AAPA PROFESSIONAL PORT MANAGER

Leadership & Workforce Development Capstone

Developing Today's Leaders for the Future

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Lorrie Taylor serves as the Executive Port Director and CEO at the Port of Orange, bringing over 12 years of dedicated service to the port. She is a Lamar University alumna, holding a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting, and is a certified public accountant with 30 years' experience.

Under her leadership, the Port of Orange has seen steady growth, with over a 50% increase in revenues alongside securing $42 million in federal and state grants to expand infrastructure, strengthen operations, and position the port for future growth.

Today, the port generates $1.6 billion in economic activity and supports 6,700 jobs, making it an important economic engine for Southeast Texas.

Executive Summary

Leadership & Workforce Development: Developing Today's Leaders for the Future is a practical professional-development project designed for port and maritime professionals. The project addresses a basic workforce challenge: ports need capable leaders today while also developing employees who can assume greater responsibility, preserve institutional knowledge, and lead through change.

The Capstone was developed as a training project and includes a professional training presentation, interactive activities including two online self-assessments, two port-specific leadership scenarios, reflection worksheet, and a Leadership Toolbox containing five checklists/templates.

The methodology combined the project objectives with the user's port-industry experience, practical leadership resources, online professional-development sources, realistic maritime situations, and reusable tools. The material was reviewed and organized for both in-person and virtual delivery.

1. Project Topic

The project focused on leadership and workforce development within port and maritime organizations. Port operations depend on people, and leadership decisions affect safety, service, efficiency, employee engagement, communication, and organizational continuity.

Workforce development is a leadership responsibility which includes: developing employees, creating clear expectations, transferring knowledge, providing feedback, and preparing people for greater responsibility. This is not an activity that should begin only when a vacancy occurs but part of maintaining a capable and resilient organization.

2. Project Objective

The objective of the Capstone was to develop and organize a practical Leadership and Workforce Development training module that port professionals could use to strengthen leadership skills and workforce-development practices.

- Developed a comprehensive Leadership and Workforce Development training module for port professionals and emerging leaders.
- Provided practical techniques supporting communication, employee engagement, coaching and mentoring.
- Introduced workforce-development and succession-planning strategies that supported employee growth and future workforce needs.
- Used realistic, port-specific situations to move participants from leadership concepts to practical decision-making.
- Provided reusable templates, checklists and worksheet that can be used after the training.
- Supported in-person and virtual delivery of interactive training.

3. Approach / Methodology

The project identified leadership and workforce-development issues and progressed through objective setting, content development, activity development, creation of practical tools, review, and delivery.

Development process:

- Defined the leadership and workforce-development issues within the port-industry.
- Established learning objectives based on leadership, communication, workforce development, succession planning, and practical leadership challenges.
- Developed the training presentation around these objectives.
- Created interactive activities and self-reflection exercises centered around realistic port scenarios.
- Developed the Leadership Toolbox so participants have resources they can use after the training.
- Organized the materials for in-person and virtual delivery.
- Established evaluation questions that can be used to assess understanding, relevance, practical application, and useful tools.

4. Project Resources

Resources were selected based on their relevance to the training topic. This capstone project relied on professional development websites, AAPA resources, port industry experience, survey feedback, and the training and toolbox materials developed.

- Leadership & Workforce Development Workshop at the annual conference and two virtual/in-person workshops after the annual conference
- Leadership & Workforce Development Interactive Activities; online self-assessments, port-specific scenarios, and reflection worksheet
- Port Leadership Development Plan
- Employee Mentoring & Coaching Guide
- Performance Review Guide
- Employee Performance Evaluation Form
- Goal Setting and Performance Planning Template
- Succession Planning Checklist
- PPM Capstone Summary Report

Project References

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5. Project Content / Activities

The training is organized to move from leadership awareness to practical application:

- Leadership in the port industry; characteristics of effective leaders; trust; collaboration; accountability; and leadership style.
- Communication and team development, including active listening and feedback.
- Workforce development, including coaching, mentoring, professional growth, cross-training, retention, and developing future leaders.
- Succession planning, including critical roles, employee readiness, knowledge transfer, and development needs.
- Decision-making and leadership under pressure through realistic port scenarios.
- Self-reflection through emotional intelligence and online leadership-style assessments including a closer look at the pressures of leading.

Interactive activities:

The Interactive activities included two online self-assessments, two port-specific scenarios, and a successful leadership practice worksheet.

- “The Captain Is Waiting” — a time-sensitive inbound vessel situation involving different understandings among operations, a tenant, and a pilot.
- “The Day the Ship Parted All Mooring Lines” — an emergency involving a ship, sudden squall, tug response, communication challenges, and pressure to continue.
- Successful Leadership Practice Worksheet — asks participants to reflect on leadership behavior, identify an area for improvement, and identify a practical takeaway.

Leadership Toolbox:

- Port Leadership Development Plan
- Employee Mentoring & Coaching Guide
- Performance Review Guide
- Employee Performance Evaluation Form
- Goal Setting and Performance Planning Template
- Succession Planning Checklist

6. Audience Identification and Implications for Practice

The primary audience for this training includes port and maritime professionals, including managers, supervisors, emerging leaders, human resource staff, and employees preparing for greater responsibility. The materials are designed to be adaptable across different departments, roles, and port organizational structures.

The training can serve as a resource for leadership development, a refresher for current supervisors and managers, or a starting point for employees developing their leadership skills. It provides practical tools that can be used for employee development, mentoring and coaching, performance conversations, succession planning, knowledge transfer, and individual leadership development.

The materials can be used for in-person or virtual professional-development sessions and include a Leadership Self-Assessment, Leadership Scenarios, Individual Leadership Development Plan, Mentoring and Coaching Guide, Succession Planning Checklist, and performance and goal-setting tools. Together, these resources are intended to help port professionals apply leadership skills in their current roles and prepare for future responsibilities.

7. Reflection on Learning

Developing this capstone reinforced something I have seen throughout my career in the port industry: leadership problems rarely arrive as clean, textbook examples. They usually happen at the worst possible time, when time is short, people disagree, communication breaks down, or employees are looking for direction.

I chose to make the scenarios operational to allow participants to talk through difficult moments before they are facing one themselves. The project also reinforced the value of simple tools. Leadership concepts may be easy to agree with in a workshop, but it is harder to use consistently after returning to the port. The toolbox is intended to close the gap by identifying strengthening skills; coaching tools to support employee growth; performance tools to create clear follow-up; and succession planning tools to connect individual development with organizational needs.

Another important lesson was the need to develop people before there is a vacancy. Succession planning is more useful when it is an ongoing development process rather than beginning with a retirement announcement. Finally, the project made me think more deliberately about my own leadership. Operational knowledge is important, but listening, communication, employee development, and building confidence in others are equally important to organizational continuity.

This capstone project helped me grow both professionally and personally. Through developing and presenting a workshop, I strengthened my ability to organize and communicate information effectively. More importantly, the experience pushed me outside of my comfort zone and helped me become more confident and comfortable with public speaking. Looking back, I feel this project not only improved my presentation skills but also gave me greater confidence in my ability to engage and connect with an audience.

8. Conclusion

Leadership & Workforce Development is developing today's leaders for the future by providing practical, port-focused approaches to develop people and strengthen organization readiness. The project combined instruction, self-reflection, realistic scenarios, and reusable workplace checklist and templates.

The evaluation survey provides the next step for measuring participant response and application. Once training is delivered, participant feedback can be incorporated into the materials and used to strengthen the PDB presentation and future versions of the training.