Impact of succession planning practices on employee relations among health professionals in one government hospital in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Purpose: This study ascertains how succession-planning practices affect employee relations in public healthcare facilities in Zimbabwe.

Research Methodology: The pragmatism philosophy, which emphasizes relevance in interpreting mixed-method data, served as the foundation for this study. A sample size of 60 respondents was chosen from 120 healthcare professionals. A descriptive method was used for data analysis using SPSS and theme analyses.

Results: The results revealed that although succession planning exists in healthcare institutions, its implementation is shambolic, heightening its negative impact on employee relations, as evidenced by high staff turnover.

Conclusions: Job rotation enhances career development and provides valuable training opportunities.

Limitations: Despite adopting a mixed-method approach, the findings could not unravel the effective implementation of succession planning in the whole country; hence, the results from one institution cannot be generalized.

Contribution: Effective succession planning results in better employee relationships, lower uncertainty, increased engagement, and boosted morale among staff members. It can also broaden our understanding of best practices in succession planning.

Keywords: *Succession planning; Health care institution; Employee relations; Mentoring*

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1. Introduction

Succession planning is imperative in organizations so that employee relations can thrive in current global market settings, because the environment is constantly changing. Succession planning would help organizations achieve proclivity through interactions between employees, management, and organizations. This makes out the best candidates for key roles and simultaneously upholds good employee relations. Makambe and Moeng (2020) underscore that the phenomena of leadership are essential for giving workers motivation and guidance so that they can perform at their highest level. Although previous research on succession planning in the non-profit sector has been conducted, most studies have ignored the positive effects of succession management methods on employee relations in favor of concentrating on the roles that boards and executive directors play in succession management (Allison, 2002; Hunter & Decker-Pierce, 2021).

However, inadequate internal succession planning is the cause of poor employee relations and the inability to maintain positive employee relations, which ultimately results in dissatisfaction and leads to an employee's decision to leave their job for another company (Marlapa & Endri, 2024). Due to their progressive intention to leave, these individuals cause job instability, which negatively impacts the

organization by creating an unfavorable work environment and driving up human resource expenses (Hapsari & Zulherman, 2021). Organizations must be able to predict, sustain, and maintain good employee relations even though it is a non-profit entity in return for their work engagement. Employees value the reason to offer their best, abstain from absenteeism, and work hard to achieve organizational goals.

Human relations must be incorporated into succession planning, because a structured succession plan indicates that an organization is prepared to handle the impending requirement for a new generation of leaders (Martin & O'Shea, 2021). Accordingly, employers that prioritize employee health and well-being through internal succession planning would make employees strive to give more than 100% by speaking positively about the company; genuinely engaged employees become invaluable assets to the company (George & Krishnakumar, 2023). With this in mind, succession planning ensures continuity of leadership and organisational culture, creating a plausible climate for enhancing employee satisfaction and engagement in healthcare institutions (Abu-Ghname, Davis, Shook, Reece, & Hollier Jr, 2021). Nevertheless, succession planning has become a significant measure of human capital development in both private and public institutions. Professionals must demonstrate their expertise in their respective fields. This illustrates that proficiency raises motivation, which in turn increases employee performance in the line desired by leadership (Eladira, Lubis, & Sakti, 2024). It is well accepted that the measurement of human capital development in the context of sustainable development is part of the length and breadth of any organization's development worldwide (Iskandar, 2020).

People-centered development in organizations is based on succession planning. The goal of this career development program was to help people in a business become more capable leaders. Staff movements are apparent and create voids in key leadership positions, thereby causing business disruptions. It is important to note that such gaps affect organizations' effectiveness. Therefore, it is necessary to identify potential candidates for growth so that they can take on leadership roles within the business when the opportunity arises within the organization (Mokgalapa, 2023). It is becoming clear that, if there is low engagement, low morale, or even a serious lack of employee relations, human capital flight causes significant organizational disruptions (Ali & Mehreen, 2019).

As such, succession planning (SP) evaluates each leader's skills, identifying potential replacements within and outside the company, in the case of internal replacements, training those employees is required so that they are prepared to assume control (Ijaz & Nawaz, 2022). However, both profit and nonprofit organizations are vulnerable to patterns that emerge in unstable contexts. For example, COVID-19 has changed the career paths chosen by prospective leaders and severely disengaged a group of prospective frontline subordinate officers who have an impact on employee relations, a crucial component in achieving self-efficacy in succession planning. In times of adversity, however, non-profit entities are pushed, for example, to improve succession-planning management and make it salient to improve succession planning in non-profit organizations, as argued by Santora (2020). Reducing resentment training can be used as a strategy to improve employee skills and knowledge, leading to increased motivation and job satisfaction (Ichdan, 2024). Nonetheless, due to a lack of adequate resources, top-down internal succession planning is favored at the expense of bottom-up succession planning. Accordingly, people will inevitably depart from other organizations when there are few chances for promotion, particularly for those who are not yet considered for important positions. In particular, in Zimbabwe, this situation has led several health professionals to quit the health industry due to rising levels of work unhappiness and bad employee relations.

Work Institute's 2021 Mid-Year Retention Report data indicate that "career reasons" are the main causes of resignation (workinstitute.com, n.d.). Regarding the survey, over 50% of those who quit their jobs did so because they perceived better prospects for career growth and promotion elsewhere. The aforementioned trend exhibits a 17.2% increase from 2020 and 7.6% increase from 2019, suggesting a growing need for talent development and advancement prospects. Employee relations are undoubtedly more compelling in that they may prepare employees to serve and support (SP) practices if leadership can promote open communication, recognize exceptional performance, and offer opportunities for training and growth. Succession planning may assist in generating these opportunities by placing

organized leadership pipelines in place. Talent management is the overarching program that supports organizational growth and stability, and it is a high priority for 76% of firms, according to the same study, the SHRM (2006) Talent Management Survey Report. A company's ability to succeed is closely correlated with its human capital, which is why it is important to improve human relations procedures, particularly in the healthcare industry, to ensure that patients receive the safest possible treatment from nurses.

However, several authors have recently highlighted the critical role of human resource (HR) specialists in non-profit succession planning (Santora, 2020). The primary reason for this is that HR specialists enhance human capital in both strategic and day-to-day operational practices such as in healthcare services by reinventing their employees (van Vulpen, Scherpenisse, & van Twist, 2020). Healthcare services require succession plans because of the scarcity of healthcare professionals, the rise in the demand for healthcare services, and the focus on patient safety and excellence. To the best of our knowledge, no SP study has been conducted in healthcare facilities; nonetheless, since these organizations' primary purpose is to support human life, their main operations ought to take precedence. Accordingly, it is fascinating to conduct this research because the outcomes in public healthcare institutions are rare and little is known about succession planning, especially after the disruptions caused by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Anjum et al., 2022).

It is anticipated that this research will provide insight into the effects of succession-planning procedures on employee relations in Zimbabwe's public healthcare institutions. To address this knowledge gap, this study attempted to address the following research questions:

1. Q1. How are employee relations affected by internal top-down succession-planning procedures in health care institutions?
2. Q2. How are employee relations affected by internal bottom-up succession-planning techniques in health care institutions?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Conceptualisation of Successful Planning
Succession planning is critical in any organization to maintain leadership continuity. Rothwell (2015) defines succession planning as the process of identifying individuals for strategic leadership positions. Furthermore, succession planning, also known as succession management, is the "intentional and systematic effort by an organization to assure leadership continuity in critical positions, to retain and build intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and to promote individual progress" (Rothwell, 2015). Succession planning captures a wide range of people-related activities. It is worth noting that succession planning is 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. Consequently, effective organizations ought to be watchful to sustain good employee relations while maintaining key leadership positions in their delivery of performance.

2.2 Employee Relations
Employee relations are the existence of an interconnection between employers and employees in an organization. Effective employer-employee relationships are designed to encourage employees' motivation, dedication, and trust, as noted by Bajaj, Sinha, and Tiwari (2013). Additionally, it fosters an environment within the company that guarantees that every employee's potential is fully realized for the best possible achievement of the organization's objectives. Developing trust is a crucial concern in human relations. However, employees by their nature might not agree with every move made by the employer; interestingly, employees will nevertheless appreciate moves to promote good working relationships if it is done in bad faith. Effective employer-employee relations provide the foundation for integrating employee demands into organizational goals (Ogbonnaya, Daniels, Connolly, & van Veldhoven, 2017).

2.3 Theoretical framework
The foundation of this article is John Maxwell's law of legacy. In companies that must fill leadership positions for several reasons, succession planning aims to develop leaders who might be allocated to

significant roles. In his emphasis, Maxwell (2007) highlighted the idea that "a leader's lasting value is measured by succession." Note that developed people show a leader's commitment to their vision and that these followers are tangible products of the leader's legacy. According to Maxwell's (2007) findings, leaders can achieve success by taking on major tasks independently; they can also leave a legacy by placing leaders in positions where they can take on major tasks without their help. Leaders remain crucial members of organizations by mentoring and developing others and guiding them through challenging experiences that test their resilience and potential. Leaders who leave a lasting impression focus on the big picture (Maxwell 2007). Even after they have departed, leaders continue to run the company. They enable hiring from within by supporting leadership development at all levels, while maintaining employee relations. The law of legacy imposes a duty on all leaders in companies to engage in succession planning to support staff development, maintain leadership continuity, and maintain organizational effectiveness.

2.4 Succession Planning and Employee Relations in Organisations

A sense of organizational concern for employees' well-being and contributions to the company is the focal point of top management support, which is reflected in managers' and supervisors' support (Pila et al., 2016). In top-down succession planning, the top leadership of the organization actively participates in the succession-planning process. They were responsible for identifying critical leadership positions and establishing criteria for selecting potential successors. Talent and expertise are not specifically inclined towards top leadership. Employees become alienated and desire to grow; thus, if not considered, they may eventually pull off the organization. Rebuilding employee trust is especially crucial in the current turbulent workplace because of unforeseen events, such as the COVID-19 outbreak and the uncertainty they bring (Rudolph et al., 2021). Workplace relationships improve dedication and lead to fewer disruptions, such as staff turnover, because management tends to attend well to employees' needs. This can help build trust, engagement, and commitment and improve relations and motivation among all parties involved (Hoque & Zheng, 2024).

Various methods, such as job rotation, project assignments, coaching, mentoring, training, and exposure to top leaders, can improve succession planning. Second, management should evaluate key personnel, primary areas that require development to acquire skills appropriate for the next level, succession-planning strategies, coaching or mentoring, job improvement, leadership and management training, and work enhancement (Monyei et al., 2021). However, in today's workforce, a "bottom-up" approach to succession planning is more effective if it includes frequent staff members about their career aspirations and assists them in creating career plans and competencies to achieve those objectives, while enabling the company to adapt to the shifting demands of the market. Employees act as crucial points to foster meaningful change; hence, supervisors should treat them with utmost care. Furthermore, earlier research has demonstrated that by encouraging job engagement, the supervisory function has a major impact on employee engagement (Pires, 2021).

While internal succession planning focuses on developing internal talent to fill key leadership positions, the external approach involves seeking and selecting candidates from outside the organization. This development is detrimental in the sense that junior employees, in particular, feel that their chances for advancement are limited, which results in disengagement; thus, the benefits of the external approach do not align with their expectations. Participation and appropriate placement are essential for healthy SP. However, by bringing in leaders from outside the organization, companies gain access to individuals with diverse experiences and backgrounds. These external candidates may introduce fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, challenge the status quo, and drive organizational growth. Numerous studies have found that companies with succession plans perform better during leadership changes and have longer stretches of stable profitability sustained by positive employee relationships (Buckman et al., 2020). Closer to home, competence and job happiness are inextricably linked to an organization since both are necessary for the organization to achieve its objectives and achieve good results (Ngaliman, Astarina, & Catrayasa, 2024).

According to Gabriel, Biriowu, and Dagogo (2020), succession planning at work helps identify and develop high-potential workers to guarantee the readiness of successors by enabling the company to

take on risk in critical roles while lowering that risk, by so doing guaranteeing positive employee relations. Succession planning initiatives often require employees to demonstrate high performance levels to be considered in future leadership roles. The degree of employee relations is indicated by job performance, which is measured by metrics such as productivity, task completion, innovation, and customer happiness. In many circumstances, this approach enhances the effectiveness of succession planning (Bella 2023). When an atmosphere that encourages employees' career aspirations, offers opportunities for skill development, and acknowledges and rewards their accomplishments is created, employee relations come into play. According to Riyanto, Endri, and Hamid (2021), reflective personality and behavioral traits are crucial components of leadership and need to be further developed as essential managerial competencies. When employees feel that their efforts are valued and acknowledged, they are motivated to continue performing their best and pursue advancement opportunities. In summary, it is believed that good communication is a critical component of the succession-planning process, and all employees in the company must receive cooperation and support (Pila et al., 2016).

Where there is employee engagement, the organization is likely to retain its current leaders, and upcoming leaders are addressed by other constructs of leadership succession planning that focus on leadership development curriculum, cultural reflection of the leadership plan, and the development of young leaders in many organizations around the globe. In a study focused on management development in Tanzania by Nassary (2020), in the case of Arusha Municipality in Tanzania, the findings show a positive relationship between training and employee performance, as well as employee relations. They showed that organizations are both concerned with their management population; they saw their development as a key priority by investing in them. By doing so, employee relations were fostered openly. When unique opportunities are given to those who are thought to be at the core of management, employees typically dislike this strategy, although it goes against management standards. Anger and conflict among some employees will result from dissatisfaction, disrupting SP practice. On this score, there is a need for a shared leadership perspective that fosters the distribution of leadership responsibility to non-formal leadership actors on a task-related basis (Ziegert & Dust, 2021). This connection includes every member of the organization at one's level of responsibility. This succession-planning practice cements employee relations. However, deliberate overlaps of leadership responsibilities in succession management neutralize role conflicts (Geib & Boenigk, 2022).

Equan (2021) conducted research in Charlotte, North Carolina, on how to enhance property and liability insurance organizations' succession planning. The conclusions of this study provide a crucial point to consider. The findings of this study demonstrate that to guarantee agency continuity, it is crucial to implement a variety of sound succession-planning practices. The results were bolstered by thematic data analysis to promote employee relations through recruitment, training, mentorship, and leadership commitment. Alradhi et al. (2020) examine the impact of succession planning on innovation in products and services. The regression analysis results also demonstrated that succession planning has a significant influence on creativity. When an organization implements SP formally, employees who have not participated in the program for their entire lifetime will start to see things from a different angle. The findings also indicate that the four facets of succession planning, successor selection and training, post-succession company strategy, incumbent's post-succession function, and succession decision distribution have a significant impact on innovation in products and services. Thus, the critical implementation of SP with due diligence in improved employee relations fosters organizational innovation.

In South Africa, research on the value of succession planning for an organization's survival Erasmus (2009) discovered that while most businesses knew about succession planning procedures, their actual execution lagged behind. As long as the initiative serves the interests of the organization's management and aims, employees with aspirations to advance will likely oppose it. Obadan and Ohiorenoya (2013) investigated succession planning in small businesses in Edo State, Nigeria, and discovered that the majority of these businesses lacked a succession plan and did not consider the competency and aptitude of their successors. Nevertheless, if clear career development plans and succession management procedures bind employees to the organization, their happiness increases. When senior management

feels negatively about the succession-planning process, employee relations may suffer as a result of management's lack of transparency. This could lead to mistrust and management crisis. As stated by Bano, Omar, and Ismail (2022), a misconception about the benefits and results of succession planning will bring to the organization, would make some leaders reluctant to begin the process.

According to a study on health worker retention in Kenya (Ndetei, Khasakhala, & Omolo, 2008), succession planning strategies are not a significant factor in determining staff retention among Kenyan public health facility nurses. Apparently, the SP is not a size-fits-all jacket. In contrast, a Kenyan study discovered that factors influencing nurses' retention included pay, ability to obtain loans for a home or automobile, training opportunities, comfortable living arrangements, access to healthcare, and possibilities for self and family education. Succession plans are essential in healthcare organizations because of the scarcity of healthcare professionals, the rise in the demand for healthcare services, and the emphasis on patient care and safety are important factors to take note of. Research indicates that healthcare organizations do not practice succession planning at a rapid pace. When it is, executive leadership positions are the focus of the plan rather than clinical leadership responsibilities (Phillips, Evans, Tooley, & Shirey, 2018).

3. Methodology

This study is underpinned by pragmatic research philosophy. The effectiveness of pragmatism comes from its ability to prioritize practicality and applicability, and it is problem-centered, mixed methods, flexibility, collaboration, reflective practice, contextual understanding, and iteration and refinement (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Meanwhile, Heinonen and Strandvik (2022) assert that pragmatism focuses on practical action, and that the generation of knowledge that is relevant to the real world is one of its primary strengths. To collect both quantitative and qualitative data, descriptive research was used to portray the research topic methodically and factually. This approach was chosen because trustworthy information regarding the specific succession-planning procedures used in the public healthcare organization under study was obtained. This study adopted a mixed method approach. This made it possible for new complementary points of view to arise, which increased our understanding of the phenomenon under study. The target population included 120 participants. Sixty people made up the study's final sample, selected by purposive, systematic, and convenient means. 52 members who had given their consented to participate in the study were given questionnaires, and eight members received structured one-on-one interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted with healthcare professionals, including a matron, senior and junior doctors, nurses, and the human resources district manager. The interviews were recorded to provide room for further understanding of the details of each participant's interview session. Each interview lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. Member verification was used in this study to ensure the veracity and application of the information gathered from participants' answers, and to reaffirm data interpretations (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Participants were asked to confirm their answers they had provided. Thematic analysis was conducted with healthcare management workers' responses in each transcript thoroughly and independently coded by the researchers. The researchers employed NVivo 12.0 Pro software to assist with the qualitative data analysis. Similarly, information gathered from tape-recorded interviews and interview transcripts led researchers to apply thematic analysis to offer a thorough understanding of the problems they were studying (Lune & Berg, 2017). Data from the questionnaires were coded and entered into a computer using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel for further analysis. These tools are used because of how quickly and accurately data can be analyzed as well as how effectively both software programs work when creating graphical presentations.

4. Result and discussions

4.1 Quantitative data analysis

The study sought to identify the various practices that the organization studied to enhance preliminary practices that would eventually achieve both succession planning and employee relations. Respondents were given the option to select procedures based on the company's apparent perception of maintaining succession planning and fostering positive employee relationships. The results are shown in Figure 4.1.

4.1 Succession planning practice to hence employee relations

Researchers introduced a variety of succession-planning variables that are thought to influence employee relations. A summary of the results is shown in Figure 1 as a summary.
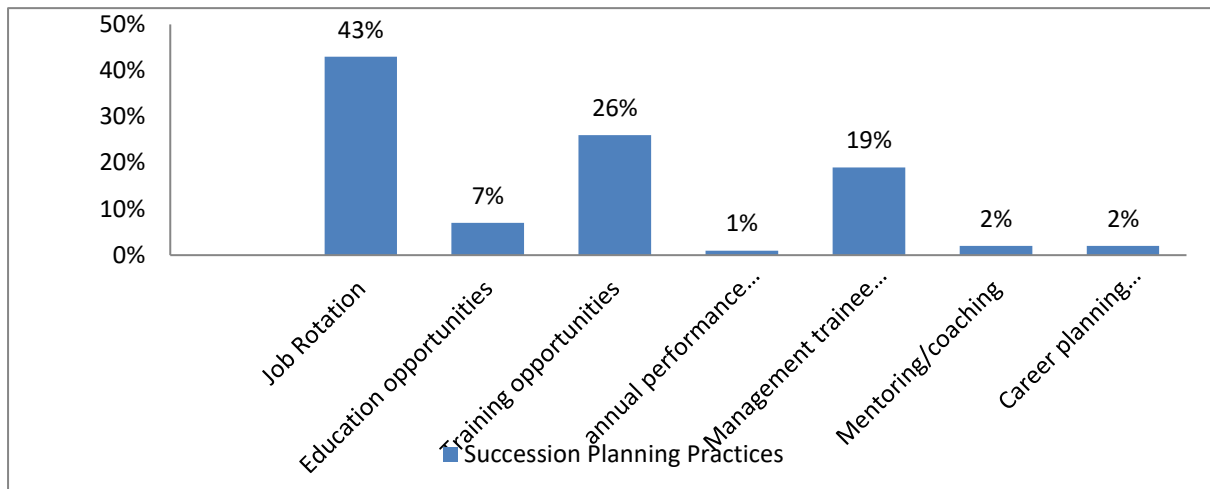

Figure 1. Succession planning factors enhance employee relations

Job rotation is a popular approach for talent development, succession planning, and improving employee relations, as indicated by the findings, which show that 43% of organizations use it. This healthcare institution employs job rotation to professionally empower staff with multiple skillsets. The percentage of opportunities for training was 26%. Otherwise, employee training is the most important skill for health professionals. The management training trainee program (19%) may be directly related to continuity of leadership. There is a chance that the (7%) of educational opportunities have nothing to do with succession planning, and with only (2%) mentoring, (2%) career planning, and (1%) annual performance have received less focus. This may raise questions about an organization's ability to implement effective succession-planning procedures. Therefore, the most effective strategy used to train people for employment stability in many specific fields is job rotation. Nevertheless, it appeared that the executives in the organization still had the final say over leadership succession. Admittedly, job rotation fosters beneficial relationships by exposing employees to a range of roles and responsibilities within the organization and improving their skills, knowledge, and adaptability (Cascio, 2003). Employees who have a broad range of abilities and a thorough understanding of the business may perform better since they will be more flexible and valuable contributors (Alaflaq, Aloqab, & Al-Dakhli, 2024).

Respondents were asked to score their level of agreement with statements regarding succession-planning strategies inside the organization on a five-point Likert scale. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Succession Planning Strategies

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Managers in the company discuss with employees their development plan	0%	7%	13%	20%	60
The company has a career development program for employees	0%	0%	0	67%	33%
Employees are given opportunities to be part of tasks outsuide their core responsibili	0%	5%	15%	53%	27%
Managers effectively communicate with employees on matters affecting staff	33%	50%	7%	10%	0
Employees in the company are empowered to take responsibility and authority	25%	22%	53%	0	0

strongly agree	5				
agree	4				
neutral	3				
disagree	2				
strongly disagree	1				

The results in Table 1 above indicate that the management of the selected institution effectively communicates with employees. For example, (83%) of the respondents indicated that managers' communication is specifically on improving staff welfare, while (80%) indicated that managers do not discuss their development plans with employees to enhance succession-planning practices. Furthermore, (45%) of the respondents believed that managers at this healthcare institution empowered employees to take responsibility as a way to both enhance succession planning and sustain good employee relations, while (80%) averred that employees were not given opportunities to be part of tasks outside their responsibility. The findings in Table 1 also indicate that (100%) of the respondents opined that there was no career development program for employees.

The results shown in Table 1 demonstrate the traits of different employee interactions, supporting efforts to improve positive employee relations. For example, participants concurred that managers and supervisors had efficient communication with their workforce over matters about staff-related concerns. The majority did not favor allowing employees to participate in task groups and assignments outside of their primary duties, which suggests that there are no mechanisms in place to positively impact the execution of succession-planning processes. Employee relations are negatively affected by any succession plan that lacks trust in both large and small businesses. This trend marks growing feelings of job satisfaction, which profoundly heightens reasons for turnover intention. This development is accompanied by high levels of stress, resentment, job discontent, and low levels of commitment, which lead to attrition and a negative attitude toward work. Similarly, the results above show that the organization has no intention of implementing career development initiatives for staff members. These findings are in line with a study conducted (Marlapa & Endri, 2024) by a tourist attraction service organization in North Jakarta, Indonesia, which revealed that stress was a major reason for the high number of staff resignations in the customer service division. Because employee relations are not receiving enough attention, workers will continue to lack motivation and will be against any efforts made to undertake succession planning for the organization's few senior members who have been chosen. These results corroborate those of Ali, Bashir, and Mehreen (2019), who found that, in the end, a dearth of communication regarding succession planning may lead outstanding employees to search for opportunities elsewhere out of frustration and demotivation. Nonetheless, increased employee engagement and productivity are closely correlated with high levels of motivation, which have a major impact on positive organizational outcomes. As a reminder, management is compelled to take note of this and improve employee relationships.

The results of the survey, which asked respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with a variety of job-related factors, primarily those connected to succession planning inside the company, and vis-à-vis employee relations are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 2. Job-related levels of satisfaction

	strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree
availability of promotion opportunities	12%	15%	53%	15%	5%
established career progression	0%	10%	30%	13%	47%
opportunities to learn new things from the job	37%	33%	23%	7%	0%
quality of supervisin I get on my job	0%	20%	13%	47%	20%
support and guidance from my manager	27%	13%	53%	7%	0%
opportunities for personal growth	15%	12%	53%	20%	0%
strongly agree	5				
agree	4				
neutral	3				
disagree	2				
strongly disagree	1				

The findings in Table 2 above demonstrate that managers at this healthcare institution have very few prospects for promotion. For example, (27%) of the respondents said that the organization's managers lacked the motivation to cultivate leaders who could be elevated to important roles, and (53%) said they were unconcerned. Conversely, (70%) said that the organization gave subordinates opportunities to learn new skills in roles other than leadership. (90%) Of the respondents, 90% said that the management did not care about the advancement of their employees' careers, which is a sign of poor succession planning. Forty% agreed that their managers provided them with good support and guidance, and (67%) said that the organization's supervision was of low quality.

The results shown above provide some intriguing conclusions. The results from the other measurable variables do not significantly support the notion that succession planning has a beneficial impact on employee relations, despite Table 2's results showing that managers of the chosen institution positively and largely provide opportunities for subordinates to learn new things. This result suggests that succession planning is not helpful to healthcare institutions' management in terms of improving employee relations. Nonetheless, superiors should always attend to the needs of employees. Positive attitudes toward their work are a sign of high job satisfaction, whereas negative attitudes toward their tasks or work are a sign of low job satisfaction (Kertiriasih, Sujana, & Suardika, 2018). This does not matter to the type of organization, whether it is a profit-making entity or not.

A closer look at the findings in Table 2 demonstrates that chances for advancement, personal development, and learning new things are scored poorly, with ratings below 30%. As a result, an organization's succession-planning practices have a detrimental effect on employee relations, which lowers employee engagement and work satisfaction. This result supports the opinions of Lu, Guo, Azimi, and Huang (2019) who underscore that a positive perspective that balances people's expectations for their work with their benefits is employee job satisfaction. If left unchecked, it hurts patient happiness, service quality, and organizational growth, which ruins good employee relationships. Ultimately, poor employee relations and corporate resignations result in higher human resource expenses and widespread low productivity throughout the organization.

The study also examined how employee relations inside a company are affected by internal bottom-up succession-planning strategies. Table 4.3 displays the options that the respondents were given to select: yes or no. The table below lists the study outcomes.

Table 3. Bottom-up Succession Planning and Employee Relations

STATEMENT	YES	NO
Does the Company experience high employee turnover rates in a year?	88%	12%

Does the company consider outsiders for filling key positions in the organisation?	**80%**	**20%**
Is there a Succession Planning System in place?	**35%**	**65%**
Does the Company have a strategy/plan/policy for career advancement for employees?	**5%**	**95%**

These results indicated a high staff turnover rate. For example, (88%) of the respondents said that there was a lot of personnel turnover at the company. According to Table 3, the chosen institution maintains leadership continuity by using the external labor market to fill open positions. This eventually stifles the internal labor market, which harbors prospects for advancement. Finally, (65%) of respondents emphasized the absence of succession planning and (95%) angrily declared that the organization had no strategy, plan, or policy for career advancement. The results of previous studies are intriguing.

The data presented in Table 3 shows that the organization depends more on foreigners than internal candidates for advancement to important leadership roles. As an increasing number of healthcare professionals leave organizations, the costs are rising. Workers are unhappy with how leaders handle succession planning; rather, the process worsens employee turnover and has a detrimental effect on institutional operations. According to Nkouangas (2023), these findings corroborate the views of workers who may become disengaged, unmotivated, or look for career advancement opportunities elsewhere in the absence of a formal succession plan or career progression framework. This scenario aggravates job dissatisfaction due to damning company disruptions. High job satisfaction might reduce turnover intention, while low job satisfaction will rapidly or gradually cause damage or setbacks to the organization (Andriani et al., 2023). This would result in the organization losing its skilled and trained staff, which would cost them twice as much due to operational and financial inefficiencies.

This study evaluated the impact of external top-down succession-planning practices on employee relations. The results are shown in Figure 2.
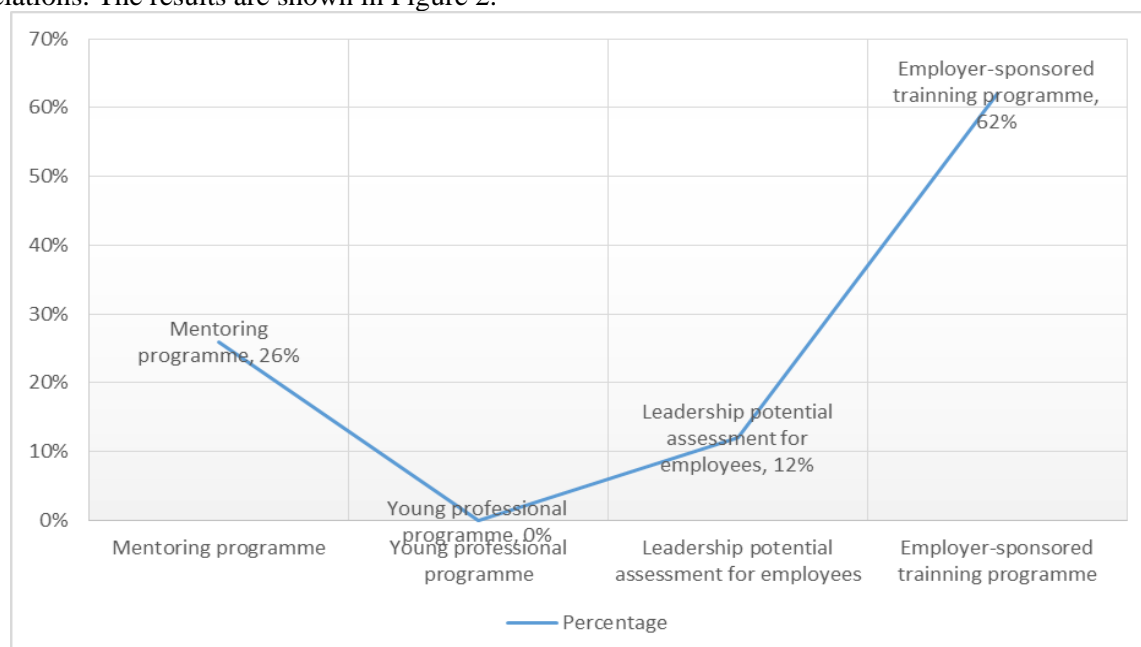

Figure 2. Bottom-up succession planning practices

The public institution's 26% mentorship program engagement rate indicates that it is difficult to increase positive employee relations through talent development and future leadership preparation. Nonetheless, this shows that some employees have mentorship connections, which may be helpful for their career advancement and potential succession planning. The young professional program's zero percent participation rate raises questions about the organization's ability to draw and maintain talent. This

raises the possibility of a gap in the development of young professionals for leadership positions in the future, which can worsen poor employee relations. Conversely, poor company relations are associated with low motivation and stifle personal desires to improve performance and work output. Workers are quite proud of their work so that efforts increase some level of utility," according to the theory of intrinsic motivation (Virgiawan, Riyanto, & Endri, 2021).

Employee skills and knowledge development are becoming increasingly valued, as seen by the high participation rate of 62% in employer-sponsored training programs. In light of this, employer-sponsored training programs are critical for creating a pipeline for future leaders, according to Bano et al. (2022). Numerous programs offered by employers are designed to perfect new workers rather than to develop the current workforce. This was the situation in the selected institution. Therefore, this program injures employee relations, as when vacancies arise, the organization relies on the external labor market. An action such as this is counterproductive to this healthcare institution's goal of achieving employee relations from an internal perspective. By identifying and nurturing leaders who can adapt to the changing needs of the business, Perrone (2022) in the book "The Leadership Pipeline," highlighted the significance of bottom-up internal succession planning. Employees would demonstrate loyalty and dedication by applying bottom-up succession planning, ultimately increasing the organisation's worth and motivating them to improve their job performance (Udodiugwu, Nwosu, Obiakor, & Nwumeh, 2024).

4.2 Qualitative data analysis

The interviewees discussed internal succession planning and its potential to produce leaders that the organization can utilize in the future. Participants agreed with the following statements about the importance of advancing succession-planning processes without denigrating employee relations within the company.

"Sir, could I please just ask you to pay attention This Healthcare Center stands out from other public institutions. Responsibilities of the positions matter. We have state-registered nurses, doctors, matrons, trainees, general personnel, and more in addition to patients." Participant 4.

"Your education and medical competencies will be taken into consideration by strategic key positions within health care organizations." Participant 5.

"We are dealing with life or death as you know patients; first-rate knowledge and training are required for treating them." Participant 3.

Job rotation is essential in this position because, despite the need to provide world-class healthcare, diseases are evolving and disrupting the existing systems. One needs to be conversant with one's job description. Just think of the havoc that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused in our communities." Participant 1.

The responses clearly indicate that there could be some challenges or hitches in the manner in which a health institution practices succession planning without harming employee relations. The main argument is that general hospitals operate with unique occupations, and as such, training people to take on leadership roles is not a job that can be taken on by anyone because the main responsibility of the work is to help patients become healthier. By their responsibilities within their respective fields, healthcare institutions are distinct from other public organizations due to their increased focus on combating diseases and finding solutions to save lives. These results demonstrate that succession planning may fail to uphold good employee relationships. The bone of contention provides clear evidence of a good staff turnover rate of 88 %. Both bottom-up and top-down succession-planning practices are strictly based on the knowledge one has in managing the critical health conditions of patients in the organization. Importantly, in the words of Kamariah, Hudiono, and Yani (2013) leadership has been identified by a number of authors as a strategy for coming up with creative settings that enhance organizational, human, social, and structural capabilities. A glaring disregard for employee relations remains a dream, as workers present several ways to thwart management's expectations. Given

the above findings, the traditional succession-planning approach, which can foster employee happiness, increased motivation, and improved employee relations, has not yet been implemented in this selected institution. Despite these obstacles, effective succession planning helps the business by maintaining institutional knowledge and facilitating the growth of internal talent, seamless leadership transfers, and well-defined career advancement pathways (Siambi, 2022).

The theme that was also addressed in this study is bottom-up succession planning in a healthcare institution. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the way managers handled the phenomenon to improve leadership continuity through improved employee relations. The interviewees' basic argument was that, in comparison to other public institutions such as schools, the nature of the core business is very different, and this has aggravated poor handling of how the selected organization can achieve succession planning by improving employee relations. In a school, temporary teachers can be deployed to address high staff turnover; however, this is not possible in hospitals because the primary goal is to save patients' lives.

Participant 2 added "My *understanding of succession planning is to prepare people who may serve a key position if it has fallen vacant for any reason. Young personnel, say, young doctors and nurses, are required to gather experience and knowledge specifically on treating patients, diagnosing new ailments and fighting diseases*"

In addition, participant 4 underscored that: *"It becomes intriguing if this knowledge is not there among the staff. It would rather make sense to serve patients in the sick bed than to implement bottom-up succession planning."*

"To save life, I do not think junior doctors may complain when a new senior doctor is hired from outside to take over a new position in the institution" Participant 3. In addition, Participant 8 averred that *"Succession planning was being done, but in the respective positions and departments in this institution. It also depends on what you do and what you have regarding your responsibilities."*

The responses show that succession planning in healthcare institutions is not business as usual, but rather it seems management may initiate the process on a priority basis. It has been urged that people develop leadership abilities in appropriate contexts. The precepts above reveal that bottom-up succession planning negatively affects employee relations. It is not done according to the expectations of the generality of employees, hence leaving a void on the account of employee motivation and engagement. In certain situations where funding is needed to support staff training, the choice to spend that money carefully considers the patients' priorities before other considerations. These scenarios meet with decisions in favor of patients' welfare and upkeep, rather than the welfare and staff development of employees. *"Nevertheless,* because *we work with sick people, succession planning is extremely important in our organization. We do not take opportunities or make educated guesses. Therefore, regular skill updates are the norm but not necessarily in the manner many employees desire." Participant 7.* In collaboration with Mihaylov and Zurbruegg (2021), they postulate that leadership continuity is the driving force behind succession planning, and leadership is the point at which education, training, and development for successors should begin. The results of this study demonstrate some form of controversy in the sense that what managers say must be done to achieve succession planning is a non-event on the ground. Succession planning practice in the selected healthcare institution is hurting employee relations; hence, employees are leaving the institution at an alarming rate, bedeviling the institution's operations. It is time for organizational leaders to uphold HR practices for effective performance in organizations. Vizano, Khamaludin, and Fahlevi (2021) posit some takeaway notes for managers. The authors argue that, to boost employee performance, firms have recently concentrated on implementing a number of high-performance HR practices and initiatives, including career development, teamwork, training, performance appraisal, and remuneration. Such practices have been found to hold water for research in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

This study adds to the extant literature on the impact of succession-planning practices on employee relations in healthcare institutions. The study established that leader voids are left by both junior and prominent position holders as a result of stifled employee relations. The organization is experiencing high staff turnover, which escalates the poor implementation of SP, leading to high employee disengagement. These findings indicate that job rotation enhances career development and provides valuable training opportunities. Conversely, management has good communication practices for career development, but plans have never been implemented, rendering it difficult to achieve positive succession planning. It emerged from the findings that employees are not given job opportunities outside their key responsibilities, ultimately stifling employee relations. Simultaneously, opportunities to learn new skills are provided outside the realms of key leadership positions. The occurrence of high staff turnover has seen the organization resort to the external labor market to fill key leadership positions. The employees bemoaned that SP failed to uphold employee relations deliberately, and hence, aspirations for internal promotions were severely bottlenecked, leading to high staff turnover. The findings reveal that SP is not a major priority, as significant priorities are focused on the healthcare services of patients. Succession planning in this institution has proven to be a non-event and has affected employee relations with a high prevalence. Nevertheless, the effective implementation of a succession plan requires an adequate human resource information system, which constitutes an organizational structure for promotion, training, coaching, and mentorship programs (Ahmad & Keerio, 2020).

5.1 Implications of Findings and Future Study

The findings of this study add value to the limited but growing literature on the impact of succession planning on employee relations in healthcare institutions. Consequently, this contribution has broadened our understanding of the impact of succession-planning practices on employee relations in Zimbabwe's healthcare institutions. This study focuses on the unique Zimbabwean context, characterized by hyperinflation and a dearth of research on succession planning within both the private and public sectors, including political leadership. To improve future studies aligned with this concept, quantitative methodology could be further used in the future to allow the generalization of the findings to other Zimbabwean healthcare institutions. Overall, policymakers and healthcare leadership need to be aware that in as much as a priority of healthcare support is channelled to patients there is a need to implement sound succession planning to open up opportunities for promotion from the internal labour market.

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