee

1. Name
2. Current role in BB
3. Duration in role
4. Any past roles that may also be relevant

Part B: Succession Planning

1. What does succession planning mean to you?
2. Do you think succession planning applies to your role? Why or why not?
3. What are the benefits of succession planning in your role? (if there is)
4. What are the challenges to you carrying out succession planning?
5. If you were to carry out succession planning for your role, how would you go about doing it?
6. Have you ever seen examples of succession planning, or been a part of it yourself? If so, how did it happen and was it useful/successful?