



Leading Into Tomorrow:

Developing Leaders for The Challenges Ahead

By Lisa Cornelius and Charles Dively

Preparing the leaders of tomorrow is one of the most important jobs for the leaders of today. The Minnesota Department of Corrections (MNDOC), like many other organizations, will be experiencing significant turnover as baby boomers retire. In order to better prepare the agency's future leaders, a multidisciplinary approach was developed so that MNDOC could lead into tomorrow.

Developing a Comprehensive Leadership Program

Why it began. MNDOC created the Advanced Leadership Development Program (ALDP) for a number of reasons. First, it was developed to better prepare future leaders for the challenges they will likely face in five to 10 years.

Second, like in many organizations, most of the senior leadership positions at MNDOC are filled through promotions. Investing heavily in internal resources is most likely to pay dividends, as MNDOC has a high retention rate. Third, the department's leadership development consisted of a patchwork of programs run by sponsors that were not always in contact with each other, including various universities and vendors, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), and MNDOC. Although the programs were good, they did not guarantee that enough people would be trained at once in the essential disciplines needed by future senior leaders. In order to implement a change, oftentimes a critical mass of 20 to 60 employees is needed to apply a new strategy. Sending so many people to one conference was cost-prohibitive, so it was difficult to implement change under the model previously used.

How it began. John King, now the warden of the Stillwater prison, surveyed numerous prison systems to understand what leadership development strategies and techniques had worked for them. King prepared his findings and presented them to MNDOC Commissioner Joan Fabian and her executive team. The project was initiated in 2005 with their full support and cooperation. The program, now in its third year, is conducted once per year and takes eight months to complete.

Planning committee. Under the direction and vision of Lisa Cornelius, the assistant commissioner of administration, a committee was created to guide the program development. One of the keys to success was including a cross section of the organization, with representatives from field services, facilities, education, employee development and instructional technology. The group initially identified goals, objectives and instructors but then transitioned to a more comprehensive process that included actually creating the curriculum. One of the major decisions was how to select participants for the program.

Selection committee. The Planning Committee decided on a transparent model where individuals would be selected to participate in the program based on established, well-publicized criteria. The decision was made to separate the Selection Committee process from the Planning Committee. This was partly due to the workload and was also a way to expand the number of people exposed to ALDP and its benefits.

In order to make the selection process transparent, candidates are given all of the selection criteria and told how each item will be scored. The categories include years of experience, number of different job assignments, current and prior supervisory assignments, education, performance appraisal history, discipline record, self-assessment, supervisory assessment, and an essay. Human resources and employee development staff score the first round of the application, and then Selection Committee members score the candidates individually. At the conclusion of this, the Selection Committee members meet to discuss their results and make recommendations. In addition to the 20 candidates, five alternates are identified; however, no alternates have been selected by senior management yet, due to the quality of the selection process.

Program elements. The entire program is approximately 200 hours in length and requires a significant commitment by attendees.



Courtesy: Minnesota Department of Corrections

Rebecca Dooley makes her final presentation to senior management.

- **Workshops.** There are eight full-day workshops conducted every other month on a separate subject;
- **Individual assessment.** Participants complete a battery of surveys and test instruments so they have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses;
- **Mentoring.** Monthly meetings are held with a member of senior management;
- **Reading assignments.** Individuals read several books and articles as part of the program and discuss them during workshops;
- **Team projects.** Four to five teams work to identify a solution to a DOC problem, which takes approximately 50 to 100 hours to complete; and
- **Final presentation.** Participants present individual and group projects on the last day of the program.

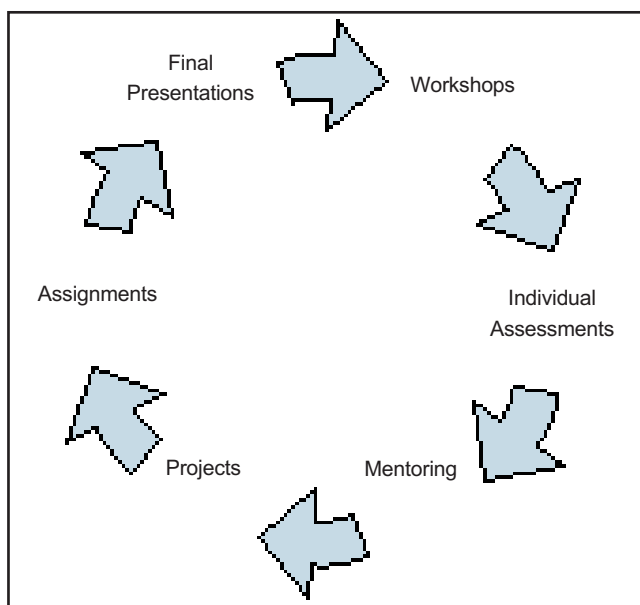
Method of instruction and instructors. An analysis of job responsibilities by members of the ALDP Planning Committee highlighted the importance of making decisions in small groups. It also stressed the need to make presentations that are persuasive as well as informative. Therefore, different types of presentations were incorporated into the program design. The majority of the curriculum is highly interactive — only 20 percent of the program is lecture-based. For example, all members must present at a mock legislative committee hearing meeting and respond to

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inquiries from a reporter. Half-hour and full-day case studies are used to add a layer of realism to the program. In addition to the daily presentations, there are end-of-program group project presentations and an individual summation of what the participant has gained from the experience. Participants are assigned books to read such as Jim Collins' *Good to Great* and *Enlightened Leadership* by Ed Oakley and Doug Krug.

MNDOC is fortunate to have a diverse panel of highly skilled instructors who are selected on the basis of their knowledge and ability to present in front of groups. The vast majority of the instructors are senior managers and DOC subject matter experts. Because the majority of the instructors come from the ranks of DOC management, program costs are kept low. In addition, a former legislator, a newspaper reporter and several professors and consultants have also served as instructors.



Workshops. The Planning Committee selected a variety of topics to be addressed at ALDP workshops. The sessions include project management, leadership, budgeting and finance, diversity, strategic planning, conflict resolution, media relations, and legislative relations. These topics were selected because they relate to a management job analysis previously conducted by Human Resources. When possible, workshops are linked thematically. In the workshop on budgets, participants analyzed a case in which various units within the department had their budgets trimmed by 10 percent. At the next ALDP meeting, participants addressed human relations problems created by the cost and staff reductions.

Mentoring. Mentors have been crucial to the success of the program. Mentors are program directors, associate wardens, wardens, assistant commissioners and deputy commissioners. Mentors and ALDP participants typically have 8 hours of contact each month, some in one-on-one meetings. In addition, ALDP participants attend various meetings suggested by the mentor such as legislative committee hearings, media events and staff meetings. Mentors take part in a three-hour training based on the NIC model of mentoring presented by Connie Roehrich, warden of Faribault prison. The revised curriculum gave the mentors a clearly defined task in the first several meetings with their mentees. This improved the mentorship process significantly, and feedback from participants indicated that mentoring was one of the most effective parts of the entire program.

Projects. Projects are selected by senior management from ideas and recommendations that come from all units of MNDOC. Senior management also selects a team leader, called the project champion, who serves as a resource expert for the team. Each year there are four to five projects, and four to five participants assigned to each team. Here are three examples of projects that were selected:

1. Asset preservation: How to better preserve the assets of DOC;
2. Greening of DOC: How to help the DOC reduce its carbon footprint; and
3. Sergeant roles and responsibilities: How to prepare the next layer of the organization for integration into the employee development model that was created for ALDP.

Keys to Success

One of the keys to success is having a senior manager as the project champion. This keeps the focus on solving real problems so the organization sees the benefit of supporting ALDP. The involvement of top managers ensured that the program participants have easy access to mentors, without which ALDP would have just been a succession of workshops. In addition, some member of the selection and planning committees rotate each year. This helps maintain continuity and keeps the process unbiased and transparent. Rotational planning also keeps new ideas flowing into the program. Although the selection members change, the selection criteria stay the same.

Lessons Learned

Going into the third year, there have been a large number of lessons learned. After the projects are completed and presented to senior management, it is critical to have a process to ensure ideas are implemented and followed up on periodically. In addition, there must be a clear understanding of the role and the parameters of the project so participants do not get “project creep.” Project creep occurs when the project grows to become something never intended or approved. For example, if a project designed to study the hiring process begins to include processes not related to this, such as manager training, then project creep has occurred. To combat this, teams discuss and define what the project is and what it is not in the first team meeting.

Something often overlooked in government is the need to market programs aggressively and to keep a good applicant pool through continuous recruiting. The Selection Committee has learned that employees not selected for ALDP can become disenfranchised. The committee now holds informational meetings to help employees better prepare to apply for ALDP. In the second year, the Planning Committee noticed that even the most experienced participants became anxious when they presented to 70 peers and senior managers, so the committee decided to incorporate more practice presentations into the program.

Program Benefits

Program participants who have been promoted have indicated they felt better prepared for their new job. Individuals who have not yet been promoted have said they approach their work in a different manner. MNDOC is also creating an elaborate database of the knowledge, skills and abilities required to be a senior leader. Surveys created by Personnel Decisions International, a large assessment organization, and assessment instruments created by MNDOC were used to develop a leadership behavior and knowledge database. This database will assist future Selection Committee members as they now have a standard to measure applicants against. Although the program is costly — the total is about \$1,000 per person — each participant is involved in more than 200 hours of project work, classroom time and mentoring. There are some data to suggest that people who complete ALDP are more likely to be promoted. It may also be that people selected are already considered highly qualified and could have been promoted even without the ALDP participation. Regardless, MNDOC is better preparing them for future promotions.

While there were lessons learned on how to improve the program, some of the best lessons came in the form of unexpected benefits. Participants who have completed the program often volunteer to be members of future selection and planning committees. Having invested 200 hours in self-development, members want to help others experience what they have experienced. In fact, participants want the program to continue, so MNDOC is planning for annual ALDP get-together. The model has become so successful

that senior managers have requested a mini-ALDP just for them. Finally, one of the most valuable benefits has been the relationships developed between senior leaders and ALDP participants.

The Steps to a Successful Leadership Program

- 1) *Identify a planning committee.* It will move the process along and make the program and curriculum relevant.
- 2) *Identify goals and objectives.* It is important to scope the project to define what it is and what it is not.
- 3) *Establish selection criteria.* Selection criteria raises the bar. While others may choose to have “first come first serve,” MNDOC believes senior managers should be selected by something other than just chance.
- 4) *Select projects.* Have the group work on real projects that have meaning and add value to the organization.
- 5) *Identify ALDP project champions.* Project champions need to help the team steer the boat. They are subject matter experts, but they are really facilitators. The best ones know when to push, when to pull and when to leave the group alone to learn.
- 6) *Establish a budget.* It cost less than you think.
- 7) *Create the program.* This is the easy part.
- 8) *Market the program.* In retrospect, this should really be a higher priority as marketing is a key to success.
- 9) *Select participants.* Consider how you will deal with people not selected
- 10) *Conduct program.* Internal and external resources worked well for MNDOC.
- 11) *Evaluate.* Begin by identifying how you will measure program success. Decide first what to achieve and then evaluate at the end of the program if the goals were accomplished.

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