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MANAGING TALENTS THROUGH SUCCESSION PLANNING IN THE MALAYSIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

Hamizam Abdulla Zabidi
Joesfina Syawati Mansor
Dr. Jasmine Ahmad (Prof Madya)
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia
jasmi661@salam.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Succession planning is not a new concept but recently redefined and reemphasized due to the importance of ensuring there is talent continuity in an organization. This is especially when there is so much buzz on the notion that retaining and managing the right talents is one of the main survival elements of an organization in the competitive world. In implementing such concept, the main issue of interest is identifying the suitable dimensions needed to build a sophisticated and solid succession planning model. This concept paper is aimed to explain the various literatures of succession planning in managing talents. From the various literatures, the paper attempts to identify the key elements to conceptually build a succession planning model which will fit within the Malaysian public sector scenario. Primarily, the paper is based on various literatures and reports available about the concept. Specifically, the literatures and reports referred are those which focus on the dimensions of the various approaches. In addition, the identification of the key dimensions for Malaysian public sector is done through comparing specific perspectives of different approaches suggested by various literatures reviewed. The finding would give some insights on succession planning as a major tool in managing talents in Malaysian public sector's scenario.

Keywords*: Succession planning, talent continuity, Malaysian public sector, system theory*

INTRODUCTION

April 19th 2004 marked the day when McDonald lost a leader, chief executive Jim Cantalupo, who has successfully turned its badly-stumbled business to a practically overnight success. However, the sudden death did not mark the end of the success story as the position was immediately filled by Charlie Bell, who was identified by the late Mr. Cantalupo as a very talented employee and was groomed to succeed him in the event of his demise (cited from Rothwell, 2005). The choice and grooming of Mr. Bell's, which is also based on his high potential traits has proven to be one the best decision McDonald has made about its organization as McDonald continue grow to be one the most successful and resilient fast-food empire until today under Mr. Bell's leadership.

McDonald is one example of an organization which recognized the importance of talent continuity, especially in choosing the right leader to lead. Talent, however, does not conform to

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those at the top level only. Rothwell (2005) emphasized that talent continuity need not be limited solely to management positions or management employees. In fact, there is a critical need to identify talent in any job category and at any level especially since most organizations are "*taking active steps to build high-performance and high-involvement work environments in which decision making is decentralized, leadership is diffused throughout an empowered workforce and propriety technical knowledge accumulated from many years of experience in one corporate culture is key to doing business*".

Talent continuity is an important factor to maintain organizational success. George Cox (2002), Director General of the Institute of Directors at Development Dimensions International in the UK denoted that talent continuity, especially leadership continuity is not only the "*prime determinant of performance, but the confidence of investors, employees, and all stakeholders largely rests with the teams at the helm*." (Pepe, 2007). In a survey by McKinsey & Company (2005), it is discovered that over a 10-year period the quality of an organization's talent management program was linked to annual return to shareholders (cited from Pepe, 2007). Hence, talent continuity is essential and one of the tools which are currently being practiced worldwide to ensure such continuity is succession planning.

This study is aimed to explain the various literatures on succession planning in managing talents. The explanation form, to some extent, the evolution of the succession planning concept. It will be from this evolution, one could see the changes in the perspectives and focus of this concept over time. This study is also aimed to identify the key elements and conceptually built a framework on how to develop a strategic succession planning model which will fit within the Malaysian public sector scenario. The conceptual model can, to some large extent, be a guideline for the Malaysian government in reviewing the current succession planning policy.

The scope of the study is on those succession planning approaches within the available literature for talent continuity. The study also focus only on the perspectives conceptually and the strategies. The study, however, did not intend to assess any of these approaches. Basically, the methodology used for this study is literature review or library research from various journals,

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books and articles about succession planning concept. The data collected is in the form of the various approaches of this concept from as early as 1841 up to the current year.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to Succession Planning

Succession planning is not a new phenomenon. Its goal is to identify a talent pool that can be developed in preparation for future responsibilities and considers not only past performance but the future potential of the individual. This process will be at ease if talent has been well managed and groomed. The right successors to continue the leadership are not likely to be found inside an organisation where talent has not been properly nurtured and developed. Succession planning forces an organisation to scrutiny its talent, develop reliable assessment procedures, and ensure that they are applied systematically across the organization. According to Roberts (2002), the ultimate aim of succession planning is to promote the best and brightest across the corporation by having the right person in the right place at the right time for the right job. Wilkerson (2002), on the other hand, states that the practice of succession planning is a key to sustaining organizational initiatives, performance, and the execution of its mission. In order to achieve mission objectives, companies need to start with the basics by developing a strong process and then invest in the tools and technology to instil a talent development mindset in their organization.

Why is the sudden interest in this concept as the central tool to ensure talent continuity? The obvious reason is to ensure the right person is chosen (Clutterbuck, 2005). There are also few other concerns if the organization did not have one. For one thing, loss of investment in people assets, particularly loss of talented and key resources is inevitable. This is the direct effect of disruption in processes and tasks due to no proper incumbent to replace the leaders who had left. This is also the case in many organizations nowadays. In Harvard Business Review cover story in 2005, titled "*Ending CEO Succession Crisis*", the author claim that succession planning is "*broken*" in North America and beyond. The article cites a study conducted by the National Association of Corporate Directors which found that nearly 50% of companies with revenue greater than $500 million have "*no meaningful CEO succession plan*". Another study by Price

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Waterhouse Coopers found that 65% of CEO surveyed planned to leave their organization in less than a decade. Nearly half of these CEO's, however, had not done any real succession planning, and while 61% did not even have a likely succession in mind. This alarming statistics show that there is strong need for organization to build an effective succession plan to ensure talent continuity. The result of poor succession planning is often poor performance, which translates into higher turnover and corporate instability. Succession planning has also become an important tool for organizations to face higher demands in a global market with the retirement of growing numbers of 'baby boomers' and the widening talent gap due to difficulties in recruiting talented employees from the small pool of talent from 'Generation Y' individuals. Even when there are the numerous benefits of a formalized succession planning process, many organizations have failed to make it a top priority.

Succession planning in the public sector: The Malaysian case

In public sector, succession planning has not until recently received much attention. However, a more critical issue is that it has not received much attention in the actual world of public service. This negligence reflects the fact that leaders in the public sector themselves not taken succession planning as a serious issue. Although searching for the right officers to be placed at strategic posts is difficult, what is more challenging is changing public sector culture to focus on succession planning as an important element to assure talent continuity. Four types of barriers must be overcome by the public sector leaders in making succession planning a success are the reluctant to take up the succession plan; confusion about the framework of succession plan; the underlying assumption that succession issue are beyond the scope of the leader's responsibility; and lack of information about how to take up the task in such a way on how to plan for succession planning in the midst of a shifting political environment and given regulatory and political constraints.

In Malaysian public sector, the implementation of succession plan is carried out through Service Circular No. 3/2006 (The Search Committee Establishment Guideline and The Implementation Process of Succession Planning). The Circular is meant only for Grade 48 and above with the purpose of ensuring that competence officers will fill up all the strategic post to

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meet the needs of the organizations, stakeholders and environments. This is provided that each agency has their own comprehensive succession plan developed at their levels.

Succession plans in the Malaysian public sector work in concert with merit system principles especially with the introduction of Malaysian Remuneration System (MRS) in 2002. The plan tied up very closely with a series of comprehensive Competency Level Assessment that operate within the parameters of the merit system to ensure employees have equal access to learning and developmental activities and potential employees selections remain consistent and competitive. By examining critical skill areas at all levels and identifying strategic positions, the public service will ensure that there will be continuity in talent transition whereby important knowledge and skills will not be lost as senior officers left the service. Besides the Competence Level Assessment, the Performance Appraisal System is also used as one of the requirements in executing the succession plan. This system introduces a more objectives, systematic and reliable assessment since there are fewer subjective elements. It recognizes the need to give more weight to different aspects for different service groups such as work output based on knowledge, work quality, timeliness, ability to manage and make decisions; good values such as trustworthiness and reliability; potential for leadership; and the annual targets as agreed upon by both the officers and their superiors. This multifaceted approach in the implementation of succession planning makes seniority in the civil service no longer a top priority. For example in the case of promotion for Administrative and Diplomatic Officer, it is "*strictly based on merit*" (Ahmad, Mansor and Ahmad, 2003). Before the independent, seniority was the main criterion but now merit is the main criterion of promotion (Omar, 1980). In a nutshell, succession planning in the Malaysian public sector takes in a form of top-down approach, though maintaining competencies and merits as the bases for selection.

The literatures: Definition, focuses and perspectives

Generally, many literatures on the concept of succession planning describe it in different focus and perspectives. Evidently, the differences created the different focuses and perspectives, though maintaining the main objective of ensuring talent continuity. **Table 1** illustrates the summary of these literatures.

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Basically, the literatures are arranged chronologically to demonstrate the evolution of the succession planning concept in terms of definition as well as the perspectives. The arrangement of the literatures is done in such manner so as to provide a general inference of how the succession planning's concept has moved from responsibility of the management to a holistic process. Similarly the perspectives of each literature provide an evolution of a conceptual view of an ideal succession planning concept. Perhaps the earliest of them all is M. Henri Fayol (1841-1925). Fayol, hailed as the father of management theory, enunciated his ideas through his fourteen points of management.

Succession planning must take into account of these basic frameworks for it to be solidly built. This concept is further enhanced to encompass a larger group of individuals and job categories. Various researchers including Carter (1986), Friedman (1986; cited in Huang, 2001) Tung-Chung Huang (2001), Rothwell (2005) and the latest Zaini.et.al (2009) had generously contributed towards the literature of this particular concept.

Perhaps the most comprehensive literature about succession planning was contributed by William. J. Rothwell. He began his study on this concept in 1991 and built up the idea of succession planning as the tool to ensure talent continuity until the current year. According to Rothwell, there are various approaches to succession planning, which can distinguished according to the direction of the succession (top-down, bottom-up or a combination of both), timing (need to be execute fitfully, periodically or continuously), planning (in the form of systematic or unsystematic approach), scope (it is a specialized or generalized plan), degree of dissemination (it is a closed, limited to 'need-to- know" basis or open, treated with candor) and amount of individual discretion (a mandated or verified succession planning programs). In building an effective succession planning program, he has listed down several characteristics including evident of top management participation and support; it should be need-driven with external benchmarking; there should be dedicated responsibility on the accountability of the program; it should be systematic and there should be specific developmental programs established and conducted.

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Table 1: Summary of various literatures on SP

RESEARCHER	M. Henri Fayol (1841 -1925)	Norman H. Carter (1986)	Friedman (1986)	Tung-Chun Huang (2001)	Rothwell (2005)	Zaini Abdullah et.al (2009)
DEFINITION	The responsibility of the management to 'ensure the stability of tenure of personnel', which if ignored, will result in the key positions end up being filled by ill-prepared people	A means of identifying critical management positions, starting at the levels of project manager and supervisor and extending up to the highest position in the organization.		Succession planning involves selecting from pools of promising candidates those employees best suited to fill higher-level management positions in business firms	Any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department, or work group by making provision for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people over time.	A process that selects employees develops their competencies, which then prepares them for future assignment in positions which require these competencies for effective performance in the organization.
	These 14 principle of management enunciated the idea of SP: 1. ivision of work 2. uthority and Responsibility 3. iscipline 4. nity of command 5. nity of direction 6. ubordination of individual interests to general interests 7. air Remuneration to employees 8. entralization and Decentralization 9. calar Chain 10. rder 11.	SP must be based on competencies	Key dimensions are: 1. formalization; 2. control systems; 3. resource allocation; 4. information systems; 5. political criteria; 6. technical criteria; and 7. staff's role.	Key components are: 1. statement of strategic vision; 2. planning database (Pattan, 1986); 3. candid and open channels of communication (Shulman, 1991); 4. support from the management staff (Nahorney, 1992); 5. systematic way of identifying candidates and rewarding managers for promoting their best employees (McElwain, 1991); and 6. participation, feedback and action (Getty, 1993).	SP approaches are characterize by: 1. Direction; 2. Timing; 3. Planning; 4. Scope; 5. Degree of dissemination; and 6. Amount of individual discretion. Minimum requirement for an effective SP (5th Generation Approach) 1. A policy and procedure statement 2. A statement of values governing the effort 3. Competency models for the groups targeted 4. Full-circle, multirater assessment efforts 5. Individual development plans 6. Skill inventories for talent pools inside and outside the organization	Key dimensions are: 1. managerial competencies 2. spiritual capital, 3. culture and 4. awareness (ZAKEPT.1)

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Table 1: Summary of various literatures on SP

RESEARCHER	M. Henri Fayol (1841 -1925)	Norman H. Carter (1986)	Friedman (1986)	Tung-Chun Huang (2001)	Rothwell (2005)	Zaini Abdullah et.al (2009)
	quity 12. tability of use of personnel 13. nitiative 14. pirit of Co-operation (esprit de corps)					

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Rothwell also has suggested that an organization might go through five main generations of succession planning program (though some organizations might just gone through certain generations or skip one or two of these generation), starting from a simple replacement planning for the CEO up till a more sophisticated program. The latter comprises of more holistic approach of the plan to include not only the replacement plans but also focusing on the development of internal talent pools. All in all, based on his assertion of this concept, he has established a seven-pointed star model with steps for systematic succession planning and management, of which he inferred, should be the foundation for many best-practice succession planning programs in many organizations.

The latest effort of research on succession planning is, perhaps, by Zaini Abdullah et. al (2009), which had resulted in the establishment of the ZAKEPT.1 model, a comprehensive model which aimed to outline the most essential aspects in executing a succession plan in Malaysian's Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The evolution of the literatures on succession planning in **Table 1** shows that this concept was recognized as an important management concept as early as the 1800s, even though at that point of time, the term '*succession planning*' was not specifically used. The recognition of this concept in that era, to some extent, owed to the vocation for an efficient and effective management of which a continuous leadership is essential. In other words, the idea of succession planning was in placed with the idea that a leader must be well-replaced to avoid any disruptions in the management process. From this research as well, it can be inferred that perhaps the earliest literature which actually focused on this concept per se as part of a strategic management begins in the 1980s. At this point, most of the literatures focused on the dimensions or components of a good strategic succession planning. The idea, then, was to establish a good succession program which ensures smooth leadership continuity. However, at this point of time, this concept was misinterpreted to be just another workforce replacement program (Khumalo et al, 2007). It is not until the early 1990s where the concept began to take its place as an important strategic management tool though the writings of established human resource gurus such as William J.

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Rothwell. Basically, the evolution, conceptually, built the stages of which the idea of having a systematic plan to ensure talent continuity is given the priority as the years progressed.

One interesting finding from this evolution is that how all the researches mentioned in the list seemed to use different terms to explain about this concept, resulting in, what seemed to be, different focuses and perspectives. For example, Fayol (1841-1925) uses the term 'principles' in explaining the importance of successor in ensuring successful management of an organization, while Friedman (1986) and Huang (2001) coined the terms 'dimensions' and 'components' in their explanation which are needed to develop a good succession plan. Carter (1986), although, had not detailed out any elements, did mentioned that competencies are the main 'component' in a good succession plan. Rothwell (2005), on the other hand, focuses on various 'approaches' and 'characteristics' in carrying out a systematic succession plan in an organization. Zaini et.al (2009), in their study, focused on the 'criteria' to build a comprehensive model of succession planning, emphasizing these criteria as dimensions for selecting individuals rather than the planning process itself. **Table 2** summarizes the various terms used in all these literatures.

Despite the differences in terms, focuses and perspectives, as shown by the table, some of the attributes mentioned in each term shares the same perspective. For example, Carter (1986) emphasised on competencies as a major dimension for a solid succession plan. Rothwell (2005) and Zaini et. al (2009) also agreed on this attribute to be included as part of the characteristics and dimensions in their studies respectively. Huang (2001) had suggested that statement of strategic vision is an important component, of which Rothwell (2005) also mentioned is one of the characteristics of an effective succession plan. Another similarity, a rather important one, is that all of the attributes (except probably Zaini et. al, to some extent) are focusing on the process of either formulating or implementing succession planning in an organization. If one observed the definitions by all these researchers (referring to **Table 1**), all of which call attention to the fact that succession planning is a process. Evidently, the concepts put forward by all these literatures formulated into suggested steps that an organization need to take in implementing an effective, solid, sophisticated succession planning program. Perhaps, the only real difference of all these literature is the particular attributes each of them has suggested.

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Zaini et. al (2009), although, did not specifically mentioned that the attributes can be associated to any succession planning process, but the dimensions they have suggested can be inferred as the scope needed in one of the steps in the process itself, which is in the selection process.

RECOMMENDATION

Thus, given the literatures and findings, in the case of Malaysian public sector, it is essential to review its succession planning policy to determine whether it is in align with the suggested attributes, in particular the two main attributes which were given quite an ample attention in most of the literature which are competencies statement of strategic visions and procedure.

Could this be enough? By merely reviewing and modifying the policy, does this mean that succession planning in the Malaysian public sector would be successful? Viewing this in a more holistic manner, one can deduce that, so far the highlight of succession planning is only on its processes. On the other hand, definitions and attributes of succession planning, up to this point, suggested that succession planning is a not just merely a process but a systematic process with systematic attributes. In other words, there should be other elements besides the process in the system. According to the General System Theory (Bertalanffy, 1968), systems focus on "*the arrangement of and relations between the parts which connect them into a whole*". Most systems share the same common characteristics as below:

1. Systems have a structure that is defined by its parts and processes.
2. Systems tend to function in the same way. This involves the **inputs** and **outputs**.
3. Systems often exchange matter beyond their defined boundary with the outside environment, and other systems, through various **input** and **output** processes.
4. The parts that make up a system show some degree of integration (in other words, the parts work well together).

Table 2: The summary of various terms used in various literature of SP

Researcher	Principles	Dimensions	Components	Approaches/ Characteristics
Fayol (1841-1925)	Divided into 14 principles, namely: (1) Division of work; (2) Authority and Responsibility; (3) Discipline; (4) Unity of command; (5) Unity of direction; (6) Subordination of individual interests to general interest; (7) Fair Remuneration to employees; (8) Centralization and Decentralization; (9) Scalar Chain; (10) Order; (11) Equity; (12) Stability of use of personnel; (13) Initiative; and (14) Spirit of Co-operation (esprit de corps)			
Carter (1986)		Competencies		
Friedman (1986)		(1) formalization; (2) control systems; (3) resource allocation; (4) information systems; (5) political criteria; (6) technical criteria; and (7) staff's role.		
Huang (2001)			(1) statement of strategic vision; (2) planning database (Pattan, 1986); (3) candid and open channels of communication (Shulman, 1991); (4) support from the management staff (Nahorney, 1992); (5) systematic way of identifying candidates and rewarding managers for promoting their best employees (McElwain, 1991); and (6) participation, feedback and action (Getty, 1993)	

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Table 2: The summary of various terms used in various literature of SP

Researcher	Principles	Dimensions	Components	Approaches/ Characteristics
Rothwell (2005)				SP approaches are characterized by: (1) Direction; (2) Timing; (3) Planning; (4) Scope; (5) Degree of dissemination; and (6) Amount of individual discretion. Minimum requirement for an effective SP (5th Generation Approach) are: (1) A policy and procedure statement (2) A statement of values governing the effort (3) Competency models for the groups targeted (4) Full-circle, multirater assessment efforts (5) Individual development plans (6) Skill inventories for talent pools inside and outside the organization
Zaini et.al (2009)		(1) managerial competencies; (2) spiritual capital; (3) culture and (4) awareness		

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Thus, through this definition, it is suggested that suggestion planning should also focuses on other components, which are the input and output, of the system besides its processes. In this sense, the input of a succession planning program is the attribute of the individual who will be part of the program. At this point, one could say this serves similarly to a type of pre-selection criteria. However, it can also infer that there must be some sort of parameters defined for the input of the succession plan. Parameters such as qualification and experiences could be the intended criteria. It differs from the competencies defined for the processes since the criteria are not tight to any strategic visions or statements of the whole succession planning program, but merely serve as filter to ensure the system will not be overloaded with just any type of input.

In any succession planning program, the final output is a person who the processes has identified as the most qualified, suitable and appropriate candidate to succeed the key positions of the particular organization. However, there is also a question of whether the intended individual is prepared or not to succeed the place. Spafford (2006) suggested that level of readiness is an important attribute to assess the successfulness of a succession planning program. How ready is the person? Can the person succeed the position immediately? Can the person succumb to the needs of the organization instantaneously? On the other hand, the level of readiness is a two-way traffic. Chen-chen et al (2004) suggested that readiness also needs to be assessed in terms of the organization, whether the organization are ready to accept the intended person as the next leader.

Apart from the three main components, there also should be feedback mechanism to identify any loopholes in the succession planning program as it is also influenced by its environment. In this case, succession planning programs should be dynamic and flexible enough to adjust itself to the changes in the public sector.

Thus, summarizing from the above, it is suggested that for succession planning to work in the public sector especially in Malaysia, three main components are needed in the program; input, process and output. Each component needed to be assessed individually to suit the current scenario before being integrated to complete the whole system. **Diagram 1** illustrates the

conceptual framework of a holistic succession planning program, which can be applied in Malaysia.
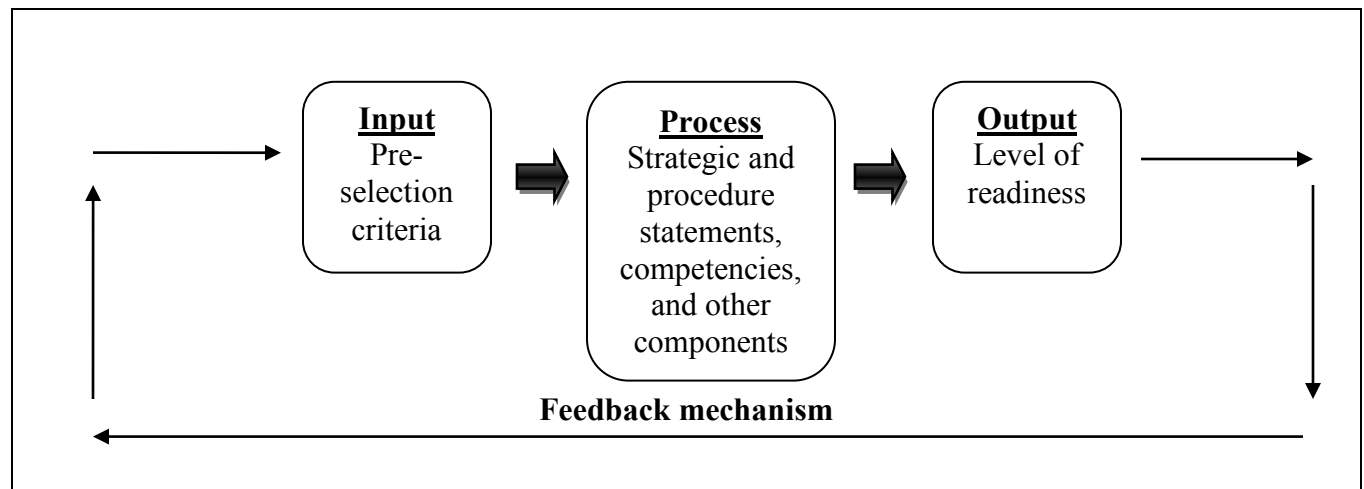


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           ┌──────────┐    ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────┐
    ──────▶│  Input   │───▶│   Process    │───▶│  Output  │──────▶
    ▲      │  Pre-    │    │ Strategic and│    │ Level of │      │
    │      │ selection│    │  procedure   │    │ readiness│      │
    │      │ criteria │    │  statements, │    │          │      ▼
    │      └──────────┘    │ competencies,│    └──────────┘
    │                      │  and other   │
    │                      │  components  │
    │                      └──────────────┘
    │              Feedback mechanism
    ◀────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────
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Diagram 1: A succession planning conceptual framework based on systems theory

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are varieties of approaches to develop a solid and sophisticated succession planning which will assist in managing talent of an organization. However, it must be emphasized that this study is not comprehensive in the sense that it does not meant to suggest that the findings are exhaustive. There are, of course other literature, though may not be directly relevant to the objective of this research. In addition, the suggested framework is serving merely as a guideline. Thus, it is recommended that it should be tested against the current scenario to assess its credibility and reliability.

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