

Executive Branch workforce: 62,609

Synopsis

South Carolina (SC) is one of 26 jurisdictions that participate in the National Certified Public Manager Consortium. Since 1996, the state has offered an 18-month program leading to CPM certification. SC's approach stands out for several reasons: It redesigned the program in 2001 so that participants would proceed through the program as part of a defined cohort, rather than at their own pace. This change is just one of the ways the program seeks to build strong relationships across departments. In addition, the state has evaluated the program based on Level III of the Kirkpatrick model (see page 58), which evaluates longer-term outcomes from training. The case describes SC's assessment efforts to date and the challenges to implementing more rigorous program-evaluation.

Challenges

■ **Retirements.** At the end of 2004, 32 percent of SC's Executive Branch workforce were within five years of retirement-eligibility. In January 2000, the state introduced an incentive program that allows state employees and teachers to retire, continue to work, and receive their salary over a five year period (during which time their retirement distribution is held in escrow). About 5,500 executive branch employees are currently participating in the program. In the short term, the incentive should forestall retirements, buying SC additional time to prepare. Yet eventually, SC's mature workforce will retire in record numbers. It's that inevitability that the Budget and Control Board's Office of Human Resources (OHR) has been trying to drive home to agency heads through an intensive education effort.

OHR staff are showing agencies how to mine their workforce data to identify which employees are approaching retirement eligibility and to develop succession plans. Rather than a one-for-one replacement pool, where a single candidate is earmarked for a specific promotional opportunity, agencies are encouraged to develop a pool of leaders they can pick from, explains OHR Director Sam Wilkins. They're also encouraged to integrate succession planning with other tactics such as recruitment and retention to create a broader workforce planning strategy.

■ **Upgrading the Certified Public Manager (CPM) Program.** Recognizing that it would be losing many managers, SC launched a statewide leadership-development program. In 1996, the program became accredited by the National Certified Public Manager Consortium (<http://www.cpmconsortium.org>). Five years later, the state rounded up agency leaders and asked for feedback on the CPM program. While the program had been effective, strategic changes were proposed to better address shortages in the state's leadership pipeline.

In the initial stage of our research, we interviewed a number of states that have CPM programs and that participate in the National Certified Public Manager Consortium. Among these, South Carolina stood out for three reasons:

First, the state has produced a lot of CPM graduates: 265, including the class that's about to finish the program. Second, SC has radically redesigned its CPM program since 2001. Many of the problems that needed fixing are ones that other jurisdictions face, which makes SC's experiences relevant to agencies at all levels of government.

Another deciding factor in choosing South Carolina is that the state has a plan, now partially implemented, to systematically evaluate its CPM program using what has become the gold standard in the field of training and development: the Kirkpatrick Model of Evaluation. (See sidebar on page 58 "What Is the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model?"). While SC is still working toward the fourth, and most challenging, level of Kirkpatrick's model, its effort to bring more rigor to the evaluation process puts it ahead of many other jurisdictions.

These three factors make the state's CPM program distinctive; the coup de grâce is that the state was one of three, top-ranked states in the 2005 Government Performance Project's "People" category. South Carolina earned an A-, bested only by Georgia and tied with Virginia.

Approach

The National CPM Consortium specifies certain components that every CPM program must include. Beyond these, there's room for variation. So when SC asked for feedback on its CPM program, it was looking for things it could improve upon and still meet the National Consortium's accreditation standards. As it turned out, there were several important aspects of the program that needed fixing.

■ **Self-selection.** Any state employee could sign up to take the courses that, at the time, made up SC's CPM curriculum. As a result, says Laurette Burdyl, State Training Director, "the people in the program weren't necessarily part of an agency succession planning initiative."

- **Low agency commitment.** Because the agencies weren't nominating participants, their commitment to the program was very low. When their workload increased or their budget was cut, they might not be invested in making sure their employees finished the program.
- **Open enrollment.** Employees could register for individual courses within the CPM program in whatever order, and at whatever time, suited their schedule. That meant they might have different classmates from course to course. People moved through the program at different rates. As a result, in the eyes of both agency leaders and prospective participants, the program seemed to take "forever" to complete.

Acting on this feedback, South Carolina made significant changes in 2001.

- **Agency nomination.** Every spring, OHR asks agencies to nominate one or more employees for the next CPM program, which begins every fall. It reviews applications to make sure candidates have had enough supervisory experience that they're ready for the next challenge. They must also have completed one basic supervisory course offered through the state.
- **Program cohorts.** Rather than signing up for courses à la carte, participants now take a series of courses that have been carefully sequenced. As a result, they move through the program from start to finish as a group.

Program Design

The CPM program takes 18 months to complete. Participants typically meet for two consecutive days per month and complete homework assignments and projects outside of class. They must attend 90 percent of class sessions to qualify for certification, although there's some flexibility to allow participants to take make-up classes the following year.

- **CPM Competency Clusters.** SC's CPM program components are clustered into four areas and sequenced to build from the specific needs of individuals and groups and to general trends in government.

1. Self-management and personal development:

Participants complete the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory and a 360-degree feedback process in advance. The program begins with a "Developmental Retreat" designed to kick-start individual development and build a cohesive cohort. The two-day event combines experiential learning using a ropes course, results of the MBTI, writing an Individual Development Plan based on the 360-degree feedback, and forming small groups with other participants who are working on similar issues. The groups are structured so that, over the first six months of the program, members are coaching each other in setting behavioral goals and trying to meet them.

- ### 2. Leading individuals and groups:
- Sessions of varying length focus on generational differences, diversity, communication, conflict, performance management, team leadership, and effective presentations.

3. Understanding organizational systems and cultures:

Topics include systems and process improvement, agency accountability reports, performance measures, strategic planning, workforce planning, Franklin Covey's 4 Roles of Leadership, organizational culture, and effective presentations.

4. Knowledge of state government and trends:

Administrators and program experts from the Budget and Control Board, the University of South Carolina and other areas of state government lead sessions on an overview of state government, the legislative and budgetary process, ethics, human resource management, procurement, auditing, and the impact of technology. In addition, each class member makes a presentation to the class about his or her agency—not just what it does, but what its top issues and challenges are. Through these presentations, people begin to see the connection between their own agency and others. They discover that many departments are struggling with the same problems. Getting the bigger picture can be a major ah-ha moment — a developmental leap that many jurisdictions and agencies find lacking when they look at their succession pool.

- **Emphasis on practical application.** Rather than simply presenting theory and best practices, the program emphasizes what Burdyl calls the so-what factor: What can you take from this course content and apply back at your agency? What issues or problems might this help you address?

Participants are constantly challenged to use what they learn in class in various application activities. In the sessions that focus on performance management, for example, they learn delegation, situational leadership, and other skills. First, they practice them with each other in class. Then they have to try them out for real, with their own subordinates and co-workers, and report back on their experiences. What worked? What bombed? What would you do differently next time?

- **Final examination.** To be accredited, all CPM programs must include a final examination. South Carolina's is an open-book and take-home exam. Rather than testing mastery of facts, the exam emphasizes application. "We don't want them to regurgitate Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," explains Burdyl. "We want them to bring together all the course material and describe how they would apply it." Typically, the exam includes a number of scenarios that any agency leader confronts. In explaining how they would respond, participants must demonstrate what they've learned about themselves and about teams, organizations, systems, state government, and larger, environmental trends.
- **CPM project.** As required for CPM certification, each candidate in SC's program completes a project designed to improve services, processes, or products within an agency. Coached by consultants with problem-solving and research expertise, candidates hone their skills while developing new ideas for improving agency services or reducing costs. One project analyzed clinician productivity to improve billing systems for the Department of Mental Health. Another investigated the impact of work centers on response time to wildfires for the Forestry Commission. A third designed an assessment program for the Department of Transportation to improve the maintenance of highways.

Cost

Agencies pay \$1,850 per participant, which can be spread over two fiscal years.

Evaluation

At the final Capstone Retreat, OHR staff engage each CPM cohort in a "SWOT" analysis, identifying the program's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This feedback is used to adjust the program, as needed. For example, SC will drop an off-the-shelf leadership course and replace it with something more easily customized to state government. Participants have also suggested adding a project-management session and another on values-based decision making.

Such feedback is a good example of a Level I evaluation in Kirkpatrick's model: a measure of customer satisfaction, or what trainers sometimes refer to disparagingly as "smile sheets." While Level I feedback is useful for refining the program, it doesn't tell OHR about actual outcomes. "We try to go as bottom-line as we can," says Burdyl. "We try to show how the individual was impacted, but also how their agency was."

Toward that end, South Carolina has developed a more extensive, quantitative evaluation for the CPM program. It's an added bonus that this instrument was researched, designed, and piloted by OHR staffer Katherine Fanning as her final application project in the CPM program. Its intent is to measure Level III learning, which Kirkpatrick defines as actual behavior change resulting from the learning experience. The evaluation is distributed to program participants and their supervisors six months after the end of the program. It was administered for the first time to evaluate the program that finished in May 2003 and again to assess the 2004 class.

- **Graduates' Evaluation of the CPM Program.** Graduates are asked whether their management responsibility has increased since completing the program; how much their approach to management has changed; and the extent to which their skills have improved in areas such as performance management, process improvement, and knowledge of state government environment and trends.
- **Supervisors' Evaluation of the CPM Program.** Supervisors are asked to evaluate improvements in the CPM graduate's skills, knowledge, and performance. They also rate specific areas in which the agency has benefited both from the employee's experience in the program and from his or her final CPM application project.

Feedback from these surveys has been positive. The majority of graduates and supervisors responded with a rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale to the question "How much did the CPM Program help you develop professionally?" Most supervisors rated the extent to which their employee's approach to management had changed since completing the CPM program as four or above on a five-point scale. The majority of supervisors also indicated that their employee's management responsibilities have increased since attending the CPM Program.

Yet SC has also encountered some challenges in trying to implement this evaluation. The primary obstacle has been getting supervisors to complete the survey. Whether they have left state government, moved to another position, or simply forgotten, the response rate for supervisors has been too low to produce representative data. Thus, while South Carolina has advanced ahead of many jurisdictions by creating an evaluation instrument that goes beyond "Did they like it?" to investigate "So what difference did it make?"—it must still find the right carrot or stick to boost a critical stakeholder group's participation.

Until then, it may have to look at other outcomes: Since the program was redesigned in 2001, enrollment has doubled, suggesting that OHR's campaign to promote succession planning and to overhaul the CPM program have hit the mark.

An additional impact is that the number of CPM graduates is becoming a critical mass. They have created their own membership association, the Society of Certified Public Managers of South Carolina. While independently incorporated and separate from state government, the society has partnered with OHR in sponsoring leadership development events for its members and other state employees.

Burdyl foresees the day when candidates and alumni collaborate on problem-solving teams to deal with issues across state government. Not only would such assignments stretch people beyond their own department and comfort zone; they would also deepen the network of connections that the program is building across state government.

Next Steps

Many state agencies offer internal programs for developing leaders within their organization. The statewide CPM program is different, however. "We try to get people to move beyond their agency issues," says Burdyl. "We're developing leaders not only for agencies but for all of state government. Eventually, we will have people who can move more easily from one agency to another because they will have developed a common language."

If that happens, SC will have overcome significant odds. Even when organizations train a cadre of elite leaders with the intention of moving them around, few leaders actually achieve such mobility, research has found. Departments or agencies persist in choosing leaders from within or hiring leaders who have grown up in the same technical area. Human nature can be obdurate. Yet as baby boomers retire, leaving a smaller pool of younger workers to replace them, talent wars will heat up. Such shortages, Burdyl thinks, might increase the competition for talent among agencies. If that happens, South Carolina will have a network of managers groomed to think beyond their own agencies and to understand the bigger picture of state government.

How Do We Know if What We're Doing Is Effective?

In our discussion of the research findings, we noted a major shortcoming of many organizations' efforts to build the leadership outline: the lack of systematic evaluation to assess the outcomes. The chart on page 9 points to a variety of evaluation methods described in the case studies. Nevertheless, one of this study's strongest conclusions is that organizations could be doing more in this area—a point that many of the jurisdictions we interviewed were quick to acknowledge.

For readers who may be wondering what they can do to improve in this area, we recommend the following resources:

- Kirkpatrick, Donald (1998) *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. Alexandria, VA: American Society for Training and Development.

Kirkpatrick is to training and development what Dr. Deming was to TQM and Norton and Kaplan are to the Balanced Scorecard. Since it was first published in 1975, the "Kirkpatrick Model" has become the gold standard for analyzing training outcomes. Most corporate trainers and Chief Learning Officers know his four levels backwards and forwards, but very few can claim to have reached the pinnacle.

Level I evaluates participants' "reaction and planned action" following training—that is, what they liked and didn't like. Basically, it's an exit poll.

Level II measures self-reported learning, or the skills, knowledge, and attitude changes they say they learned from the training

Level III is where the rubber meets the road. It measures actual behavior, or how the participant applied the learning on the job. Here, there may be multiple sources of data: not only the participant but also his or her supervisor, peers, and subordinates.

Level IV asks the "so what?" question. What difference did it make to the organization? It assesses business results, such as the change in customer satisfaction, productivity, morale, quality, etc.

These four are the essentials, although Kirkpatrick has also described a Level V evaluation that calculates actual financial returns.

- Jennifer Martineau and Kelly Hannum, *Evaluating the Impact of Leadership Development*, Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 2004.

The Center for Creative Leadership is one of the foremost institutions in the field of leadership development. Not only does it offer four-star executive development programs; CCL also conducts research, publishes articles and books, and generally keeps the field on its toes and moving forward.

This slim book is a gem. Offering clear, step-by-step instructions for designing effective evaluations, it's an ideal guide for the professional who is new to program evaluation. It's a pleasure to find solid methods and intelligent advice combined with friendly, non-technical writing.

- Eric Shepherd and Janet Goodwin, *Assessments Through the Learning Process*, Questionmark Corporation White Paper, 2004.
www.questionmark.com/us/whitepapers

You'll have to register to download this white paper from Questionmark.com's website, but it's painless and quick. This 30-page document provides a basic primer on learning assessments. It defines different types and describes how to develop effective instruments and analyze their results. Not surprisingly, the authors are especially enthusiastic about computer-based assessments (this company's product).