



Succession Planning at Higher Education Institutions: Leadership Style, Career Development and Knowledge Management Practices as its Predictors

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ABSTRACT

Succession planning has spelt many affirmative returns to organizations, several reviews have indicated that this corporate initiative lacks in its planning, implementing and managing. It happens at higher education institutions in Malaysia that have been slow to embrace corporate formal succession planning approach. Perhaps the appropriate leadership style, perception of career development opportunities as well as knowledge management (KM) practices may enhance the succession planning of public universities in Malaysia. Therefore this study specifically intends to examine the significant relationships between succession planning and its predictors which are leadership style, career development and KM practices. The sampling frame in this study contained a list of all administrative officers from grade N41 to grade N54 at 19 public universities staff. According to the results, there is significant influence of two independent variables which are leadership style and KM on successive planning effectiveness. Nevertheless, career management does not influence successive planning effectiveness although both are significantly related.

Keywords: Leadership, Knowledge, Management Practice

JEL Classifications: M1, M5

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Malaysia have long been responsible for educating and developing future leaders and thinkers for the nation. While great at molding future leaders and workforce for the nation, many HEIs are not taking the necessary steps to develop their own administrative staff of leadership talent to take them into the demanding and challenging tomorrow through appropriate succession planning program as they are slow to adopt and implement learning and talent management strategies and technology solutions that could help them facilitate and ensure the development and retention of faculty and staff on campus. Perhaps the appropriate leadership style, perception of career development opportunities as well as KM practices may enhance the succession planning of public universities in Malaysia. This study specifically intends to examine the relationships between succession planning, leadership style, career development and KM practices.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Today, the most pressing talent management issue facing universities is succession (Jusoff et al., 2009; Alina et al., 2012). Considering that a university is no different from any respectable organizations in the constant quest forward, the irony is perhaps softened as the debate can only be fuelled by a genuine eagerness to stay relevant and competitive, hence the uneasiness stirring from within. Staying connected with the external environment, keeping constant vigil of the ever changing expectations and maintaining a heightened sense of awareness towards the wants and needs of society are basic rules for the survival of HEIs today. The ability to obtain updated information and the even greater capacity to digest and filter the incoming data with significant bearing on the operations of a university are simply indispensable (Alina et al., 2012). Their study has supported Zaini, Siti Akhmar, Kamaruzaman and Posiah (2009) study when they revealed

succession planning acts to provide motivational booster for the workers as in talent pooling as well as customers' satisfaction due to institutional effectiveness and the organization competent management at large.

As Rothwell (2005) defined the concept of succession planning as "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement". He also asserted succession planning is imperative considering organizations today face the ever-increasing issues related to growth, globalization and competitions. Therefore succession planning is needed to cultivate the right talent in order to meet these daunting challenges. Rothwell also firmly emphasized that "the continued survival of the organization depends on having the right people in the right places at the right time (Rothwell, 2005). For this reason, the impact on organizational continuity would be overwhelmed if a successor was suddenly required and none had been identified. These problems became critical when it involved positions and fields that were critical to the survival needs and the thrust of the organization, in this case is the university.

Indeed, to overcome this problem, universities should provide a plan to prepare and develop highly qualified and capable staff to fill the vacant positions. In this regard, potential successors need to be identified by the management in order to ensure the program vision and missions are achieved. In addition, succession planning program not only helps to ensure that key management position remain filled, but it also helps to identify critical training and development needs of both individual managers and the organizations as a whole. It clearly involves taking an investment-oriented approach toward employees. Therefore, in order to ensure the succession planning is effective, the organization must involve the whole people in the organization (the executives, top managers, and staff), having a systematic process and an efficient human resources information system. Nevertheless, despite the importance of succession planning program for any organization, it is considered less important by the university.

The reality of succession planning program was assessed via a survey conducted by Rothwell (2005 and 2002). Rothwell (2005 and 2002) study on succession planning and management practices revealed that the opinions of top management on the succession planning and management were inconclusive. Rothwell (2005) also added succession planning and management should support strategic planning, strategic thinking and provide an essential starting point for management and employee development programs. Furthermore, Rothwell (2005) also suggested succession planning and management should support strategic planning and strategic thinking and should provide an essential starting point for management and employee development programs. In addition, in a separate study, Jaladdin's (2009) study revealed emphasis of succession planning program was not consistent within the organizations of public sector. In this regard, this program is interpreted by some government departments/agencies as among important agenda, while on the other side of spectrum there was

also those who placed this program under uncritical category and thus gave less priority. This is because the mechanism of implementation depends on the core business or the goals of ministries/departments respectively.

As for civil servants working in public universities specifically, succession planning was an unusual issue despite Pekeliling Perkhidmatan Bilangan 3 on Succession Planning Program was made known since 2006. According to Jaladdin (2009) study, two out of five diplomatic and administrative officers (PTD) were aware of succession planning program, leaving another three officers not aware of it. In time, the ignorance created problem especially among official of Grade M48 to M54 where as some of them involved directly in decision making process or in establishing the organization's policies. Besides, Jaladdin's (2009) study also found that the emphasis of succession planning program was not consistent within the organizations of public sector. In this regard, this program is interpreted by some government departments/agencies as among important agenda, while on the other side of spectrum there was also those who placed this program under uncritical category and thus gave less priority. This is because the mechanism of implementation depends on the core business or the goals of ministries/departments respectively. Overall, the different mechanism of implementation deteriorates the importance of succession planning matter even more as there was no definite mechanism to ensure the successfulness of succession planning program of these universities.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Succession Planning

Although succession planning has spelt many affirmative returns to organizations, several reviews have indicated that this corporate initiative lacks in its planning, implementing and managing. Due to these setbacks, this initiative, all too often revered by many successful organizations, may not be too popular by educational organization. However, according to Clunies (2007), he reiterated that although it was difficult to implement in academia, the initiative can begin with plans that were simple and tailored to the need of the educational organization. Meanwhile, although Rothwell (2005) focused on profit organization, he underlined the importance of succession planning as an effort for individual development that should include any job category. He also mentioned that should there be staff shortage, it would bring disaster or chaos to the performance of the organization for that particular time. Hence, he urged the need to extend succession planning not only at management ranks, but also throughout the empowered workforce. In such scenario, employees have become anxious about their job security that they start to think and search the organization that can provide positive assertions. The increasing trend of turnover sometimes is worsened by the lack of adequate programme to groom the existing talent. Clunies (2007) believes that higher education has historically been slow to adopt many corporate management processes. He therefore has a reasonable doubt for the readiness of the institution to employ succession planning or any executive development programme because of dramatic cultural differences between the boardroom and the campus. Rosse and Levine (2003) support this argument

by stating the complex and bureaucratic procedures for hiring compared with many profit organizations or business corporations.

3.2. Career Development

According to Kirk et al. (2000), career development can be described as a process for achieving specific employee and organization goals, including providing career information to employees, helping employees identify advancement opportunities, promoting job satisfaction, and improving employee productivity. In terms of advantages, career development is a vital organization strategy that facilitates internal promotion (Bowes, 2008) and with this strategy organizations can help employees identify and understand their interests and strengths such as widen their skills, plan and implement career goals, and develop themselves for their career path (Whymark and Ellis, 1999; Cambron, 2001), or employee engagement, retention, and succession strategies (Rothwell, 2005; Tarasco and Damato, 2006; Beever, 2008; Bowes, 2008), to increase understanding of organization and enhances reputation as people developer. Interestingly, in other aspects, career development can help companies attract the best employees, as well as motivate, develop, and retain the best workers over time. The benefits of a carefully crafted organization career development system can help a better employee-organization fit, a better employee-job fit, effective communications between employees and managers and increased employee loyalty. It also can improve employee morale and job satisfaction, leading to improved performance. Hence, with the improved engagement it may facilitate succession efforts to reduce turn-over; employee motivation and promotion within the organization.

3.3. KM Practice

According to Kidwell et al. (2001) KM is often loosely defined, but its central purpose is the action of “transforming information and intellectual assets into enduring value”. In the arena of higher education, KM is being touted as a method that will increase institutional innovation. Meanwhile, according to Azura (2009), KM is a systematic approach to manage organizational tacit and explicit knowledge that resides in its people, process and technology for the purpose of enhancing organizational performance and competitiveness.

KM represents an increasingly important area of consideration particularly for public sector organizations such as HEIs. As a service provider, it relies on the intellectual capital and the knowledge of its staff. Capturing, organizing and sharing organizational knowledge is important in order to maximize and fully exploit the intellectual asset. With the current external pressures of economic instability, changes in governmental policy and increased globalization and commercialization, the education sector at this time not only needs to be efficient and effective but also innovative and trend setting in order to remain competitive. Furthermore, the organization that will prosper in the future will be those that make best use of the knowledge they hold and are able to exploit this through organizational learning (Garcia et al., 2011).

In addition to that, KM can be used by educational institutions to gain a more comprehensive, integrative, and reflexive

understanding of the impact of information on their organizations. However introduction of KM into the educational arena has been a slow and often underutilized process due to the fact that it is a multi-layered and systems-oriented process that requires organizations to rethink what they do and how they do it (Metcalfe, 2010). Therefore, management training programs and courses need to include aspects of succession planning, career development and KM processes as well as training in transferable skills or soft skills.

3.4. Leadership Style

Defining leadership has been a complex and elusive problem largely because the nature of leadership itself is complex. Interestingly there are many studies and publications about leadership in recent years, but there is no common definition of leadership yet. Many authors have attempted to describe leadership within the limits of their understanding and emphasis. The next following definitions of leadership are found from literature which may be more representative for leadership. Obiwuru et al. (2011) said that the leadership is an important subject in the field of organizational behaviour. These authors further explain that leadership possesses a dynamic effect on individual and organizational interaction. In other words, the leadership capability has strong correlation to management’s “collaborative effort” execution.

This statement echoed by Daft (2011) who cited that leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes. In addition, Fairholm (2009) offers a classification of five leadership perspective namely the leadership as scientific management, leadership as excellent management, leadership as a values displacement activity, leadership in a trust culture and whole soul spiritual leadership. Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Shelton et al. (2002) both stressed on leadership as the pivotal force behind successful organizations and that to create vital and viable organizations, leadership is necessary to help organizations develop a new vision of what they can be, and mobilize organizations to change toward their new visions.

Proposed hypotheses:

Ha1: There is a significant correlation between career development, KM practices, leadership style and succession planning at HEIs.

Ha2: There is a significant influence of career development, KM practices and leadership style on succession planning at HEIs.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study objectives are: (1) To examine the relation between career development, KM practices, leadership styles and succession planning and, (2) To investigate the influence of career development, KM practices, leadership styles on succession planning through the model fit.

The population of the study was the administrative staff of HEIs in Malaysia. The list of the N scheme working population is used as sampling frame of the study (Zikmund et al., 2010). The sampling frame in this study contained a list of all administrative officers grade (N41-N54) at 19 public universities staff which are

UUM, UM, USM, UPM, UTM, UIAM, UNIMAS, UMS, UPSI, USIM, UiTM, UTHM, UTEM, UMP, UNIMAP, UMT UDM, UMK and UPNM.

The sampling process was facilitated by the availability of a sampling frame in the form of the universities' directory in the website. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the use of the directory constitutes a sufficiently reliable sampling frame. Once the sampling frames are collected for each university, 20 samples were collected using systematic sampling, which a starting point will be selected by a random process, and then every *n*th number on the list will be selected (Zikmund et al., 2010). A total of 400 administrative officers from the whole population as a sample was taken based on the determination table of sample size by Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

The nature of this study is correlational. The survey research was facilitated via questionnaire. In addition, the unit of analysis of the study was administrative staff of HEIs.

The measurement instrument to gauge the dependent variable (DV), succession planning effectiveness was taken from Questionnaire for Effective Succession Planning and Management (SP&M) by Rothwell (1999), the measurement to gauge career development was adopted from the American Standard Training and Development Survey Questionnaire by Gutteridge et al. (1993), the measurement to gauge KM practices or processes were adapted from Beijerse (2000) and Filius et al. (2000) (as cited in Azura, 2009) consisted of five elements (knowledge acquisition, knowledge creation, knowledge storage, knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer) and measurement to gauge leadership styles was adapted from Leadership Styles Questionnaire from www.sagepub.com/northhouseintro2e. Reliability test was performed on the measurement of the study, with cronbach alpha values more than 0.7 at acceptable level.

5. FINDINGS

Total of respondents were 337 with 145 male and 192 female; where most of the respondents are at the age of 25 until 34 years old which consist 38.6% from total respondents. Most respondents served HEIs for 6-10 years. They are those who already familiar and well verse with the previous and current situation of HEIs' organization. Majority are first degree qualified with 69.1%. Most administrative officers are grade 41 whilst 2 persons are grade 54 and the others such as N52, N48 and N44 are 6.5%, 13.9% and 19.9% of total respondent. In terms of the mean and standard distribution of the variables of study, succession planning mean = 5.58, standard deviation (SD) = 0.922, career development mean = 3.74, SD = 0.595, KM practices mean = 3.82, SD = 0.549 and leadership style mean = 3.82, SD = 0.599 (Table 1).

According to the correlation results, independent variables are significantly correlated to DV. Thus hypothesis Ha1 is accepted. Meanwhile to test Ha2, the researchers perform structural equation modelling analyses via AMOS. Figure 1a refers to hypothesized model whilst Figure 1b refers to modified model.

The goodness of fit index (GFI) of the structural model to respondents was assessed using several fit indices. The fitness of model was determined through observing several fit indices and not just by relying on the test of the absolute model fit (the Chi-square statistics) due to its rigidity and sensitive nature to large sample size. The fit indices were inclusive of GFI, adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI); as well as the values of root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) used to assess the magnitude of residuals of the structural model. Since the hypothesized model did not achieve model fit, the model was modified. The results of hypothesized and modified structural model are as shown in Figure 1a and b. Since the hypothesized model did not achieve model fit, the explanation of hypothesis results was based on the modified model as shown in Figure 1b. The results of the modified model in Figure 1b were assessed to test Hypothesis Ha2. Prior modification of hypothesized model, the model fit was not achieved; thus did not support the structural model fitting the data. After modification, the results of the chi square statistics and other fit indices indicated that the modified model adequately fitted the data as shown in Table 2.

The fit indices such as the Chi-square statistics ($\chi^2/df = 1.556$, $\chi^2 = 964.417$ and $df = 620$), CFI, AGFI and TLI of 0.915, 0.804 and 0.908 respectively supported the model. GFI however, did not support the model with slightly less than 0.90 of 0.827. Meanwhile, RMSEA and SRMR value confirmed that the structural model had adequately fitted the data with value of 0.049 and 0.0551 respectively. The SRMR value was in accordance with Garson (2008) where the desired cut-off values agreed at the levels of 0.05, 0.08, and 0.10. Hu and Bentler (1998) preferred the value ≤ 0.08 for model fit. Hence Hypothesis Ha2 was supported when the modified model achieved six acceptable GFI measure values. The results revealed that KM and career development have significant influence on succession planning. Specifically, the estimates of the path coefficients from the results indicated that KM at $\beta = -0.319$, $t = -2.914$, $P = 0.004$ influenced succession planning. Whilst career development at $\beta = -0.597$, $t = -3.758$, $P = 0.000$ influenced succession planning. However, leadership did not significantly influence succession planning. Overall result showed that 14% of variance for succession planning was explained by its relationship with all other variables of interest in this study which were KM, career development and leadership style.

Table 1: The correlation between variables of study

Variables	Correlation sig	1	2	3	4
1. Career development	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1			
2. Knowledge management practices	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.657** (0.000)	1		
3. Leadership styles	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.590** (0.000)	0.586** (0.000)	1	
4. Succession planning	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	0.208** (0.000)	0.315** (0.000)	0.335** (0.000)	1

Figure 1: (a) Hypothesized model, (b) Modified model

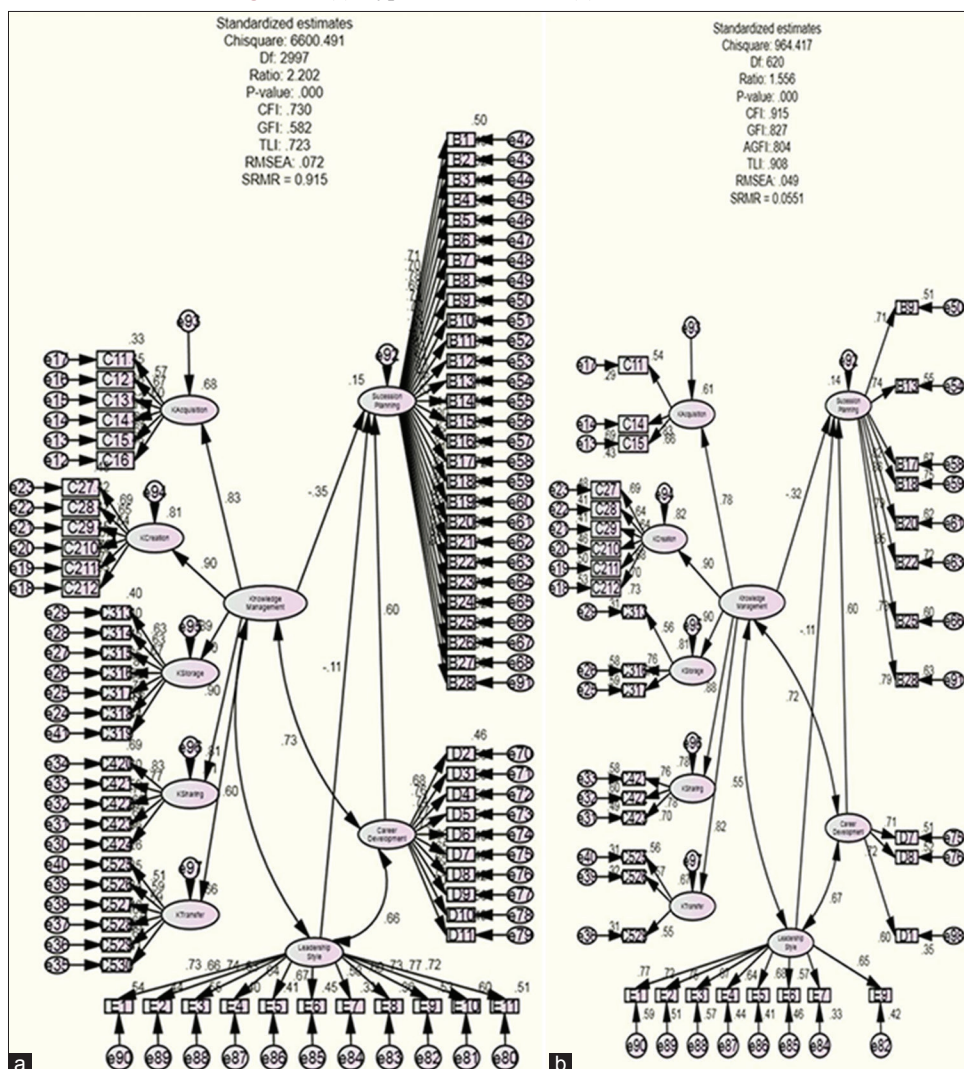


Table 2: Summary of fit indices for the structural model: Hypothesized and modified model

Fit index	Prior modification	After modification	Recommended values	Source
Df	6600.491	964.417		
χ^2	2997	620	≤ 3.00	Hu and Bentler (1995)
χ^2/df	2.202	1.556	≥ 0.90	Hoyle (1995)
GFI	0.852	0.827	≥ 0.80	Chau and Hu (2001)
AGFI	-	0.804	≥ 0.90	Bagozzi and Yi (1988)
CFI	0.730	0.915	≤ 0.08	Browne and Cudeck (1993)
RMSEA	0.072	0.049	≥ 0.90	Bagozzi and Yi (1988)
NNFI (TLI)	0.723	0.908	≤ 0.10	Garson (2008)
SRMR	0.915	0.0551		

GFI: Goodness of fit index, AGFI: Adjusted goodness of fit index, CFI: Comparative fit index, RMSEA: Root mean square error of approximation, TLI: Tucker-Lewis index, SRMR: Standardized root mean square residual

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to the results, there is significant influence of two independent variables which are KM and career development on successive planning effectiveness. Nevertheless, leadership style does not influence successive planning effectiveness although both are significantly related. Nevertheless, generally, the three independent variables only predict small percentage of successive planning effectiveness variable. The findings indicate the existence

of other significant predictors that are important in explaining the effectiveness of succession planning that have not been considered in this study. Therefore, the researchers recommend new study to be performed to explore other significant predictors of successive planning effectiveness. In conclusion, based on the results, we can now project that for HEIs, the KM practices and career development will raise the succession planning effectiveness whilst leadership style does not. This study also has substantiated Mehrabani and Mohamad (2011) study where KM

practices and career development are among main factor which influences succession planning in HEIs, besides other constructs such as organizational development and learning and development of potential successors. Nevertheless, leadership style factor is not substantiated. Considering variance explained of succession planning is small, it indicates that there are other important elements or factors that can be predictors in influencing the effectiveness of succession planning such as determining the requirement of the current performance, measuring the performance, determining the performance which are needed for the future, assessing the potential, following up, documenting competence, making and maintaining rewards for developing people, and evaluating results (Rothwell, 2002), management supports, clarifying the career path, creating a positive vision, strong organizational culture, technology advancement, flat structure and the financial conditions (Mehrabani and Mohamad, 2011).

7. RECOMMENDATION

Succession planning is vital in HEIs to ensure the continuity of effective successor. Based on the results, there were significant relationship between KM, career development and succession planning. By way of Rothwell (2005) experiential, the task of succession planning and management is troublesome in any organization, since it entails the concentration of consideration and resources on the expansion and execution of a multifaceted plan. Creating a succession plan and training program necessitates HEIs to evaluate its current employment arrangements and practices, projection upcoming needs, and begin emerging a succession plan that takes current human resources policies and practices into consideration.

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