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# Identification of Individuals for Directorship Roles: Evaluation of a University's Succession Management

Nana Yaw Oppong

*University of Cape Coast, Ghana*, [noppong@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:noppong@ucc.edu.gh)

Nancy Oduro-Asabere

*University of Cape Coast*, [nancy.oduro@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:nancy.oduro@ucc.edu.gh)

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### Abstract

Identification of potential individuals for leadership roles is a critical aspect of a succession management programme, as other aspects of the programme depend on an effective identification. This study evaluates how the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Ghana identifies potential non-academic senior members for directorship roles. We collected qualitative data through in-depth interviewing of nine directors at the university. We analysed the data using constant comparison analysis by developing three themes, under each of which we presented similar categories of data. We found that the criteria for identification of potential directors include seniority; both internal and external sources; and familiarity with the culture, the legal framework, and the higher educational system. We conclude that UCC does not operate a structured, formal succession management but fills leadership vacancies through the traditional recruitment and selection method, an all-inclusive approach which we argue is not suitable for identifying and developing potential individuals for leadership positions.

### Keywords

Succession Management, University of Cape Coast, Identification of Potentials, Ghana, Constant Comparison Analysis

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## Identification of Individuals for Directorship Roles: Evaluation of a University's Succession Management

Nana Yaw Oppong and Nancy Oduro-Asabere  
University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

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*Identification of potential individuals for leadership roles is a critical aspect of a succession management programme, as other aspects of the programme depend on an effective identification. This study evaluates how the University of Cape Coast (UCC) in Ghana identifies potential non-academic senior members for directorship roles. We collected qualitative data through in-depth interviewing of nine directors at the university. We analysed the data using constant comparison analysis by developing three themes, under each of which we presented similar categories of data. We found that the criteria for identification of potential directors include seniority; both internal and external sources; and familiarity with the culture, the legal framework, and the higher educational system. We conclude that UCC does not operate a structured, formal succession management but fills leadership vacancies through the traditional recruitment and selection method, an all-inclusive approach which we argue is not suitable for identifying and developing potential individuals for leadership positions. Keywords: Succession Management, University of Cape Coast, Identification of Potentials, Ghana, Constant Comparison Analysis*

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### Introduction

There is no subject in the last two decades that has received as much attention in the human resource management literature as “talent management.” An appreciable amount of literature has been produced by eminent scholars and experts like Pfeffer (1998), Woodruffe (1999), Barner (2000), Michaels, Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod (2001), Berger and Berger (2004), Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), Rothwell (2005), Cappelli (2008), and Meisinger and Schiemann (2009) on what organisations should do to attract, hire and retain talent. Recent publications such as by Tansley (2011), Devins and Gold (2014), and Oppong (2013, 2015) have added to the literature. All these experts recognise that talent provides organisations with a competitive advantage, and they also highlight a common concern that not only is talent scarce, but also that most organisations are not doing enough to manage talents. For instance, Oppong (2015) observed that even when this was mandated by law, companies in the Ghanaian mining industry were not implementing the talent management (a programme of identifying and developing potential employees for higher and/or critical positions). This is because the expatriates did not see the business need for it, and also because they were afraid of developed subordinates taking over their positions. However, Pfeffer (1998) had earlier revealed that as the greatest source of competitive advantage for any organisation is its human resources, they deserve the attention and time of managers more than any other organisational resource or asset. This view of Pfeffer is deemed to relate to the traditional way of managing human resources but managing talent should go a step further to embrace strategic consideration. Therefore, the view of Ashton and Morton (2005) on managing human resource in contemporary business is welcome. They believe that placing the right people in pivotal roles at the right time is something that HR professionals are familiar with, but this can be done differently – through talent management – to create a long-term organisational success. This implied that creating talent mindset in organisations is an important success factor.

Succession planning, a component of talent management that is concerned with the process of ensuring continued availability of top management/leaders in pivotal roles, has become more critical than ever because great leaders are scarce and struggle among organisations for such leaders has become keener. Succession planning (or management) therefore becomes a serious human resource issue as “over the last decade, CEO turnover has increased by over 50 percent” (Paese, 2008, p. 19). This affirms Elegbe’s (2012) view that organisations that do not attach importance to planning for succession may face a crisis when they lose their executives unexpectedly. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation conducted a research in 2007 and reported by Elegbe (2012) revealed that three out of every four executives in the United States said that succession planning was their most significant challenge for the future, while about 71 percent of the respondents mentioned providing leaders with the skills they needed to be successful as their next most pressing problem. These studies and related findings paint a vivid picture about the business case for succession planning. As “an effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organisation, division, or work group by making provision for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people over time” (Rothwell, 2005, p. 10), succession management is to meet the strategic need of an organisation by creating a pool of high-performance leaders. Succession planning is and should be regarded as a business imperative and not just one of the numerous human resource management activities.

Like talent management, a critical consideration in succession planning is the identification of potentials for leadership roles. Identification is so important that it formed a half of the whole talent management definition empirically produced by Oppong and Gold (2016). They provided a two-part definition as identification of individual potentials; and harnessing their talent, where the harnessing process includes training and development; retention and utilisation; deployment; and rewarding contributions. This means that without identification, the other talent management (or succession planning) activities cannot be carried out. This paper therefore assesses how potentials for directorship positions are identified in the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana. As literature reviewed revealed no similar study conducted in UCC or any other public university in Ghana, this study was the first to assess how potential non-academic members are identified for directorship succession in a university in Ghana, and as such provides fresh research in the areas as well as being a guide to higher education institutions and businesses on the identification of potential individuals for leadership positions. The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The next section reviews literature on identification of potential leaders including the criteria for doing so; followed by the methods employed in conducting the study. We then present our qualitative data before analysing/discussing the data results. The subsequent section is dedicated to our key findings, while a section on conclusion and recommendations completes the study.

### **The Study Organisation**

The University of Cape Coast (UCC) is one of the ten public Universities in Ghana. It was established as the University College of Cape Coast (UCCC) in October 1962, with the responsibility of training professional graduate teachers to teach in the country’s secondary schools, teacher training colleges, polytechnics, and technical schools (Kwarteng, Dwarko, & Boadi-Siaw, 2012). The university was placed in special relations with the University of Ghana to ensure high academic standards and secure international recognition for its degrees, diplomas and certificates (Kwarteng et al., 2012). The university attained full and independent status with the authority to confer its own degrees, diplomas, and certificates by the University of Cape Coast Act, 1971 (Act 390) and subsequently the University of Cape Coast Law 1992 (PNDC Law 278; VC’s Annual Report, 2013).

The University Council is the highest governing body which makes the strategic decisions in the University. The Academic Board also formulates and implements academic policies, regulating and approving all programmes. Managerial and operational decisions are also taken by other boards and committees. Apart from these bodies, there are Directorates, Colleges, Divisions, and Centres which are responsible for providing effective and efficient services to accelerate the development of the university. While executing its core mandate of training and producing quality graduate teachers, UCC has diversified its academic programmes to include market-driven programmes such as business, law, humanities (Arts and Social Sciences), biological sciences, physical sciences and agriculture.

There are four categories of staff at the University of Cape Coast; academic senior members, non-academic senior members, senior staff and junior staff. In terms of administration, the university is divided into nine directorates, which are headed by directors. The higher educational institution chosen for this study is the University of Cape Coast. The institution was chosen on the basis that it has diverse experts, specialist performing directorship roles in different directorates, divisions and sections. Realising the importance of succession planning in ensuring that there is uninterrupted succession in critical roles such as directors and, also, against the background of incessant complaints regarding some directors who do not have technical expertise relevant to the directorates that they head, the authors chose to investigate the directorship succession at the university. Non-academic senior members of the university have to rise through the ranks from Junior Assistant Registrar to Deputy Registrar (equivalent to Deputy Director) to apply for the position of a director (UCC Statutes, 2012). The full range of the ranks as detailed in the statutes includes junior assistant registrar, assistant registrar, senior assistant registrar, deputy registrar, and registrar/director; and one has to serve for a minimum of five years in a rank to qualify for promotion to the next higher rank.

### **Literature Review**

Identification and preparation of the next generation of leadership talent has consistently been cited by top management of organisations as their most critical priority (Oppong, 2013). Davies and Davies (2010) argued that attracting people to the organisation is different from attracting the right people, who will be enthusiastic, highly capable and loyal to the values, beliefs and mission of the organisation. This is due to the fact that the availability of potential talents per se is of little strategic value if it is not identified, nurtured and used effectively (Mellahi & Collings, 2010). This implies that the organisation that wants to get the needed human capital must be ahead of the competition to attract highly potential and competent employees to groom for the organisation's competitive advantage. Put differently by Ashton and Morton (2005), to justify the need for talent management as opposed to the traditional human resource management, getting the right people in pivotal roles at the right time should be nothing new to HR professionals. However, approached differently, talent management in general can create long-term organisational success and this is very important – creating talent mindset in organisations.

Meanwhile, appointments of top leaders in organisations are terminated for various reasons, such as the acquisition of a new job, unsatisfactory performance, and incapacity due to illness, death and even retirement. However, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (see CIPD, 2010) proposed that when such vacancy occurs, management needs to make a decision about qualified candidates to fit in that position. The same CIPD study found that managerial and professional vacancies are often difficult to fill externally, so it makes sense to look for internal candidates who have demonstrated potential to grow. Rothwell (2005) opined that most organisations design succession for senior management position and frequently neglect the early identification of individuals with leadership potential among

middle management, and this makes identification of high-potential leaders the greatest challenge in succession management. Such organisations tend to forget that middle management people progress to senior managers, so identification of leadership potential among them will enable them to form the best pool from which leaders could be drawn.

In identifying potential leaders, organisations have a choice to fill their leadership vacancies from within the organisation or outsource, and whichever means, identification is key to effective succession management. However, research suggests that insiders deliver better results than outsiders, if they have been groomed for the role (Berke, 2005). Brant, Dooley and Iman (2008), referring to varied survey reports reveal that majority (about 55%) of companies prefer internal replacement than outsourcing. There is therefore evidence that many organisations prefer to identify potential leaders from within, because of some outstanding advantages internal high-potential leaders have over external sources of high potential leaders (Brant et al., 2008). One of such areas in succession management is using internal talent pools to identify potential leaders among existing employees (Mellahi & Collings, 2010). This makes succession management a unique approach to filling leadership roles that focus on developing a leadership pipeline for organisations to fall on whenever leadership vacancies arise. A talent pool, according to Mellahi and Collings (2010), is a group of potential and high-performing employees who will fill the pivotal positions. In order to have the talent pool, talented individuals who are high performers within the organisation must be identified in addition to the high potentials outside the organisation.

It can be established that identifying leaders from well-developed internal talent pool for succession is more preferable. According to Fulmer and Conger (2004), organisations see much benefit in monitoring the internal leadership pipeline for talents that have potential, and there are certain obvious benefits from the approach. For instance, Tan and Wellins (2006) revealed that improving internal development practices and programmes and re-focusing on the internal talent will reap more benefits such as cost advantages, productivity, and higher retention, as the success rate of internally developing future leaders is high, compared to outsourcing talent from the open markets to fill vacant positions. In this regard, investing in the development of quality internal talent pools or a leadership pipeline is a key factor for companies that desire success.

Supporting the view of Tan and Wellins (2006), Brant, Dooley, and Iman (2008) opined that external candidates often fail, while internal candidates often succeed. This is because external candidates may increase cost in terms of search fee, interview costs on hiring, signing bonus, relocation compensation, and others while internal promotions retain high potential talents. Backing the need for internal source, Tan (2009) also believed that internal successors make fewer changes to organisational structures than outsourced leaders, who are often better compensated than internally identified leaders. However, companies with insider successors demonstrate better organisational performance than those who outsource their successors. In these regards, most organisations have adopted the practice of identifying their leaders internally, and only outsourcing when potential leaders are not available internally or outsiders are more competent (Brant et al., 2008; Tan, 2009). The literature implies that organisations normally promote from within their organisation to fill leadership positions. This corroborates the outcome from the study on leadership succession in an Australian university by Murray et al. (2012), who found that leadership appointments were initiated from within twelve months prior to the position becoming vacant and potential leaders needed to express interest in the position. During this period, the potential leader is assigned a mentor. The qualifying period for one to apply for a leadership role is for the person to have been in his/her current position for a period not less than five years. The same study found that higher education institutions often find it difficult to recruit strong leaders from outside as renewal of such professionals cannot be expected through the traditional replacement approach.

## **Criteria for Identifying and Selecting High Potential Leaders**

Identification and selection of talent in most organisations are usually the responsibility of a talent review panel (Tansley, 2011). The talent review panel consists of individual representatives from senior management, line management, and the HR function, as well as individuals with particular expertise who are selected from across the organisation. To identify potential leaders, Shondrick, Nordisk, Neyman, and Benckiser (2013) posited that organisations should first clearly define the qualities that make someone a high potential, such as delivering strong results in their current role; skills above and beyond the technical skills required for the current role; and behaviours in ways that are consistent with the company's values. On his part, Oppong (2015) identified talents as those described as high potentials, high fliers and stars. The author, however, was worried that there was no common definition for talent, though firms and institutions are able to describe their talents. Literature therefore suggests that human resource professionals should be able to develop criteria to select those the organisation refers to as high-potentials in order to identify competent people for current and future critical leadership roles because the criteria could be company-specific.

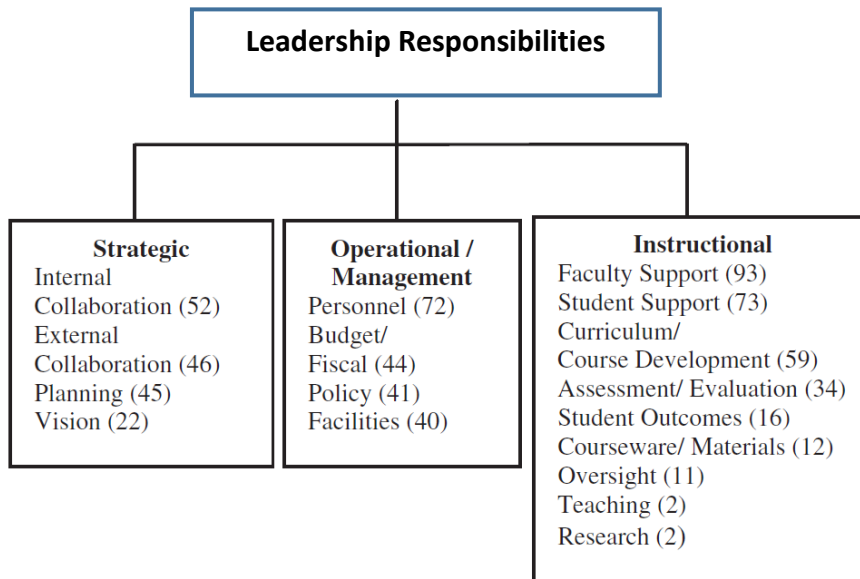
Stahl et al. (2007) were of the view that a range of approaches and tools are beneficial, such as leadership competence models, which consist of skills, attributes and behaviours that organisations expect and develop among high-potential employees. Another approach is performance management, which comprises goal setting, performance evaluation and development within a coherent unified framework aiming to align individual and group objectives with the objective of the organisation (Golik, Blanco, & Natacha, 2014). Golik et al. (2014) explained the process of talent identification as a systematic process of determining if employees have what it takes to advance to positions of greater management responsibility or positions demanding greater technical knowledge now and in the future. According to these authors, as well as Horváthová (2011), the process of talent identification begins with performance management, which is demonstrated by achievement of results or goals. For this, Garrow and Hirsh (2008) mentioned that goal-setting is essential to succession management processes, because it guides the identification and recruitment of talent pools, and senior management developing within ranks.

Another way of identifying high potentials is by adopting the talent matrix. This matrix demonstrates a combination of qualitative and quantitative skills and traits that shows the employee's image that the organisation wants to see (Davis, 2007). The talent matrix comprises key elements; profile, qualification and experience that are identified in the individual that shape the image of the employee required, and subjective elements that illustrate the future development of the talented employee the organisation wants. These characteristics are used to search for talents internally or externally and also enable recruiters to pay attention to the characteristics required of the individual for critical positions. In this regard, candidates' traits, profile and characteristics are compared with the requirements on the matrix to enable the organisation choose talented individuals to develop to fill critical roles.

Related to leadership traits, Holdford (2003) identified two main traits that a leader should possess to be effective. These include the leader being both task-oriented and follower-oriented. For leadership effectiveness, an individual should possess both traits but not only one of them at a particular stage during one's leadership role. Task-oriented leader is one who focuses on accomplishing the job by leading and motivating employees to get results. This means the leader should himself be a performer to be able to lead the subordinates to perform. Follower-oriented, on the other hand, is about the leader's concerns for subordinates as human beings. These twin traits imply that effective leaders should be (1) performers themselves and (2) be able to influence others to behave desirably towards achievement of the organisational objectives. From institution of higher education perspective, Nworie, Haughton, and Oprandi

(2012) examined the qualities and qualifications for leadership positions in higher education in the United States of America and write that leaders should have leadership responsibilities and qualities within a range of strategic, operational and instructional areas. These emphasise what leaders do while the academic qualification, experience and other skills and qualities should be informed by the nature and magnitude of these three broad responsibilities as shown in Figure 1 (the figures against the specific responsibilities indicate how they were ranked by respondents).

Figure 1: Leadership responsibilities



Source: Nworie et al. (2012)

This study, succession of non-academic leaders in UCC, is deemed relevant as there are increasing complaints about some directors not fit for the directorates that they head (either due to lack of technical background or not up to the required rank). This corroborates the growing literature that there is difficulty in succession management in institutions of higher education. For instance, the study of Long, Johnson, Faught, and Street (2013) revealed that within the confines of higher education institutions (HEIs), succession management is rare unlike in most private sector organisations. They therefore conclude that in order for HEIs to succeed as modern organisations, they must adhere to the insights and follow in the footsteps of larger private sector businesses in relation to their administrative practices. Long et al. (2013) concluded that the quality of leadership in HEIs depends on the implementation of succession management plan, taking into account careful selection of personnel to be included in the plan. Supporting the need for leadership in HEIs, Burkhalter (2010) asserted that educational leaders are concerned about the reality and pain of restructuring and are searching for answers which will allow proactive leaders to shape the change process. In a similar vein, Murray et al. (2012) advised that senior leaders of HEIs must begin to adopt strategies from the business community in order to operate within a corporate ethos while selecting and retaining effective leaders. These submissions imply the critical role that identification of potentials play in planning the succession of leadership positions in universities. The objective of this study, therefore, is to assess how UCC identifies potentials leaders to ensure leadership succession to help drive the university’s vision of being a university that is strongly positioned, with a worldwide acclaim (UCC Statutes, 2012). This study is relevant due to the growing concerns of misfit of some directors as heads of certain directorates in the university, and also



the poor implementation of succession management policies in higher education institutions. The study has the potential of contributing fresh literature on leadership succession in HEIs in Ghana and to extend literature on succession management generally. It will also be a guide to HEIs and business organisations on the succession of managers and leaders.

### **About the Authors**

Nana Yaw Opong is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Human Resource Management, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He has taught at the Leeds Business School, UK and has also worked in human resource managerial roles in national and multinational firms both in Ghana and the United Kingdom. He is a visiting professor in International Management to the Bonn-Rhein Sieg University of Applied Sciences, Germany and the Berm School of Management in Dakar, Senegal. He holds a PhD in Talent and Management Development. His research interests include talent and skills development, management development, and HRM practices in Western multinational subsidiaries in Africa, with many publications covering these areas. His research outcomes have also been shared through conference presentations in Ghana, Greece, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong and the United States of America.

Nancy Oduro-Asabere is an Administrator in the Department of Management in the School of Business of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. She holds M.Phil in Human Resource Management and a Post-graduate Diploma in Organisational Development. Her research interests include strategic planning, succession management, organisational cultures and facilitation. This article adds to her work on succession management.

### **Methods**

The study presented in this paper was designed to assess how UCC identifies non-academic senior members for directorship succession in the University. The research was approached qualitatively. Quantitative and qualitative are devices used by researchers and differentiated in terms of the type of data, methods of data collection and the procedures adopted for data processing and analysis (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Forman et al. (2008) are of the opinion that qualitative techniques are likely to produce large amounts of data that represent words and ideas, while quantitative techniques illuminate the process underlying statistical information, produce interventions and show how interventions work to produce observed outcome. Considering the two, this study was qualitative as it seeks to generate some form of in-depth data that is raw, detailed and which allows for the description of the leadership identification phenomenon in great detail and in original language of the research participants.

### **Study Population and Sample Size**

The population size was 15, representing heads of the directorates, centres and divisions who were all designated as directors (there were seven directorates; three centres; and five divisions). Although the researchers wanted to interview all the 15 directors, only nine were available for interviewing. The nine directors (forming 60% of the population), who were interviewed, formed our sample size. In order to get the participants, an introductory letter was taken from the Head of Department to collect a list of all Non-Academic Senior Members and their roles from the Senior Members Section of the Division of Human Resource.

## Data Collection

In line with the qualitative enquiry, our data collection method was to generate rich and in-depth raw data for analysis. We therefore adopted face-to-face interviewing with nine of the 15 directors who provided in words, their views, experiences, and expectations in relation to the identification of non-academic senior members for directorship positions. Although all the 15 directors were targeted for interviewing due to the small size of the population, the similar trend of responses provided by the nine directors suggests that the other six directors would have given similar narrations and, therefore, would not have made much difference to the nature and number of themes generated. The interview questions were partly based on the literature review, which helped develop a good understanding and insight into relevant previous research and the trends that have emerged and used to build the interview guide. The existing literature helped acquaint ourselves with the available body of knowledge from earlier research (Lahikainen, Kirmanen, Kraav, & Taimalu, 2003) and helped clarify the relationship between our research topic and previous work conducted on leadership succession.

The actual interviewing process (researcher-interviewee interaction) generally began with introductory statement, which Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, and Mattis (2007) referred to as a “grand tour” question. It followed more open, less structured interview protocol – more general problem introduced for discussion and followed up with questions from different perspectives based on the interviewee’s previous answers by slowly moving towards questions on more specific aspects of the topic. Each interview expanded for at least one-and-a-half hours, substantial amount of data was collected using probing questions to get deeper explanation and understanding of the issues raised by interviewees on our research objective, which formed the research question. In the course of the interviewing efforts were made to avoid bias, which had the potential of influencing the responses provided and therefore affecting the quality of data and research findings. The interview therefore followed that there was no one “objective” view to be identified which the process of the interview may bias. Probes were used as an intervention technique when there was the need to discover responses to specific alternatives or to seek further explanations.

## Our Data Analytical Tool

In analyzing our interview data, we employed constant comparison analysis (CCA) propounded by Glaser and Strauss (1967). CCA was deemed appropriate for this research because we were interested in utilising the entire dataset to identify underlying themes revealed through the data, which is a tenet of CCA (Leech & Onwueguzie, 2007). The authors read through the entire raw interview data, after which we grouped the data into smaller meaningful parts by labelling them into descriptive titles/themes, an important tenet of CCA. Texts or narrations as provided by interviewees were therefore sorted, and grouped under relevant themes that constantly appeared from the raw interview data. In presenting the raw interview data the authors used narration(s) from participant(s) that represent what all or most participants said in relation to a given theme. The themes were compared for analysis and the comparisons were done to ascertain how the themes developed from our interview data corroborate or otherwise the outcomes from previous studies.

## Results

As our interview guide was based on themes developed from our literature review and the review was also based on our research objective, the themes generated from the interview data and analysed helped achieve the research objective. In all, we developed three themes,

under which we presented similar texts to strengthen the themes, leading to their descriptive validity or accuracy. The themes include sources of identification, criteria for identification, and pool of potential leaders which were the bases for the analysis. Therefore, the results of the study were also informed by, and organised according to these three themes.

This section presents the raw interview data as provided by participants and transcribed. In line with our constant comparison analysis, transcribed interview text was categorised based on the three themes that “constantly” emerged from the data.

### **Identification of Talent**

Participants shared the opinion that identification of talented non-academic senior members with potential to be in directorship roles was mostly done internally. Participants explained how this works in practice that, the identification will start from when people apply for directorship roles. Therefore, one could only be identified after presenting himself for the process. As participants 1 and 4 put it:

We normally do internal recruitment but in a situation where no internal employee has the potential, the University outsource.

People are not identified for positions; individuals must develop themselves and compete for roles. Those with leadership potentials are mostly recruited internally.

It is assumed from Participant 4’s description that although non-academic senior members are considered as talents with potential to be in leadership roles, none of them is identified and groomed for leadership position, rather those who rise through the rank stand a better chance of attaining leadership role, and rising through the ranks implies being an internal candidate.

Identification of potential leaders internally was also described by another participant who revealed how their talents cut across the organisation as management try as much as possible to identify suitable successors internally to fill key leadership positions, and only outsource when potentials cannot be identified from within. This view was expressed by a participant as below:

Our talented employees cut across the institution and with the help of their immediate supervisors and heads of departments, we identify our potential leaders.

The inference here is that the institution identifies potential leaders internally and they outsource for leadership positions only when nobody qualifies internally. Leaders groom some of their colleagues and subordinates for the university to select when positions become vacant. To highlight how the university is committed to identifying its internal candidates and resorting to external sources only when all internal avenues have been exhausted, a participant narrated a real situation as follows:

Last year, we had to find a successor for our Director of Finance who was to retire. It is an executive position so we advertised openly for even outsiders to apply. Following the process, an internal candidate who was his deputy was appointed for the role. This created another vacancy for the Deputy Director’s position which needed to be filled. Two individuals who had applied for promotion to the required rank for the position did not qualify because they had

not yet been promoted to the rank. The position was re-opened and the Appointments and Promotions Committee had real challenge in trying to identify internal applicant for the position until we outsourced someone from another tertiary institution. You see, we outsource only when nobody qualifies internally.

The above quotation reveals how the university includes external sources when the required candidate(s) cannot be identified from within. Participants disclosed that the directive is stipulated in the university's statutes and stated the procedure involved as quoted below.

The Statutes give the direction as to the process of identification; we refer to the Statutes, inform the council, advertise openly to outsiders too, set committees to shortlist applicants, the Appointment and Promotions Board writes applicants for interviews.

### **Criteria for Identification**

In identifying potential leaders, many of the participants believe the heads of employees observe the behaviour, knowledge in area of specialty, leadership, performance, competencies, human relations, communication, change management, and technical skills. Others mentioned that superiors consider experience in service, achievement of goals or results, role management abilities as other forms of criteria used for identification. This assertion was reflected in the statement made by Participant 7 who said:

Identification of potential leadership is based on seniority in terms of rank, knowledge and experience in the area of specialty, knowledgeable in the University system and management, skills, behaviour, abilities and qualification but not based on employees' performance assessment. Performances of non-academic senior members are assessed only when they apply for promotion and renewal of their contract.

It was the belief of some participants that it is difficult to separate the internal criterion from the seniority criterion. This is because to be identified internally means one has been promoted from within.

Most of the time, potentials are recruited internally. Criteria for identifying and selecting potentials include seniority, qualification, experience, skills, behaviour, traits, length of service because it is believed that the one that has served longer will be more familiar with the University system. Among all these criteria for internal potentials, seniority and qualification assessment and achievement of goals are the most considered.

The above quotation reveals that performance is not immediate criterion. Participants also gave account of how internal candidates are assessed for the identification. Despite earlier revelations that performance is not a major criterion once a candidate becomes potential due to seniority/rank, performance records and other considerations come to the fore, as narrated by Participant 3.

Employees are assessed anytime they apply for promotion, renewal of contract or when they apply for any leadership role. Goals are also set for potential

leaders to achieve and the achievement serves as an assessment. Potential leaders are also assessed through past assessment. This involves the review of all annual assessments. Current assessment, which is assessment of employees' current performance in a confidential report by his head and finally potential leaders are assessed on the spot during interviews. The interview panel uses the outcome of these assessments to select a successor to a leadership position.

Although the above interviewee shares the same opinion with other participants that seniority in rank is the first criterion considered in the identification of potential leaders, Participant 3 outlined the various stages of performance appraisal of employees before they get the opportunity to be among the pool of talents or pool of potential leaders. This means that performance appraisal is one of the criteria to rise through the rank to a senior management position.

### **Pool of Potential Leaders**

Many of the participants mentioned that the institution has pool of talents with potential to be in current and future leadership roles.

Participant 2 briefly described the criteria for identifying leadership successors from the talent pool. He described his experience and the process of selecting a successor as:

Oh! Yes! We consider first appointee in the senior rank who should have served for more than fifteen years in a management role.

All those who meet these requirements are automatically in the pool waiting for identification. The participant continued to outline some attributes that could help with the process of identification from the pool.

Potentials must have broad knowledge of higher educational system and management and must be someone with broad knowledge of the legal framework of higher educational institutions. They must also have technical, conceptual, communication, change management skills and human relation skills and ability to take bold and fair decisions. We also consider capabilities, competence, experience, leadership skills, role management and achievement of results.

The above quotation points to the fact that potential leaders are not just appointed but they must meet some important criteria before they can rise through the ranks and compete for leadership roles.

Participant 5 said that promotion through the rank is the key to being identified to succeed a leader:

When positions become vacant, we do our best to make it open for all who qualify to apply to compete. Rising through the rank is key. An employee cannot be in leadership position if he/she does not rise through the ranks through promotion because seniority remains the first criterion in selecting a potential for any leadership role. So individuals who wish to apply just have to go through the promotion process and compete depending on the required criteria.

Participant 5's narration implies the talent pool approach since all those promoted to a certain level are all potential leaders in a pool waiting to be identified when there are vacancies. The participant further emphasised the strength of the promotion criterion in relation to performance record.

You can be the best worker, but what will push you to leadership role is by being promoted. Your performance assessment alone cannot raise you through the rank. In fact, performance appraisal has never been a criterion for identifying potential leaders because we don't have routine performance appraisal for senior members. We only appraise senior members when they apply for promotion or renewal of their contract

The lack of emphasis on performance record was also raised by participant 2 who stressed that though it is a requirement for promotion; performance is not an immediate requirement.

We look out for their capabilities, behaviour, competencies, attitude to work, ability to take initiative, innovation, work under pressure and so on as criteria. Performance assessment has never been a criterion for identifying someone to leadership role. It is a requirement for application for promotion but not a criterion for identification of potential leader.

It can be inferred from participant 5's quotation that succession to leadership role is highly informed by one's ability to rise through the rank to attain any leadership role. It was also brought out that identification of individuals to fill senior positions are not without challenges. Participant 4 described the challenges in this manner:

I must admit, it is very difficult for management to identify one among the potential leaders. Talents are very easy to come by for any role but difficult to choose among the lot. I think it is because we have no formal succession plan. The University is decentralised; so superiors who work directly with the employees identify the talented employees with potentials to be leaders. Here! Everyone is a potential leader once you become a senior member it is assumed that you have enough experience to become a leader.

Participant 4 re-echoed the seniority criterion and stressed how serious this is considered in the identification process and also refuted the role of performance in the identification process. The participant narrated that,

To the best of my knowledge, we first consider seniority in terms of rank but not their performance, because even if you do all the work in the University and you do not rise through the ranks, you will never be identified as a leader.

Participant 8 shared the same opinion with the other participants that leaders are identified from within and added that the identification is so transparent to the extent that everyone who qualifies gets the opportunity to take advantage. This implies that UCC builds a pool of potential directors/leaders through its promotion process and identification criteria.

The University has a pool of potential leaders as everyone in the required rank could be identified and promoted into a vacant leadership role.

Participant 1 described their potential leaders as those who have been able to transit through the ranks to senior management positions by satisfying all the requirements. These are those who form the pool of potentials.

Yes! Management knows all our potential leaders and they are those that have risen through the ranks so it is easy to identify them but very difficult to select a leader from them because all members of that pool of potential leaders qualify. They are skillful, competent, achievers and articulate. Their performance speaks for them; they have the required research articles.

It can be assumed from Participant 1 that their talented potential leaders are known by their attitude to work, experience in the system and their level of development. Participant 6 who was outsourced thinks that the ability to be identified to any leadership role from outside is proving to be based more on competence and good performance. His narration reveals the stringent procedure for external candidates who are less known because they have not gone through the University's ranks. He disclosed that:

Since they identified me through a contract I executed, they assessed my performance, potentials and competence during the period I was executing the contract. I and management set objectives to achieve and the results of the contract served as a means to assess my performance. As far as other senior members are concerned, nobody assesses their performance. They are assessed only when they apply for promotion and renewal of contract.

Participant 6's comments attest to the fact that even though potential leaders are not identified internally based on their performance assessment, some technical positions may be filled based on performance and results. The participant however warned management of losing internal candidates who go through the succession process but are not recognised as potential and this is likely to result in supply problems.

I was outsourced as a contractor for a project and the result impressed management to appoint me. Normally, heads identify people within their departments and groom them for future succession but most of them from the pool are not recognised and their efforts are unappreciated. Management ignores them and their services. My fear is the future supply of professionals and experts.

## **Discussion**

This section discusses the interview data results presented earlier. In line with the data analytical tool (CCA) and as the results were presented, the discussion is also done according to the three themes.

### **Sources of Identification**

It was clear in the study result that majority of participants share the same opinion that talented non-academic senior managers with potential to be in leadership roles are mostly identified and recruited internally. However, this finding contradicts the revelation of Tan's (2009) report that organisations rely on external recruitment for management vacancies, especially at senior levels. This is quite different in the institution under study because majority

(over 90%) of the participant emphasised potential leaders are identified and recruited internally, and the university only outsources senior managers and potentials leaders only when nobody qualifies internally or from within the Institution.

However, the source of leadership identification supports the outcome from Tan's (2009) investigation into corporate leadership succession planning and implementation that most organisations identify their leaders internally and they outsource leaders only when outsiders are more competent than insiders. Even in that circumstance, the authorities usually promote from within the organisation to fill leadership positions. This is economically viable because research on leadership pipeline model as a tool to developing an organisation's future leaders has revealed that it is quite cheaper to hire from within for transition than outsourcing since employees within are familiar with the culture of the organisation and is only those who have no good leadership pipeline internally outsource. A similar outcome was revealed in the study of leadership succession in an Australian university by Murray et al. (2012) where emphasis was placed on internal employees. Again, this proves how developed and prepared employees are to impact the development of the Institution to be more competitive as opined by Brant et al. (2008) that it is inevitable at certain stages of the development of the organisation to replace leaders from internal candidates. Related to a Ghanaian situation, the internal source approach to identifying potential leaders corroborates Oppong's (2015) finding that the Ghanaian mining industry depends solely on internal employees for its managerial talent development.

These previous research results highlight the internal source of identification and Murray et al. (2012) confirms in a university situation. Identification from within is mostly informed by a structured succession planning or leadership pipeline. However, it is evident from the data that the University has no succession plan, yet its leadership replacements are mostly from within the University. It is therefore not surprising the various criteria for talent identification, some of which contradict. The University's approach could rather be likened to selection for replacing positions rather than grooming people to take over from position holders.

For instance, the Institution take interest in identifying their potential leaders from within because they believe that internal potentials are highly experienced in the University management system and are more knowledgeable in the in-house procedures of the University as expressed by Participants 2 and 8. However, the formal procedure (as dictated by the University's Statutes) for leadership identification contradicts the internal sourcing. The Statutes give the direction as to the process of identification that the position should be to both internal and external candidates and a committee is set to shortlist after which it is referred to the Appointments and Promotions Board to initiate the selection procedure. This implies that the Statutes (document that regulates the identification process) stipulates a blend of both internal and external sourcing. Over 90% of Participants' narrations focusing on internal sourcing therefore suggest that the University authorities do not adhere to the provisions of the Statutes and this is likely to produce unqualified candidates into some directorship positions. This has been the warning by Long et al. (2013) that the quality of leadership in higher education institutions depends on the implementation of succession management plan, taking into account careful selection of personnel to be included in the plan. With regard to UCC, the succession plan is represented by the Statutes (UCC Statutes, 2012), which is seldom respected in the leadership identification process. The internal focus confirms why the Institution looks out for individuals with experience, high knowledge in the university management system and knowledge in legal framework of higher educational institutions in those who qualify to be among their potential leaders.

However, although this system of identifying leaders internally might be cheaper in terms of search fee, interview costs, signing bonus, etc. (Tan, 2009), and also helps employees



to advance their career, it is not enough to select potential leaders. This is because it paves way for identified employees to focus more on their career and personal advancement with the aim of getting promoted at the expense of their normal responsibilities because they know that performing high will not lead them to any key leadership role as shared by Participants 5 and 7 that rising through the ranks through promotion is key to be identified as a leader. This was a problem identified by Oppong (2015) as a management development challenge when it was argued that managers identified for management development programme should not be informed for the fear of focusing on the responsibilities of the programme at the expense of normal job schedule to secure the higher role.

### **Criteria for Identification**

The qualitative data reveals that seniority in terms of rank and date of appointment is the first criterion in order to assume leadership positions. It is believed that in the course of rising through the ranks, employees receive various development opportunities which equip them with skills and experience necessary to take on more challenging responsibilities in the next rank, which is consistent with Charan (2010) leadership development pipeline model.

This makes the focus on rank very worrying as, at senior member level, the items assessed for promotion are different from those to be performed in leadership role. While the positions are administrative/managerial in nature, assessment for promotions are usually based on academic publications. For instance, Section 15.3 of the UCC Statutes (2012) states that for promotion from Senior Assistant Registrar to Deputy Registrar candidates must have:

- a) Served as Senior Assistant Registrar or equivalent grade in the University or analogous institution for at least five (5) years
- b) Must achieve “above average” performance in all assessable areas
- c) Must have at least seven (7) publications to his/her credit, two of which must be refereed articles or a book or a chapter in a book. Two assessors’ reports on the publications will be needed. One of the assessors must sit in the interview.

This could justify why the background of some leadership job-holders do not reflect the roles they play. While Nworie, Haughton, and Oprandi (2012) identified leadership responsibilities (of non-academic staff) of higher educational institutions within a range of strategic, operational and instructional areas, the Statutes emphasises publications which are suited for the promotion of academic staff. This contradicts the human capital theory (Schultz, 1961) which claims that the human capital of employees consists of the skills, knowledge, and abilities that employees have for leadership development. However, the identification approach by UCC reveals that these skills, knowledge, and abilities that are taken into account in the promotion are not required for the leadership roles.

In the context of the literature, it can be stated that the leadership competency model is being used by the institution informally due to the informal nature of their succession management. Most of the participants stated that leaders in key positions and immediate heads look out for these attributes for potential leaders by observing individuals. It was further mentioned that long time experience, being familiar with the culture of the institutions, high knowledge of higher educational system and management and broad knowledge of legal framework of higher education are other criteria the Institution uses to identify and select potential leaders among non-academic senior members. These are leadership skills which are generic in nature and therefore support why the university seldom considers technical skills as a basis for the identification. Since these skills are required through one’s long association with the university, they also support the seniority criterion, which respondents agreed was a key

factor. An employee cannot be in leadership position if he/she does not rise through the ranks through promotions.

These assertions were confirmed by most participants who claimed that the institution does not identify potential leaders based on the outcome of their performance appraisal because performance of senior members is not assessed periodically. Instead, senior member's performance is assessed only as part of the requirement for confirmation of appointment and for promotion and renewal of employment contract as in the form of confidential report termed as "informal observation."

Inexplicitly, the participants' responses demonstrate that there is no well-defined performance management or appraisal system for senior members to serve as a criterion for identification of potential leaders among them. This shortfall is an indication that UCC does not recognise performance assessment as criteria for an employee to be identified as a leader, although the Statutes stipulate that candidates must achieve "above average" performance in all assessable areas, these areas are the discretion of the assessor(s). This is because, as narrated by participants, performances of non-academic senior members are assessed only when they apply for promotion and renewal of their contracts. Even the "above average" put in inverted commas makes one wonder if the university is not sure of what the performance standards are. Performance not being a critical consideration in the identification process is a serious deficiency. This was the concern of Shondrick et al. (2013) that the first quality that makes someone a high potential is delivering of strong results in their current roles, and supported by Golik et al. (2014) who identified performance management as an approach to identification of potentials. The Institution therefore needs to have a well-defined performance appraisal system for senior members as one of the criteria for identifying and developing high potentials for their leadership positions. These authors speculate that leadership roles require record of achievements, which could be assessed through one's performance instead of prediction of their potential to perform.

However, although it was generally agreed by participants that the identification of leaders was not based on performance assessment, there was an interesting revelation that the selection of potential leaders was in three stages including; goal setting assessment, review of previous assessments, and review of current assessment through interviewing. The three stages of assessment form part of the process of selecting a leader among the potential leaders. Since potential leaders are groomed mainly from within and progress through the ranks informed by number of years' service, employees can set goals for themselves as regards when they want to gain promotion. Then the preview of previous assessments, which is mostly based on one's publications over the years, are reviewed by both internal and external assessors as part of the promotion process. The last stage is where the potential leader is interviewed by the Appointments and Promotions Board to assess his/her suitability for the directorship role. All the stages are important because without the required rank and the number of year served (stage one); the required number of publications since the last promotion/appointment (stage two); and a promotion interview (stage three) to assess the potential's suitability for the role, one cannot be promoted.

Therefore, although performance assessment is not a direct criterion for the identification as revealed by participants, this is implied in the identification method used by the Institution. However, the level of performance (as a criterion for leadership identification) is weak contrary to Holdford's (2003) leadership traits that postulate that effective leaders should possess two main traits, that is, ability to perform (task-oriented leader) and the ability to lead and motivate subordinates to achieve results (follower-oriented leader). Holdford emphasises the possession of both traits at a time for leadership effectiveness but not only one of them. This contradicts the leadership identification criteria of UCC. Instead of strongly emphasising both traits, one of them (follower-oriented) is not stressed at all while the other

one is accorded rather weak consideration. This supports the view of Long et al. (2013) that higher education institutions do not adhere to best practices in their succession management and reveal that the quality of leadership in HEIs depends on successful implementation of succession plan that emphasises careful identification and selection of candidates.

### **Pool of Potential Leaders**

One of the themes that constantly emerged from the qualitative data was the use of talent pools to identify potential leaders among existing employees, which supports the recommendation by Mellahi and Collings (2010). This implies that the institution identifies pool of potential leaders and develops them in readiness for various leadership positions instead of waiting to identify individuals as and when leadership positions arise. Importantly, all Non-Academic Senior Members are regarded as a pool of potential leaders as everyone that attains the required level of seniority was a potential director. This theme has strong links with the first two themes as identified through our constant content analysis. Building of talent pool may explain why UCC focuses on internal source since it does not make business sense to place external talent in the pool waiting for placement. Likewise, seniority in higher educational institutions in Ghana is a race which is measured by how long one has been with, and contributed to the institution. With records on tenure and contribution of individuals, it becomes easy to determine those to be placed in the pool. This concern-for-all approach to preparing leaders for identification however contradicts popular opinions that organisations are continually looking for the few with strong leadership teams for strategic tasks (Nworie et al., 2012) as a way to cushion the succession implementation in higher education. The approach further reveals the absences of a well-structured succession management as it is not usual to have all the population in a talent pool developed. Therefore, referring to the whole non-academic senior members as a pool means there is no pool, but just a mere use of the term. This is because the pool should be in relation to a larger population.

It was therefore not a surprise when participants admitted the difficulty the method presents in identifying potentials among the non-academic senior members due to the large pool of talents among them. The power behind the narration “I must admit it is very difficult for management to identify one among the potential leaders” clearly depicts participants’ criticism of the method. This confirms the criticism of Long et al. (2013) of succession management in higher education institutions and their call for these institutions to follow the required administrative practices.

It stands to reason that since all those who have risen through the ranks to the level of potential leaders possess similar characteristics of years of service, rank and experience, they should all be given the opportunity. Concern for all approach defeats a critical tenet of management/leadership talent development (Oppong, 2015). According to him, the idea behind talent development is concern for select few who can drive organisational success. On the other hand, concern for all is an approach towards skills development, which employers are required to embark on in order to upgrade and update the skills of all employees. Even before Oppong’s (2015) accession, the all-inclusive approach had been opposed by the trait theory (Holdford, 2003) which closely relates to talent identification that unique characteristics (traits) of a potential leader that makes him/her a superior personality should be considered. There should therefore be criteria for identifying a few potential successors among the pool of potentials for a clear succession direction, while avoiding the difficulty presented by the existing method.

## Key Findings

We provide below the key findings from the study, and these are presented according to the three themes that informed the data presentation and analysis of the results.

Firstly, the university mostly identifies its potential leaders from within and considers external source only when there are no suitable external candidates. The source of identification adopted by UCC corroborates the finding from the study into the leadership succession of an Australian university by Murray et al. (2012) that the university placed emphasis on internal sources of identifying potentials for leadership succession. This approach, we believe, is good for the development of the University's human resource. This is a recipe for such employees to be more committed to the University and are also likely to make more positive contributions based on the believe that management has confidence in them. However, what senior members know to be the source of identification and practiced by the University contradicts the provisions in its Statutes that stipulate the leadership succession plan. While UCC practices "internal first" policy, what should be the practice is advertisement through both internal and external sources at a time. This may hamper the quality of the succession programme since what is practised is different from the set standard. This was the finding of Long et al. (2013) that the quality of leadership succession in a higher education institution depends on a strict adherence to its succession plan. Therefore, to avoid the plan-implementation conflict, UCC should respect the sources stipulated in the Statutes.

The second theme – identification criterion, reveals strongly that seniority/rank, number of years' service in the current rank and the required number of publications combine to form the main criterion for identification of potential leaders. Though performance is mentioned, this is implied in the main criterion i.e., one is believed to be a performer to rise through the ranks to deputy registrar/director rank to be identified for directorship role. We believe that ignoring performance as part of the requirements could lead to the appointment of directors who may not fit well into the directorates that they head. The approach does not follow the popular practice in succession management. For instance, the approach contradicts the recommendation from the study of Holdford (2003) that effective leaders should possess a twin-trait of being performers themselves in order to succeed in demanding performance from subordinates; and also be able to influence and motivate followers. The importance of performance is also highlighted by Shondrick et al. (2013), who believe that identification of leadership potentials begins with performance management while Horváthová (2011) advocates for someone who is delivering strong results in the current position.

As regards pool of potential leaders – the third theme, UCC places all non-academic senior members in a pool from which potentials are identified for leadership positions. This is a commended succession management practice as it ensures smooth leadership transition and continuity because there are people always in readiness to fill vacant positions. However, this talent pool construction approach defeats its purpose and benefits because an effective pool should consist of the select few who have the potentials to offer significant contributions to the institution, which, the study of Oppong (2015) confirms. Placing all non-academic senior members in a pool, therefore, is not talent pool construction for the purpose of succession management but a mere use of the term.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has attempted to ascertain how UCC manages succession of non-academic senior members to vacant leadership roles. Based on the analysis and the study results, it is observed that participants gave an in-depth description of the case under study. There seems to be some sort of knowledge of succession management practice. However, the university does

not operate structured, formal succession management but fills vacant leadership positions through the traditional way of managing vacancies, an approach that defeat the idea behind succession planning.

Based on the key findings from this study and their implications, we make the following recommendations to UCC to help improve the leadership succession plan. We recommend that UCC should have a well-designed and followed succession plan and procedures that will guide the effective identification of potentials for leadership positions. Specifically, we recommend that the University should:

- adhere to the provision of internal and external sources to ensure harmony between what is practised and what is documented;
- loosen the concentration on seniority/rank and include performance records and acceptance of leaders by those they are going to lead; and
- build a leadership talent pool of the few with leadership potentials who can make significant contributions when given leadership roles instead of placing all non-academic senior members in the pool, which defeats a critical tenet of succession planning.

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### Author Note

Nana Yaw Oppong as a senior lecturer at the Department of Human Resource, University of Cape Coast. He holds a PhD in Talent and Management Development (Leeds); MBA (London); BA & Dip. Ed. (Cape Coast). He has taught at the Leeds Business School, UK and has also worked in HR managerial roles. Research interests include cross-cultural HRM practices; talent management and development; and indigenous methods of developing employees, with publications covering these areas. Nana has also shared knowledge in these areas through conference presentations in Ghana, Greece, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Hong Kong and United States of America. He is as well a consultant in human resource management and development. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: [noppong@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:noppong@ucc.edu.gh).

Nancy Oduro-Asabere is an administrator in the Department of Management, University of Cape Coast. Holder of Post-Graduate Diploma in Organizational Development, Nancy is currently completing her M.Phil. in Human Resource Management at the School of Business of the University. Her research interests include strategic planning, succession management, organizational cultures and facilitation. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: [nancy.oduro@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:nancy.oduro@ucc.edu.gh).

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