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Succession Planning in International Humanitarian Organisations in South Sudan

ALFRED MUSUKUTWA, THEBETH R. MASUNDA, MANASE K. CHIWESHE¹

Abstract

The article explores succession planning in international humanitarian organisations in South Sudan, as succession planning is central to business continuity. For organisations to function successfully and sustainably, there is need for a clear leadership succession plan wherein the incumbent prepares their replacement by imparting the knowledge and vision of the organisation. Business leadership was used as the conceptual framework guiding the study. The study utilised a qualitative methodology with a bias towards the descriptive research design. Purposive sampling was used as a sampling method. The study used in-depth interviews and narrative data analysis for data collection. A review of the literature was drawn from facts from books, journal articles and policy documents. For data analysis, the study used textual analysis. The study found that humanitarian organisations use the identification of pivotal positions to plan succession. The findings show that humanitarian organisations use a system of assessing job performance for planning succession. The study indicated that humanitarian organisations utilise strategic leadership development to plan succession.

Keywords: talent pool, business continuity, departure, workforce development, lifeblood

INTRODUCTION

The development of succession plans enables business continuity in an organisation should the current leadership or management leave the organisation for various reasons (Lowan and Chisoro, 2016). However, despite its importance, there

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remains a gap in understanding how succession planning is implemented and its effectiveness within humanitarian organisations. This study aims to address this gap by examining current practices, challenges and implications of succession planning in the context of humanitarian organisations. Business continuity refers to the organisation's ability to ensure that qualified employees are always available and in place to carry out its plethora of job functions (Collings *et al.*, 2017). Developing the potential for business continuity is a top priority in the humanitarian sector. As part of a broader human resource (HR) planning framework, succession planning is just one strategy that can help or support the organisation to address HR issues related to the ageing workforce, increasing retirement eligibility, negative net migration, shrinking population, potential skill shortages and internal competency. Succession planning also ensures a smooth handover of power sharing and knowledge retention when experts leave the organisation (Lowan and Chisoro, 2016). Succession planning is a key strategic tool for organisational survival and competitive advantage in the knowledge economy. Organisations should give due care (Nel *et al.*, 2008). When succession planning policies are in place, employees' needs are balanced and suitable replacements are easily identified to fill senior positions (*ibid.*). To understand the area under investigation, succession planning is defined as the systematic organisational effort to ensure the entity's continued existence to maintain and develop new competencies and to leverage its development based on a strategic view of what is expected (Lowan and Chisoro, 2016). Understanding challenges inherent in succession planning for non-profit organisations is essential for grasping the broader implications of this study. Subsequent sections will look into these challenges, highlighting the complexities faced by non-profit leaders and the potential repercussions of inadequate succession planning strategies.

A mission and vision drive non-profit organisations and they establish themselves in regions around the world to do work that fulfils specific needs (Jules, 2021). The work of non-profits must be long-lasting and consistent as they serve, grow and change over time (*ibid.*). However, grave challenges threaten the non-profit sector, which is likely to either reduce its

effectiveness or bring about the coming in of other non-profit organisations that challenge its failed effectiveness and planning for the inevitable departure of present leaders, also known as a succession planning (Hopkins *et al.*, 2014). Due to ongoing obligations to cover administrative costs and recurring pressures of programme spending, many non-profits are believed to under-invest in their staff development, including leadership development (Selden and Sowa, 2015). It is key to address these challenges to prevent the potential consequences of not having effective succession planning strategies in place.

Norris-Tirrell *et al.* (2018) posit that most non-profits do not have a succession plan to fill leadership vacancies. Succession planning can be defined in two ways. Traditionally, succession planning is a structured process involving identifying and preparing a potential successor to assume a new role (Bozer *et al.*, 2015). Rothwell (2010) defines succession management as an organisation's deliberate and systematic effort to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future and encourage individual advancement. Succession management is the resourcing strategy that ensures continuity of tasks by balancing organisational needs in terms of competencies and personal attributes with available resources (Galjot, 2018). Succession planning is an ongoing process where future leaders are identified and developed to move them into leadership roles (Jules, 2021). To be more specific to the leadership role, succession planning is the process that plans organisational transference from one executive to another and involves the selection and appointment of successors either with or outside the organisation (Bozer *et al.*, 2015).

A benefit of succession planning is that it ensures continuity of leadership in an organisation to plan and be ready for and manage future challenges by preparing leaders to fill positions of both planned and unplanned leader departure (Varhegyi and Japsen, 2017). Among the many challenges in non-profit organisations' leadership succession planning is scepticism about hiring outside successors to fill vacant leadership positions (McKee and Froelich, 2016). Non-profit leaders are compelled and propelled by a passion for the mission and vision

of their specific organisational culture and being effective in their role (*ibid.*). The speed of change has been increasing. Challenges are becoming increasingly complex and employees, especially those in positions with the most significant impacts on business results, need to make sense of these challenges and fight them (Day, 2007). Furthermore, a talent war has emerged because many retiring are more than those entering the workforce market (Galjot, 2018). The study explores succession planning in humanitarian organisations.

BACKGROUND

DEFINITION OF SUCCESSION PLANNING

Succession planning is anticipating and then planning the replacement of essential employees in an organisation (Cappelli, 2011). Succession planning is creating a plan for what will happen when a leadership gap occurs and a new leader is needed (Jules, 2021). Succession planning is suggested to be a proactive planned and long-term strategy that addresses and meets future leadership needs of the organisation (Vanderbloom, 2015). Essentially, succession planning is a conscious decision by an organisation to foster and promote the continual development of employees and ensure that key positions maintain some measure of stability, thus enabling an organisation to achieve business objectives and continuity (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2008). Benefits of succession planning include providing members of an organisation an a career path that is supported and projected towards their success and growth. It retains and develops talent within the organisation while increasing productivity and leaders increase their skills and become motivated. It shows concern for and reinforcement of the organisation's mission, vision and goals while fostering a robust organisational culture. Finally, it allows organisations to receive a return on their investment by decreasing the time and resources used to recruit and orient new employees (Kippist, 2013).

Succession planning is a key ingredient in developing an inclusive and diverse pipeline. Collings *et al.* (2017) observe that succession planning is Talent Management's forgotten but critical tool in the talent-management toolkit because it is the

element of talent management concerned with planning for and putting in place the human capital to perform the tasks necessary to advance the organisation's strategy. Specifically,

Succession planning describes a process of anticipating and then planning for the replacement of important employees in an organisation... It is an organisational practice or system of practices for addressing succession events (Cappelli, 2011:673).

A fundamental assumption of succession planning is that internal development and work-based learning will prepare candidates to fill future openings (*ibid.*).

Organisations can run with a lean staff without well-considered succession planning or maintain surplus workforce capacity (Reilly *et al.*, 2014). If organisations run with a lean workforce, they find it difficult to re-staff after departures and have to quickly identify, recruit, select and train workers (Cappelli, 2011). Waiting until the need arises means that the organisation constantly performs with suboptimal talent. These problems are exacerbated by turnover increases or firms' growth, creating new staffing needs (Reilly *et al.*, 2014). While succession planning can help organise and prepare talent, the implementation of succession plans rarely achieves the desired smoothness of transition (Cappelli, 2008). Naturally, it is often difficult to forecast future talent demand because it requires knowing how the organisation will grow and strategically respond to such growth, neither of which is easily predictable (Cappelli and Keller, 2017).

Training the successor and formulating a vision for the company after succession can be added to this set of activities that are both the responsibility of the incumbent or transitioning leader (Jules, 2021). A succession plan is also essential because, without one, a critical mass of knowledge is leaving the organisation with limited replacement opportunities (*ibid.*). Simply put, by not developing a succession plan, organisations could fail to pass down knowledge about the organisation, including important managerial and leadership skills (Earls and Hall, 2018). Rothwell (2016) posits that succession planning and management are important for several reasons. If the organisation intends to have longevity, it must

make intentional steps to have the right people in the right places. Unfortunately, fewer people are advancing to higher-level positions in their organisations due to changes in their economic structure.

OVERVIEW OF SUCCESSION PLANNING

Rothwell (2005) introduced a succession planning model that identifies seven steps for systematic succession planning and management: to commit, assess present work, appraise individual performance, assess future work, assess future individual potential, close the development gap and to evaluate the succession planning programme. In his model, he mentioned that promotion from within the organisation is vital because, for succession planning to be effective, the organisation must have some means to replace key job incumbents as vacancies occur in their positions. Promotion from within also provides important benefits. The employer can initially check the references of existing employees easily. Second, the cost of promoting from within an organisation is often lower than hiring from outside (*ibid.*). The process of succession planning within leadership and institutions in Africa is faced with various obstacles that arise from distinct socio-economic, cultural and infrastructural factors (Matagi, 2023). There are numerous global polarising agents, but currently, the worst of those are racism, religion, gender, ethnicity and politics which stand as obstacles to succession planning in Africa and the majority of Africans are zealots of either one or others (*ibid.*). These problems are not common in the other global regions, but are limited to Africa because succession planning has not been prioritised with most leaders pulling the ethnic or racial card to stay in office forever (Siambi, 2022).

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, Fayol (1916), a management specialist, suggested that succession planning could be a great strategy for keeping a company stable. The idea behind this technique is to create a pipeline for leadership continuity at all levels of the organisation. Fayol believed that for a company to continue thriving and competing, its leaders should start developing the necessary leadership skills and

traits for long-term success. He warned that if businesses react only to the need for leadership continuity, they risk filling senior positions with unqualified successors (*ibid.*). Fayol (*ibid.*) divided management responsibilities into planning, organising, coordinating, commanding and controlling. Stability is guaranteed by management by having the right employees at the right place as it contributes to the psychological well-being of employees, provides employees with time to understand their work in-depth, increases their efficiency and accountability and plans and, therefore, ensures business runs smoothly when disruptions occur in the organisation (Fayol, 1949). Altogether, these increase productivity and willingness to perform well and contribute to company growth (Galjot, 2018). On the other hand, if the principle is violated, employees might feel unsafe, resulting in under-performance and non-willingness to participate (*ibid.*). Consequently, an organisation must deal with unexploited under-utilised resources or failure to meet business objectives. Time, effort and money spent on recruitment, training and development of unsatisfied workers will go to waste (Fayol, 1949).

Succession planning occurred in Europe after the Second World War due to numerous deaths, followed by promotions in organisations in replacement planning, rather than succession planning (Sloan and Rogelberg, 2016). Rothwell (2010) defined succession planning as identifying critical management positions starting at the level of project manager, supervisor and extending up to the highest position in the organisation. Succession planning also describes management positions to provide maximum flexibility in lateral management moves and to ensure that as individuals achieve greater seniority, their management skills broaden and become more generalised concerning total organisational objectives rather than purely departmental ones (Galjot, 2018). Galjot (*ibid.*) defines succession planning as a systematic information-gathering process aiming to find one or more successors to a position or an employee who carries out tasks that are important for organisational performance. However, finding a successor is not sufficient. The successor needs to be developed, trained and

prepared to take over tasks from a person leaving his position (Day, 2007).

In the African context, many young African managers have expressed their frustration about being present but not having a voice (Matagi, 2023). They feel pressured to act as mere observers, under the guise of being mentored for future leadership roles. The process of succession planning within leadership and institutions in Africa is faced with various obstacles that arise from distinct socio-economic, cultural and infrastructural factors.. Leadership succession planning has become increasingly important and new frameworks and cycles have been developed to advance approaches to this process. These constructs have been introduced to promote the proactive preparation of successors for leadership roles. However, Clark (2015) warns that there can be no success if there are no successors to the mission.

In the majority of academic institutions, management is rarely empowered to identify, archive or retrieve organisational knowledge. Instead, most organisational knowledge is often lost with the resignation or retirement of employees, leading to a steep learning curve for new employees, wasted productivity and redundant employee efforts. Most higher education institutions do not have a formal succession planning framework in place. Any succession planning or knowledge retention practices are ad hoc, at best, uniform format across departments. The lack of succession planning within higher education institutions is the market norm (Villien, 2023)

Mutambara and Mutambara (2012), in a study of challenges of talent management in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Zimbabwe, found that 72% of employees felt that their respective organisations were not engaging in succession planning for key personnel. This is a clear testimony that succession planning efforts were deficient. However, comments from the management of these organisations suggest that the nature of humanitarian work and the limited scope of activities, short funding cycles and lack of certainty, defy any logical long-

term investment in employees. Certain issues in the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) leadership in major emergencies were presented in a study conducted in by BRC (2011), which emphasised the need for an experienced pool of humanitarian aid leaders. The study indicated a lack of experienced leaders, leading to unfilled positions on one hand, and to deployments of a small group of experienced people time and again, on the other. The latter caused stress reactions, burnout, rapid turnover of staff in emergencies and poor programme delivery. Also, a need for clear authority to make high-level decisions in the field is mentioned in the study, which raised some concerns, especially in the case of lack of authority in decision-making situations.

SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT

Trends in the global village, such as technology, changing immigration laws and globalisation of production, are changing how organisations conduct their operations (Hill, 2010). The changing demographics of the global village, greater opportunities and deregulation of immigration rules compound the loss of key staff in organisations (Lowan and Chisoro, 2016). The goal of succession management is like one of succession planning. It aims to identify and develop current and future successors (Galjot, 2018). However, succession management considers the dynamics of the business environment. Real-time occurrence plays a role in succession management but is omitted in succession planning (Rothwell, 2010). In comparison, succession management is seen as more proactive, elaborate, deliberate, systematic and integrated (Berke, 2005). These characteristics of succession management result if conducted well in an entire pool of better-prepared employees, instead of just a list of candidates commonly resulting from succession planning (Galjot, 2018).

WHY SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT NOW?

The world of work is changing and no organisation can assume that essential talent will always be available. There are many reasons for this change, including:

- Demographic shifts: In many countries, leadership and skills gaps present an ever-growing challenge as the post-war generation moves into retirement. Younger generations lack the sheer numbers or the necessary skills to fill the void. In many emerging markets, numerous ambitious young workers are offset by gaps in knowledge and skills and the lack of middle and senior management to lead them.
- Skills shortages and mismatches: Despite high levels of unemployment worldwide, many positions go unfilled. Around the world, graduating students often lack the skills and work experience to compete for today's highly specialised roles.
- The rise of globalism: A company is no longer competing with another company down the street for talent, but with companies worldwide. Companies scour the globe for talent and workers no longer need to collaborate with colleagues on the same continent. The best talent has always had options but now, they have even more.
- Lack of engagement in the workforce: The top performers in the organisation are not the only ones with options.
- The changing nature of work: Traditional ideas about "full-time employment" have been obliterated over the past decade. If the organisation has not already, expect to see more contract and contingent labour, flex schedules, job sharing, retirees working part-time and other work arrangements which were unthinkable not that long ago. Further challenging the notion of "traditional careers" are the Generation X and Millennial populations, who carry high expectations for new and challenging work assignments. The relationship between people and where they work has never been less permanent. To attract and retain great talent, you need to show them what is in it for them.

Consequently, succession management requires the most resources and support from top management that can see its value. Hence, it integrates it into daily operations by giving feedback, coaching and helping employees realise their potential

(Rothwell, 2010). Interest in succession management expanded greatly in the 1980s by researching successor origin, organisation size succession rate, post-succession performance, role of corporate boards, decision-making process and the system itself (Galjot, 2018). However, most focused on CEO succession only (Kesner and Sebora, 1994). The importance of succession management has increased significantly over the past 10 years (Berke, 2005). The reason is that when executives were preparing for retirement, critical positions were vacant for too long or ill-prepared people got promoted (Galjot, 2018). Succession management is a resourcing strategy that helps balance demand and supply by tying an organisation's available potential successors to its future needs, encouraging skills analysis and the job-filling process (Day, 2007). As a result, it supports attaining strategic and operational objectives by having the right people at the right time and place doing the right things to achieve the right results. Therefore, it can be a source of competitive advantage (Rothwell, 2010).

It is important to note that contemporary succession planning should not be done without the broader HR/workforce planning process. Specifically, a gap analysis might identify succession planning as one of several priority strategies for the organisation which identifies the competencies required for specific jobs. All positions have a requisite set of knowledge, skills and abilities that are expected of employees filling that function. Thus, knowing the competencies of a job is a mandatory component of recruitment, serving as a general baseline to measure against interested potential candidates. However, succession planning provides an opportunity to review job competencies, particularly concerning current goals and objectives (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2008).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept that laid the grounding for this study is the leadership model developed by companies that wanted to change the existing leadership structure which has dominated business strategies and direction (Ochieng, 2016). Lacoma (2017) observes that a leadership model is a theoretical

framework for how to best manage employees involving how to encourage organisational continuation. Ibrahim *et al.* (2001) affirm that the sole mandate of the leadership concept is to ensure succession planning is in place to maintain redundancy in management and draft retirement programmes for retiring managers (Ochieng, 2016). The model also ensures that new leaders are well-groomed and established to take over an organisation's responsibility to prevent future conflicts of interest (*ibid.*). Consequently, the concept also depicts how thriving organisations can manoeuvre without the presence of their founders. This means that corporations, not-for-profits or cooperatives, have somewhat related projections but are fundamentally separated from the founders (*ibid.*). Bjuggren and Sund (2001) support this by acclaiming that companies should strategise succession planning programmes early by instituting continuous operations which simulate how an organisation will continue to thrive without its founders. However, Bjuggren and Sund (*ibid.*) advise that leadership model theory will highly depend on the leadership style in place, because succession planning varies depending on how an organisation is managed (Ochieng, 2016). This concept was adopted in this study as it provides a useful structure for defining the organisation's management and how organisational continuation can be achieved. The leadership model serves as the conceptual structure that explains what makes a leader great, The style represents the pattern of leadership behaviours such as planning succession for future uncertainties (Robertson, 2016). This theory is appropriate for this study as it depicts what makes great leaders great and succession planning is part of that package. Hongyun *et al.* (2020) observe that the leadership model involves a leadership style that is transformational leadership which involves the leaders achieving success through open lines of communication, communicating even through succession. This makes this conceptual framework applicable to the study as it dives into succession planning.

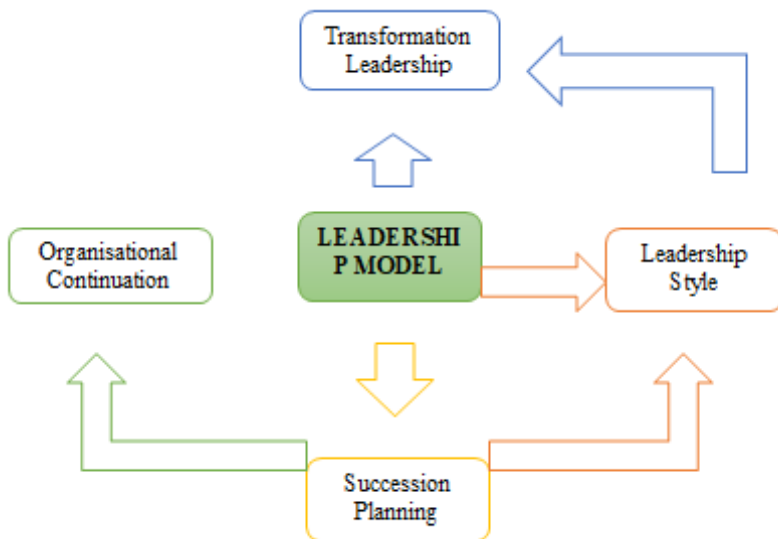


Figure 1: Leadership Model for Succession Planning in Humanitarian Organisations

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this study was based on a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This design was chosen to investigate the current trends in succession planning within humanitarian organisations in South Sudan, as outlined by Kothari *et al.* (2005). The target population consisted of supervisors and field workers affiliated to the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and Red Crescent Societies operating in South Sudan. The IFRC, as the world's largest humanitarian network, provided an extensive context for the study, with a focus on its operations, principles and organisational structure. A sample size of 10 participants, representing 50% of the managerial population in the IFRC South Sudan, was selected purposefully to facilitate in-depth exploration while minimising measurement errors and biases, in line with Creswell's recommendations (2016). The participants, comprising both South Sudanese nationals and expatriates, were selected to provide diverse perspectives on succession planning. The data collection method employed was in-depth interviews, allowing for rich and nuanced insights into

participants' experiences and perceptions. Thematic data analysis was then utilised to identify patterns and themes within the data. Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were paramount, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, maintaining anonymity and respecting participants' privacy, as stressed by Creswell (*ibid.*). Overall, the methodology employed in this study aimed to rigorously explore the phenomenon of succession planning within humanitarian organisations, adhering to sound research principles and ethical standards.

RESULTS

With organisations losing upper-level managers due to retirement, resignations and organisational restructuring exercises, the number of potential upper-level managers is also reduced. Organisations might collapse without a proper succession planning process or find it difficult to move forward. This section presents succession planning in humanitarian organisations. The results discuss succession planning along the lines of identifying pivotal positions for succession planning, assessing job performance to inform succession planning and strategic leader development.

IDENTIFYING KEY POSITIONS FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING

The participants were asked to provide how succession planning was planned for key positions at the IFRC. The respondents indicated that all positions are key and some showed mixed feelings about what they considered key positions. One participant said:

Key positions given special recognition here at IFRC are those of senior level who attend annual general meetings and contribute towards key decisions. I think a procedure is followed for the succession of these positions and it is done at the discretion of leadership. Managers inform employees at their performance appraisal that they have been identified as a successor. It is the managers and upper-level management that identify successors for key positions.

Some participants did not believe there was anything different about positions, as they viewed every position as a key position. The participants argued that every position was key as the

organisation hires for every position, meaning there will be a gap if the position is not filled. A participant said:

Looking at the programme and criteria used to choose a successor, we define a key position as those identified as key project personnel. However, I do not think we should look at that, as I do not believe that is how it should be. It must be understood that everyone is key and our positions should not be driven by work done in the past but by collective organisational goal accomplishment.

Some participants believed that directors determined key positions and it was they who approved the identification of successors for key positions as they were the ones who approved the approach to groom the successor. The participant said:

The key position identification is in the hands of the directors and it is these that determine how key positions are identified for succession planning. These directors approve the training and grooming of the successor by the office's incumbent. Without their approval, a successor cannot be chosen or trained. Competition with other organisations for talent also affects succession planning as some staff resign for greener pastures.

These results have shown powerplays in the succession planning at the IFRC as the successors are chosen after identifying key positions. If the position is not deemed key, there can be a power vacuum after the departure of the incumbent. It is also clear that competition from other humanitarian organisations affects succession planning at the IFRC.

The participants also indicated that potential successors are selected from talent pools. Line managers and senior management undertake this process. One participant noted;

Mainly, successors are selected from talent pools after going through talent reviews. It is the responsibility of supervisors and managers to review the suitability of employees to be in the talent pools. But little is known in terms of the selection criteria.

SYSTEM OF ASSESSING JOB PERFORMANCE TO INFORM SUCCESSION PLANNING

The other category used in succession planning at the IFRC is a system that assesses job performance to inform succession planning. Participants indicated that the organisation's goal is biased towards the ethos of winning or goal accomplishment

and attaining recognition for international standards. One participant said:

I think leaders must know that when they come into the position, there are people under them and as part of your being a supervisor, it is part of your responsibility to groom them. Choosing who to groom is done based on the job performance assessment.

Some participants did not view job assessment performance to inform succession planning but, rather, as evaluating a person for the current job. A participant said:

IFRC does have a system of job performance assessment. However, it is not solely systematised towards grooming successors, but for assessing a person for the job, it is working to see where improvements are needed. We do job performance assessments to evaluate the current position, not career progression.

Another section of the respondents indicated that job assessment performances were used by management to know the performances of the employees and to choose whom to set up for succession. One participant said:

I think the purpose of leadership is to know your performance so that when you get to a certain position, you can work and maximise the output of those under you. Thus, performance assessments are used to measure whether a person is suitable for leadership because they look at how well one works with others in a team.

The findings indicated different views towards job assessment at the IFRC, as some believe this system is used to assess people for promotion and identification of gaps in skills.

STRATEGIC LEADER DEVELOPMENT

The participants indicated this as the succession planning strategy that the IFRC uses. Participants indicated that this is an agency's strategic vision and recruiting strategy. One participant said:

This is a strategic vision identification leadership and managerial skill that the management at the organisation looks for when recruiting a successor. The organisation looks for talented individuals with these skills, especially vision to move the organisation forward after the departure of the current leadership.

For some participants, succession planning within the organisation was a matter of continuity even after the current leaders' departure. For this to happen, there was need for strategic leader grooming. One of the participants said:

It is imperative to use strategic leadership development to choose a leader with a vision and managerial skills and groom him by the incumbent, harnessing his skills in combination with the organisational vision and knowledge imparted by the incumbent.

These findings indicate that for succession planning to generate value, the organisation should have strategic leadership development. Participants indicated that strategic individuals with vision and managerial skills are chosen and trained for succession by the incumbent. According to one participant, the HR unit should create a conducive environment for succession planning in the IFRC. He highlighted that,

HR should be at the forefront of facilitating the succession planning process and discussion to ensure credibility and transparency. Ambiguity is not helpful and creates confusion.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the succession planning used by humanitarian organisations in South Sudan is identifying pivotal positions and grooming individuals with the talent to replace the incumbent upon retirement or resignation. Identifying and assessing potential candidates is the primary focus of succession planning. The key purpose of identifying and assessing employees against core job competencies is to help focus their learning and development opportunities to prepare them for future organisational roles. Traditional approaches to succession planning can result in a one-sided selection process – the organisation identifies a key position. Then, executives select a high-potential individual for preparation or training. Given the potential sensitivity around the decision-making process in these situations, an employee might be advised about their prospective private advancement opportunity. This process is not transparent and can negatively impact the morale of other employees (including the person chosen for succession) and their relationship with the organisation. Modern approaches to succession planning suggest that transparency and accountability are the best practices for an organisation. Recruitment should be based on merit, fairness and respect, which are maintained and supported by the succession planning process. To demonstrate these values, succession planning must be objective, independent of personal bias, merit-based, communicated to and understood by all employees and transparent at all process stages.

The findings show that it is management at the top level that identifies key positions which urgently need succession and grooms successors for these positions to create a smooth transition when the incumbent of such position vacates office. The study reveals that using such a strategy is unreliable as all roles are essential and prioritising key roles can lead to workforce vacuums in the other roles which do not have successors groomed. The identification of pivotal positions is of paramount importance to succession planning and talent management. In line with this succession planning is the conceptual framework of the leadership model as observed by Robertson (2016). Great leaders identify key positions and plan succession before the time arrives. This is evident in Collings and Mellahi's (2009:304) definition of talent management as they describe it as:

the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organisation's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high-potential and high-performing incumbents to fill these roles and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organisation.

This definition emphasises key positions, defined by their centrality to organisational strategy, their rarity (generally 10-20% of positions in any organisation) and the fact that increasing the quality or quantity of people in these positions is likely to generate value for the organisation. After identifying the positions, the high-potential and high-performing employees, the potential successors, are carefully selected to fill those critical roles (Collings *et al.*, 2017).

Consistent with these findings are Lowan and Chisoro (2016), who observe that when a key staff resigns or retires, it becomes a challenge to replace the critical staff if the organisation does not have contingency measures in place. These results have shown power plays in the succession planning at the IFRC as the successors are chosen after identifying key positions. If the position is not deemed key, there can be a power vacuum after the departure of the incumbent. To give credence to these findings, Sharma *et al.* (2003) observe that succession planning is a process that should include identifying the pool of potential

successors, designating the successor and notifying the successor designate and other management leaders of the decision made.

The findings support the notion that succession planning can improve strategic performance in addition to identifying and replacing talent (Collings *et al.*, 2017). The speedy replacement of key staff is essential for the survival and sustainability of organisations. Thus, succession planning is the key mechanism for identifying strategic talent needs and ensuring the necessary talent to accommodate these needs. Hence, effective succession planning is a key feature for creating, maintaining and sustaining economic value for an organisation.

The findings reveal a system of job performance assessment to identify individuals who can be groomed for leadership succession. The findings show that leadership uses a performance-based assessment to identify individuals who can be trained as successors of some of the leaders. The findings indicate that some employees do not consider job assessment to identify successors but to assess the current position and how it can be developed. The study shows that the job assessment system is vital for leadership to identify successors based on the skills and performances shown by talented individuals. The findings indicate that the organisation uses a strategy, that is, the strategic leadership development aimed at harnessing the personal traits in employees that are groomed for succession. In support of these findings is the conceptual framework as observed by Hongyun *et al.* (2020) that transformational leadership keeps communication lines open which is communicating succession to the employees and rewarding the best performers.

The findings urge the centrality of talent pools in the succession planning process. Identifying and managing talent pools is driven by recognising that shallow or weak pools can put the business at risk by limiting an organisation's ability to deliver on its strategy (Collings *et al.*, 2017). This is followed by talent development that entails targeted investments in those individuals with the most significant potential to build and

deploy capacity to influence the achievement of strategic organisational objectives significantly. A key advantage of talent pools is that they advance organisational practice from demand-led recruitment to recruitment “ahead of the curve” (Sparrow, 2007). A talent pool strategy emphasises the proactive identification of incumbents with the potential to fill key positions as they become available. Cappelli (2008:77), building on the supply-chain management perspective, advocates a talent-pool strategy for succession planning to manage the risks of mismatches between talent supply and demand. It has been observed that human capital accumulation is most valuable when retained in the context where it is developed (Cappelli and Keller, 2017).

The findings reveal that succession planning is closely tied to organisations' Learning and Development Plans. Once the relevant candidates have been identified, based on their interest and potential for success in a critical position, the organisation must ensure that these employees have access to focused learning and development opportunities. Some key points to remember when developing learning and development plans are that plans should focus on decreasing or removing the gap between expected competencies and candidates' current knowledge, skills and abilities. Modern succession planning is based on learning and development to fulfil employee potential, rather than merely filling a vacancy and, as such, there is need to manage expectations. A wide range of learning and development opportunities, including job assignments that develop and improve a candidate's competencies, job rotations and formal training. In addition, the results indicate that there is need to ensure appropriate strategies are in place to support the transfer of corporate knowledge to candidates for key jobs, which can include mentoring, coaching or job-shadowing, documenting critical knowledge, exit interviews and establishing communities of practice.

The findings emphasise the fundamental role played by HR in the succession planning process. HR support is vital to ensure the process happens, manage the flow of information, act as an impartial adviser and liaise with potential successors. In a nutshell, it plays critical roles as a process designer and

process facilitator in succession planning. HR should be involved in discussions with senior management regarding the succession planning process and communicating shared principles. The involvement of top management guarantees the succession planning process is on the right track and implemented well. It is essential to construct a lifestyle with the involvement of top management and personnel that helps and reinforces shared accountability, comments mechanisms and the general significance of leadership improvement (Bano *et al.*, 2022).

In support of this is the conceptual framework of the business leadership model which states leadership should identify successors of the incumbents to ensure continuity (Ochieng, 2016). The findings reveal that the strategy checks for talented employees with a vision that can be sustainable to the organisation and grooms them under the tutelage of the incumbent leaders. This has been deemed a viable succession planning strategy as it ensures organisational continuity. Similar to these findings are Nel *et al.* (2013), who posit that creating plans for all positions on a management team involves several steps. First, the core skills required for each position should be clarified. Each manager creates a skill-building plan to fill any identified gaps in their skill set, as well as professional development plans for any supervisors who have the potential to assume greater responsibilities over time. In support of these findings, Kippist (2013) argues that succession planning is a deliberate use of monitoring, coaching and grooming individuals with the potential to advance their careers. It is an essential organisational strategical process of identifying and developing individuals for critical organisational roles, fostering leadership sustainability for future years.

It is also important to note that succession planning is not without challenges. The findings indicate that some participants were frustrated by the fact that some positions were deemed more important than others. It is, therefore, fundamental for management to ensure that there is clear and consistent communication and criteria for identifying potential successors. Collings *et al.* (2017) point out that succession planning can help organise and prepare.

Talent, the implementation of succession plans, rarely achieves the desired smoothness of transition. It is often difficult to forecast future talent demand because it requires knowing how the organisation will grow and strategically respond to such growth, neither of which is easily predictable (Cappelli and Keller, 2014, 2017). In addition, environmental factors also challenge succession-planning efficacy. As markets become more globally competitive, it becomes more difficult for organisations to plan for future, often unpredictable, events. It requires predicting the future marketplace and figuring out how competitors (including those which do not yet exist) will act (Collings *et al.*, 2017). The South Sudanese context is volatile as the country has just emerged from a prolonged and brutal civil war that displaced millions of people, including a skilled workforce. Regarding strategic forecasting, succession planning in this context is quite challenging due to environmental uncertainty.

There is still competition for scarce skills in South Sudan, akin to what the McKinsey Consultants termed the 'War for Talent' (*ibid.*). Due to the dire humanitarian situation, a multiplicity of international humanitarian organisations operate in South Sudan. Hence, succession planning is influenced by the competitive environment faced by the firm and environmental changes may alter succession-planning strategies. Forecasting supply and demand is even more challenging as organisations try to think about how to fill jobs that may be at two or three higher levels within the organisational hierarchy, while addressing the uncertainties of turnover (e.g., jobs that are not likely to open soon, open unexpectedly or change in volume).

CONCLUSION

The study made it possible to analyse the subject of succession planning in South Sudanese humanitarian organisations. The study analysed the steps taken in the succession planning at yje IFRC. It is concluded here that the succession planning at this organisation has no formal policies, but a series of strategies used to identify individuals to succeed the incumbents, through identifying critical and pivotal positions that need succession. The study concludes that using the key positions' identification strategy has pitfalls, as it can lead to

power vacuums in areas deemed not key positions. The study concludes that there is a job performance assessment strategy for planning succession using the performance of individuals as an indicator of the potential of an individual's leadership traits. The research concludes that these performance-based assessments have shortcomings, as individuals can be good at task accomplishment but not team leadership. The study reveals that the IFRC uses a strategic leadership development succession planning that identifies individuals with a vision aligned with organisational goals and vision to take over from the incumbents and ensure continuity.

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