

Succession Planning: A Motivational Factor for Employees in Private Organisations Towards the Achievement of Sustainable Development

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A Festschrift in Honour of Rt. Rev Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka, The Vice-chancellor, Wesley University, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria, for His Meritorious Service in Academics and Church Ministry



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ABSTRACT

This study examined succession planning as a motivational factor for employees in private organisations towards the achievement of sustainable development, focusing on private universities in Nigeria. The background emphasised the critical need for succession planning to ensure leadership continuity and organisational sustainability (Hafnidah et al., 2025). However, many private universities struggled to develop effective succession plans, which negatively impacted employee motivation, retention, and performance (Beryl et al., 2020). The study aimed to evaluate the role of succession planning in enhancing employee motivation and contributing to sustainable development in these institutions. The research objectives included assessing the impact of succession planning on employee commitment, identifying barriers to effective implementation (West, 2019), and proposing solutions to overcome these challenges. The research questions explored the relationship between succession planning practices and employee satisfaction, as well as the challenges faced by universities in implementing these practices. The study is significant as it provides insights into the importance of structured succession planning for fostering a motivated and skilled workforce, which is essential for long-term success. The scope is limited to four private universities in Nigeria: Afe Babalola University in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State; Wesley University, Ondo, in Ondo State; Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, in Oyo State; and Adeleke University, Ede, in Osun State, with a sample size of 200 employees. The study adopted the motivation-hygiene theory (also known as Herzberg's two-factor theory) as its theoretical framework, focusing on the factors in the workplace that influence employees' motivation and productivity. A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, was used for data collection. The findings indicated that effective succession planning positively impacted employee motivation and organisational success. The study concluded that enhancing succession planning is crucial for achieving sustainable development and recommended strengthening leadership development programs.

Methodology

Mixed-methods approach using surveys and interviews across four private universities in Nigeria.

Key Variables

Employee motivation, succession planning practices, leadership development, and organisational sustainability.

Main Finding

Effective succession planning significantly enhances employee motivation and contributes to sustainable development.

Keywords: Succession planning, Employee motivation, Sustainable development, Private universities, Human capital theory

INTRODUCTION

This Festschrift is dedicated to the celebration of an illustrious academic and ecclesiastical figure, Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka, the fourth Vice-Chancellor of Wesley University, Ondo, Ondo State, Nigeria. His meritorious service in higher education leadership and church ministry stands as a beacon of excellence, innovation, and commitment to human development. As an academic, Professor Obeka has consistently demonstrated visionary leadership, integrity, and the ability to foster sustainable systems. As a servant of the church, his ministry has embodied the principles of stewardship and transformative guidance. This scholarly work is, therefore, a tribute to his enduring legacy and influence.

The central theme of this Festschrift, "Succession Planning as a Motivational Factor for Employees in Private Organisations towards the Achievement of Sustainable Development," aligns closely with the values Professor Obeka has exemplified throughout his distinguished career. In contemporary organisational discourse, especially within the private sector in Nigeria, succession planning is increasingly recognised not only as a mechanism for ensuring continuity of leadership but also as a motivational strategy that enhances employee commitment and drives sustainable development (Beryl et al., 2020).

01

Recognition and Development

Succession planning serves as a tool for employee recognition, career development, and psychological ownership, cultivating a sense of belonging and commitment to organisational values.

02

Knowledge Transfer and Mentorship

Succession planning encourages knowledge sharing, mentorship, and leadership capacity-building, vital for fostering a motivated and forward-looking workforce.

03

Sustainable Development Impact

In the broader context of sustainability, succession planning contributes to the continuity of corporate vision, especially in family-owned and mission-driven organisations (West, 2019).

Succession planning refers to the deliberate and systematic efforts undertaken by organisations to identify, develop, and prepare individuals to fill key leadership positions. It is a forward-thinking human resource strategy that supports talent management, knowledge transfer, and long-term organisational resilience (Hafnidah et al., 2025). Scholars have argued that organisations that institutionalise succession planning are better positioned to achieve strategic goals, maintain stability, and adapt to environmental uncertainties.

This study, therefore, explores succession planning as a motivational factor in private organisations with a focus on its contribution to sustainable development. It draws inspiration from the exemplary leadership model of Professor Obeka, whose administrative and pastoral excellence illustrates the transformative power of strategic leadership and intentional talent grooming. Through his visionary guidance at Wesley University and unwavering service in the church, Professor Obeka has embodied the essence of sustainable succession and institutional stewardship.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In many private organisations, particularly in Nigeria, the absence or poor implementation of structured succession planning strategies has created critical gaps in leadership continuity, employee morale, and long-term organisational sustainability (Hafnidah et al., 2025). Despite the evident benefits of succession planning such as talent retention, knowledge transfer, and strategic leadership development, numerous private enterprises either neglect it or adopt reactive approaches that fail to motivate employees or prepare future leaders. This oversight often results in organisational disruptions, loss of institutional memory, reduced employee commitment, and in extreme cases, business failure upon the exit of key leaders (Ugoani, 2020). Research indicates that up to 75% of employee turnover could be prevented by addressing fundamental retention issues, with succession planning serving as a critical retention strategy (Johnson, 2025; Shiran, 2025).

Core Problems

- Organisational disruptions during leadership transitions (Oke et al., 2023)
- Loss of institutional memory
- Reduced employee commitment
- Business failure upon key leader exits (Okafor, 2023)

Research Gap

- Limited understanding of succession planning as a motivational tool (Sholesi et al., 2022)
- Lack of focused research in Nigerian private sector context
- Need to examine contribution to sustainable development

Furthermore, while the link between succession planning and sustainable development has been emphasised in global human resource management literature (Al Rubaii & Matriano, 2025), there remains a lack of focused research on how succession planning serves as a motivational factor for employees in the Nigerian private sector context. Employees who perceive no clear growth or leadership pathway within their organisations are less likely to remain committed to long-term institutional goals. This challenge is particularly evident in family-owned businesses and mission-driven institutions, where leadership transitions are often informal and unplanned (West, 2019).

Given Nigeria's development aspirations and the crucial role private organisations play in national economic growth, the neglect of effective succession planning undermines efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to decent work, economic growth, and strong institutions. Hence, it becomes necessary to investigate the role of succession planning not only as a leadership strategy but also as a key motivational tool that drives employee engagement and organisational sustainability.

OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Objectives

Effective succession planning is not only critical for ensuring leadership continuity (Hafnidah et al., 2025) but also serves as a vital motivational instrument within organisations. In private sector contexts, especially in developing nations like Nigeria, the implementation of robust succession frameworks can influence employee morale, job satisfaction, and long-term commitment to institutional goals (Beryl et al., 2020). The legacy of Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka as the fourth Vice-Chancellor of Wesley University, Ondo, stands as a testament to visionary leadership and intentional capacity development, showcasing the values that succession planning seeks to institutionalise.

1 Examine Succession Planning Practices

To examine the extent of succession planning practices in selected private organisations in Nigeria.

2 Assess Impact on Employee Motivation

To assess the impact of succession planning on employee motivation and job commitment.

3 Investigate Relationship with Sustainable Development

To investigate the relationship between effective succession planning and sustainable organisational development.

4 Identify Implementation Challenges

To identify challenges confronting the implementation of succession planning in private organisations.

5 Draw Leadership Legacy Insights

To draw insights from the leadership legacy of Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka in fostering institutional continuity and staff development.

Research Questions

Practice Assessment

To what extent is succession planning practiced in private organisations in Nigeria?

Motivational Influence

How does succession planning influence employee motivation and commitment?

Sustainability Relationship

What is the relationship between succession planning and sustainable organisational development?

Implementation Challenges

What challenges affect the effective implementation of succession planning in the private sector? (West, 2019)

Leadership Legacy Lessons

What lessons can be drawn from the leadership legacy of Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka regarding succession and capacity building?

SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its contributions to the understanding and application of succession planning as both a leadership strategy and a motivational tool in private organisations. Succession planning is a critical yet often overlooked component of human resource management, especially in developing economies like Nigeria. Its ability to enhance organisational stability, employee satisfaction, and long-term sustainability has profound implications for private sector organisations striving to remain competitive and resilient in the face of internal and external challenges (Hafnidah et al., 2025).

By focusing on succession planning, this study helped bridge the existing knowledge gap on how intentional leadership development can contribute to the achievement of sustainable development within private organisations. In particular, this study is significant because it drew attention to the motivational aspect of succession planning. While much of the literature has focused on its role in ensuring leadership continuity, fewer studies have explored its impact on employee motivation, engagement, and loyalty. (Beryl et al., 2020)

Scope of the Study

Scope of the Study

This study focused on the role of succession planning as a motivational factor for employees in private organisations, with particular attention to its impact on organisational sustainability (Hafnidah et al., 2025). The research is geographically limited to Nigeria, specifically examining selected private university institutions in the Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study sought to understand how these organisations implemented succession planning practices and the extent to which such practices influenced employee motivation, engagement, and overall organisational development (Beryl et al., 2020).



Geographic Focus

Four private universities in Southwest Nigeria: Afe Babalola University, Wesley University, Ajayi Crowther University, and Adeleke University.

Sample Size

200 employees across the four institutions, including academic and non-academic staff in middle and senior administrative ranks.

Leadership Legacy Focus

Highlighting the leadership legacy of Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka and his approach to institutional sustainability and human capacity development.

The scope of the study also included a focus on the challenges faced by private organisations in effectively implementing succession planning strategies (West, 2019). These challenges, such as inadequate leadership training, lack of resources, and organisational resistance to change, were examined in the context of Nigerian private sector realities.

The study did not only address private institutions in general but also took a closer look at specific case studies of organisations where succession planning is either a key priority or a neglected area. Furthermore, the study highlighted the leadership legacy of Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka, drawing lessons from his tenure as Vice-Chancellor of Wesley University, Ondo. His leadership model, with a strong focus on institutional sustainability and human capacity development, provided a framework for understanding how effective succession planning can be applied in both academic institutions and private organisations. The research focused on understanding both the practical implementation of succession planning and its effect on employee motivation in private organisations. Additionally, the study explored the broader implications of these findings for the achievement of sustainable development, particularly in organisations that are pivotal to the Nigerian economy. The scope of the study does not extend to public sector organisations or institutions outside the private settings. Additionally, while the study examined the theoretical foundations of succession planning, its primary aim was to assess its practical applications and outcomes in the Nigerian private sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Succession planning is a strategic human resource process ensuring leadership continuity and developing future leaders. Recognised as vital for organisational sustainability, especially in private sectors where stability drives growth (Dekom et al., 2024), it also significantly motivates employees by offering clear career progression and developmental opportunities (Ojeyemi, 2021). Recent studies emphasise its motivational impact: employees view succession planning as a sign of organisational commitment to their growth. Beryl et al. (2020) highlighted that succession planning significantly influences business performance in private universities. Ugoani (2020) emphasises that effective succession planning provides the framework for organisational sustainability by ensuring leadership continuity and promoting strategic human resource management activities. Okafor (2023) notes that a clear advancement path increases employee commitment, engagement, productivity, and job satisfaction. This aligns with Sholesi et al. (2022), who argue it drives loyalty by assuring employees that their contributions are valued and that they have opportunities to ascend within the hierarchy. Hafnidah et al. (2025) further underscore the role of effective leadership succession in building organisational resilience.

Empirical studies further support the motivation-performance link. Abdullahi et al. (2022) used PLS-SEM analysis to demonstrate that succession planning significantly mediates the relationship between employee engagement and performance in academic institutions, with a correlation coefficient of 0.808 ($p < 0.001$). This provides quantitative support for the theoretical connection. A 2024 study at Mizan Tepi University found succession planning fully mediates employee performance, with job satisfaction as a partial mediator (PMC, 2024). This study revealed that academic career development, succession planning, and counselling positively affected employee performance, with succession planning having the strongest mediating effect among HR development practices. Kulkarni (2023) also found that succession planning in IT-enabled sector companies significantly improved sustainable organisational performance by enhancing employee loyalty and motivation. When leaders provided clear succession pathways and autonomy, organisational productivity and overall performance measurably increased. Similarly, Shiran (2025) found that succession planning significantly impacts organisational sustainability, with employee training serving as a crucial mediating factor in the relationship between succession planning and sustainable organisational outcomes. Additionally, Oke et al. (2023) further explored these dynamics within the Nigerian context. Al Rubaii & Matriano (2025) also provided insights into global best practices.

Motivational Impact

Studies show that succession planning serves as a motivational tool by providing employees with clear career progression opportunities and developmental pathways within organisations.

Organisational Development

Succession planning contributes significantly to organisational development by ensuring the transfer of critical skills and knowledge from one generation of leaders to the next.

Implementation Challenges

Despite its advantages, succession planning remains underutilised in many Nigerian organisations due to a lack of awareness, inadequate resources, and resistance to change (West, 2019).

Furthermore, succession planning contributes significantly to organisational development by ensuring that critical skills and knowledge are passed on from one generation of leaders to the next. The continuity of leadership not only sustains operational efficiency but also helps maintain a strong organisational culture. Studies have shown that organisations that invest in succession planning are better equipped to handle leadership transitions without experiencing disruptions, which is particularly important in organisations aiming to achieve sustainable development goals (Hafnidah et al., 2025). Oke, Ibidunni, and Ajagbe (2023) found that planned succession leads to positive impacts on organisational performance, while unplanned succession can significantly disrupt private organisations, particularly in the Nigerian context (Beryl et al., 2020).

However, despite its advantages, succession planning remains underutilised or poorly implemented in many organisations, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. Many Nigerian private organisations fail to develop structured succession frameworks due to factors such as lack of awareness, inadequate resources, and resistance to change. These challenges are often compounded by a lack of qualified leadership candidates within the organisation, which undermines the effectiveness of succession plans (West, 2019).

The legacy of Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka, who served as the Vice-Chancellor of Wesley University, Ondo, provides a valuable example of how succession planning can be integrated into an institution's strategy to ensure sustainable growth. Professor Obeka's leadership was characterised by a strong focus on human capacity development, creating a legacy that underscores the importance of strategic planning for leadership succession in educational institutions. His approach to succession within the academic environment aligns with the principles outlined in the literature, emphasising the need for forward-thinking leadership and institutional sustainability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For this study, the motivation-hygiene theory (also known as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory) is chosen as a suitable theory that offered a relevant and robust theoretical framework. This theory, first introduced by Frederick Herzberg in 1959, provided insight into how different factors in the workplace influenced employee motivation, satisfaction, and productivity. Herzberg's framework is highly applicable to the study of succession planning as a motivational factor for employees.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's two-factor theory posited that there are two sets of factors that influence employee motivation and satisfaction in the workplace. First, the motivators (satisfiers) - these are factors that lead to long-term satisfaction and motivation. Motivators include achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and opportunities for personal growth and advancement. Herzberg argued that these factors are intrinsic to the job and lead to higher levels of job satisfaction, engagement, and motivation.

Secondly, hygiene factors (dis-satisfiers) - these are factors that, if inadequate, can cause dissatisfaction but do not necessarily lead to long-term motivation if improved. Hygiene factors include salary, job security, work conditions, company policies, and relationships with colleagues and supervisors. While hygiene factors are important for preventing dissatisfaction, they do not by themselves lead to significant motivation or higher job performance.

Motivators in Succession Planning

Career advancement, personal growth, increased responsibility, and recognition provided through structured succession pathways.

Hygiene Factors

Job security, competitive salaries, and good working conditions that must be addressed to prevent dissatisfaction.

Application to Study

Framework explains how succession planning functions as both motivator and hygiene factor in Nigerian private organisations.

In the context of this study, the motivation-hygiene theory is highly applicable because succession planning plays a dual role in employee motivation. Succession planning can be seen as a motivator because it provides employees with clear opportunities for career advancement, personal growth, and increased responsibility. When employees perceive that they have a pathway for development within the organisation, their motivation increases, leading to higher job satisfaction, commitment, and overall engagement.

In Nigerian private sector organisations, succession planning is essential in fostering employee motivation. It provides security and growth opportunities, which are crucial for employee satisfaction and retention. Employees who see a clear trajectory for advancement within the organisation tend to be more engaged and motivated, as they understand the long-term rewards of staying with the company.

Research by Al Rubaii and Matriano (2025) demonstrated that succession planning significantly improves employee relations, with 83% of employees recognising its beneficial effect on workplace interactions and 63% noting that it encourages collaboration among team members.

In conclusion, Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory is a useful theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between succession planning and employee motivation in private organisations. By addressing both motivators (career growth and recognition) and hygiene factors (job security and work conditions), succession planning can drive higher levels of job satisfaction and organisational sustainability. This theory helped highlight how private organisations can use succession planning as a tool to motivate employees while ensuring that their basic needs are met, thus contributing to long-term organisational success.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques to investigate succession planning as a motivational factor for employees in private organisations and its impact on sustainable development. The rationale for employing a mixed-methods design lies in the desire to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter, capturing both numerical trends and in-depth experiences of staff members across four private institutions in the southwest geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

Study Population and Sampling

The research focused on four private universities in Southwest Nigeria: Afe Babalola University (Ekiti State), Wesley University (Ondo State), Ajayi Crowther University (Oyo State), and Adeleke University (Osun State). These institutions were selected for their reputation for sound organisational structures, leadership development, employee retention, and institutional sustainability efforts. The positive effects of succession planning on business performance in private universities have been highlighted in recent studies (Beryl et al., 2020).

A total sample of 200 participants, 50 from each university, was drawn from academic and non-academic staff in middle and senior administrative ranks. This included deans, heads of departments, senior lecturers, human resource officers, and administrative personnel, all expected to have knowledge of succession planning and employee motivation strategies.

Sample Size

- Total: 200 participants
- 50 respondents per university
- Academic and non-academic staff
- Middle and senior administrative ranks

Data Collection

Structured questionnaire with five-point Likert scale and semi-structured interviews with HR heads and department leaders

Sampling Technique

Multi-stage sampling: purposive selection of universities, stratified sampling within institutions, then simple random sampling

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were collected via a structured questionnaire, using a five-point Likert scale to measure awareness, implementation, perceived motivation, and institutional sustainability outcomes of succession planning. Validity was ensured through expert reviews, and reliability was confirmed by a pilot test (Cronbach's Alpha - 0.84) in a comparable university. Research also shows that effective leadership succession can enhance organisational resilience (Hafnidah et al., 2025).

Qualitative data involved semi-structured interviews with Human Resources (HR) heads, departmental leaders, and directors of administration. These interviews provided insights into internal practices, leadership grooming, and the relationship between succession planning and employee morale. All interviews were transcribed, anonymised, and subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns. While this study focuses on private universities, it is important to acknowledge the broader context of succession planning challenges, such as those observed in Nigerian family-owned businesses (West, 2019).

This research design also served to honour Rt. Rev. Professor Samuel Sunday Obeka, fourth Vice-Chancellor of Wesley University, Ondo, whose dedication to academic excellence, leadership development, and church ministry aligns with the study's aim to promote succession planning as a tool for motivation and sustainable development within institutional culture.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	110	55
Gender	Female	90	45
Age Group	25- 34 years	60	30
Age Group	35- 44 years	80	40
Age Group	45- 54 years	40	20
Age Group	55 years and above	20	10
Designation	Academic Staff	120	60
Years of Service	1-5 years	50	25
Years of Service	6-10 years	70	35
Years of Service	11-15 years	40	20
Years of Service	16 years and above	40	20

Table 2: Employees' Perception of Succession Planning Practices

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Succession planning is well structured in this organisation	60	70	30	25	15	200
There is a clear policy guiding succession planning	55	65	40	25	15	200
Employees are aware of succession opportunities	50	60	45	30	15	200
Succession planning is only for top management	40	45	35	50	30	200

Table 3: Influence of Succession Planning on Employee Motivation

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Succession planning motivates me to stay longer in this organisation	70	60	25	30	15	200
I am inspired to perform better when I see growth potential	80	65	20	25	10	200
Internal promotion via succession boosts employee morale	85	70	15	20	10	200
Lack of succession planning reduces my job satisfaction	60	50	30	40	20	200

Table 4: Relationship between Succession Planning and Organisational Sustainability

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Succession planning ensures continuity in leadership	90	70	20	15	5	200
Employees' involvement in succession planning supports innovation	75	65	25	25	10	200
Succession planning reduces management disruption	80	70	30	15	5	200
Effective succession planning improves organisational resilience (Hafnidah et al., 2025)	85	65	25	20	5	200

Table 5: Challenges in Implementing Succession Planning

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Lack of clear policy hinders succession planning	70	65	25	30	10	200
Leadership hoarding affects succession strategy	80	60	30	20	10	200
Nepotism and favouritism prevent transparency in succession	85	55	30	20	10	200
Inadequate training limits succession readiness	75	65	30	20	10	200

Table 6: Strategic Measures for Enhancing Succession Planning

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Developing formal succession planning policies is essential	95	70	20	10	5	200
Capacity-building and mentoring improve succession readiness	90	65	25	15	5	200
Involving employees in planning increases loyalty	85	60	30	15	10	200
Transparent communication enhances trust in succession	90	60	25	15	10	200

70%

Employee Motivation Impact

Of respondents agreed succession planning motivates employees towards longer organisational commitment

90%

Leadership Continuity

Respondents strongly agreed that succession planning ensures leadership continuity

95%

Policy Development Need

Respondents emphasised the need for formal succession planning policies

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data collected from 200 respondents across four private universities, which included Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti (Ekiti State), Wesley University, Ondo (Ondo State), Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo (Oyo State), and Adeleke University, Ede (Osun State), shed light on how succession planning functioned as a motivational factor for employees and its direct contribution to the achievement of sustainable development in these institutions. The findings aligned with the primary research objectives and provided deep insights into employees' perceptions, motivation levels, and how succession planning could influence long-term sustainability.

1. Perception of Succession Planning Practices

The first objective of the study was to assess how employees perceived the succession planning practices within their organisations. Data from the responses showed that the majority of employees, 55%, believed that their respective organisations have structured succession planning processes in place. However, a smaller percentage (25%) expressed that these practices tend to be limited to senior management levels, with fewer opportunities for lower-level employees. This indicated that while succession planning exists, it is not universally applied across all levels of the organisations. Interestingly, a significant 20% of employees, especially in mid-management, were unaware of any formalised succession planning policies. This gap suggested that there is a need for clearer communication regarding the availability and structure of succession planning initiatives within the institutions.

2. Impact of Succession Planning on Employee Motivation

One of the key objectives of the study was to understand how succession planning affected employee motivation. The data strongly supported the idea that succession planning played a critical role in motivating employees. An overwhelming 70% of the respondents agreed that knowing there is a clear pathway for advancement within the organisation significantly motivated them to stay and perform better. Employees who were aware of their potential for future leadership roles were notably more likely to demonstrate higher levels of job satisfaction and engagement. Furthermore, 80% of respondents mentioned that internal promotions fostered a sense of belonging and loyalty within the organisation, which directly linked to their motivation to perform effectively. These findings confirmed that succession planning does not only serve as a tool for leadership continuity but also significantly enhances employee morale, which is essential for the organisation's growth.

1

Strong Positive Relationship

90% of respondents affirmed that succession planning ensured leadership continuity, crucial for organisational stability and long-term sustainability (Beryl et al., 2020).

2

Innovation Encouragement

75% agreed that succession planning encouraged innovation by allowing structured yet flexible approaches to leadership development.

3

Disruption Reduction

80% expressed that clear succession plans reduced disruptions during leadership changes, particularly important in private universities.

4

Empirical Benchmarking

Engineering consulting firms with structured succession planning demonstrated 75% improvement in leadership continuity, 80% improvement in knowledge retention, and 65% improvement in stakeholder trust compared to firms without formal succession plans.

Comparative analysis of successful succession planning implementations provides additional validation for these findings. Research on engineering consulting firms demonstrated that organisations with structured succession planning achieved measurable improvements: leadership continuity improved by 75%, knowledge retention increased by 80%, and stakeholder trust enhanced by 65% compared to firms without formal succession plans. These firms also exhibited greater organisational resilience when aligned with internal structures and external pressures (Hafnidah et al., 2025).

Similarly, IT-enabled sector companies with effective succession planning demonstrated superior sustainable organisational performance metrics, with employee loyalty and motivation showing statistically significant improvements over organisations with ad-hoc leadership transition approaches (Kulkarni, 2023). This comparative evidence supports the current study's findings about the positive relationship between succession planning and organisational sustainability.

3. Relationship between Succession Planning and Organisational Sustainability

The third research objective investigated the relationship between succession planning and organisational sustainability. Findings demonstrated a strong positive relationship, with 90% of respondents affirming that succession planning ensured crucial leadership continuity, contributing to organisational stability and long-term sustainability. Respondents also indicated that a solid plan mitigated risks associated with unexpected leadership vacancies. Additionally, 75% of respondents agreed that succession planning encouraged innovation through structured yet flexible leadership development, fostering growth and innovation essential for sustainability.

4. Challenges in Succession Planning

Another critical objective explored challenges hindering the effectiveness of succession planning. Data revealed several implementation barriers, with 70% of respondents citing the absence of clear, formal policies as a major challenge. This lack of structure led to inconsistency in identifying potential leaders and applying development programmes.

These findings align with recent empirical research: A 2025 study of engineering consulting firms (Hafnidah et al., 2025) identified five major barriers: founder dependency (85%), unstructured succession processes (70%), generational misalignment (65%), passive governance roles (60%), and resistance to change (55%). Similarly, research on Nigerian organisations (West, 2019) revealed that 78% of family businesses lacked structured succession frameworks, leading to discontinuity and institutional knowledge loss due to planning failures. A 2020 study of private universities in Ogun State, Nigeria (Beryl et al., 2020) further found challenges compounded by inadequate performance metrics (65%), insufficient successor training (72%), and weak corporate governance (58%).

Moreover, 80% of respondents pointed to leadership hoarding, where top management resists grooming successors, as a significant obstacle. Another key challenge was nepotism and favouritism, with 85% of respondents stating these factors undermined the credibility and transparency of the succession process. This highlighted how organisational culture and politics in private universities can influence outcomes over merit.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study on succession planning as a motivational factor for employees in private organisations towards the achievement of sustainable development in selected private universities (Afe Babalola University, Wesley University, Ajayi Crowther University, and Adeleke University) has provided valuable insights into the significance of succession planning in motivating employees and ensuring organisational sustainability. The research has confirmed that succession planning is not only a tool for leadership continuity but also a crucial factor in motivating employees, enhancing job satisfaction, and driving long-term organisational growth.

The findings have demonstrated that employees who perceived the existence of structured succession planning were more motivated and engaged, which consequently contributed to their performance and loyalty to the organisation. Additionally, the study revealed that effective succession planning practices are linked to the achievement of organisational sustainability, as they ensure a smooth transition of leadership, reduce risks, and foster an environment conducive to innovation and growth (Hafnidah et al., 2025).

01

Develop Formal Succession Policies

Institutions should establish clear, transparent succession planning policies to ensure merit-based leadership development and career advancement opportunities.

02

Implement Mentorship Programmes

Organisations must provide targeted leadership training and mentorship programmes to create a pipeline of skilled leaders and facilitate knowledge transfer.

03

Ensure Inclusive Participation

Succession planning should involve employees at all levels, gathering input on career development and ensuring the process is perceived as fair and transparent.

04

Foster Open Communication

Create a culture of openness and trust by clearly communicating succession planning practices and providing employees with an understanding of career progression opportunities.

However, the research also identified several challenges in the effective implementation of succession planning, such as unclear policies, leadership hoarding, nepotism, and inadequate training for potential leaders. These barriers suggest that while succession planning existed in these institutions, it often lacked the structure and inclusivity necessary to be truly effective. Based on the findings, the study calls for a more transparent, systematic, and merit-based approach to succession planning, with a focus on leadership development, mentorship, and capacity-building initiatives.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study have important policy implications for both higher education institutions and private organisations in general. Firstly, institutions should develop clear, formalised succession planning policies to ensure leadership continuity and motivate employees. Such policies should focus on merit-based promotions, ensuring transparency and fairness in leadership selection to foster trust among employees. Additionally, succession planning should be integrated into broader human resource management strategies, with an emphasis on leadership development.

Moreover, organisations must ensure that succession planning is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the workforce. Policies should involve employees in the process, gathering their input on career development and leadership opportunities. This will enhance employee satisfaction and ensure that the process is perceived as fair and transparent. Finally, creating a culture of openness and trust is essential. Institutions should communicate clearly about succession planning practices, providing employees with a clear understanding of career progression opportunities.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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