

Building Organizational Readiness through Effective Succession Planning

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Abstract

This analysis synthesized theoretical and topical research and focused on key concepts of self-efficacy, succession planning, their relationship to organizational readiness, and their relevance to executive leadership. Succession planning evolved from a human resources task to a holistic endeavor over the decades. However, modern succession planning across sectors needed to be more cohesive and standardized. Some contexts primarily focused on C-suite executives due to the top-down driven nature of those organizations, even though the business environment in various sectors continued to become more complex and interconnected. This underscored the need for organizations to consider deliberate succession planning at all levels to face contemporary challenges and prepare for the future, mainly as leaders contend with overall organizational development concerns, including conditions of gender developmental inequality. Multi-faceted succession plans enabled successful transition management practices and mitigated turnover intentions, producing employees committed to their institution and bolstered self-efficacy. Support structures inherent in organizations' succession plans that address developmental needs at all levels, add to self-efficacy, and promote performance outcomes among their members.

Keywords: developmental efficacy, leader development, leadership development, organizational effectiveness, self-efficacy, succession planning, women's leader development

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Basis for Analysis

A preview of Day et al. (2009) prompted my interest in an organization's ability to effectively onboard and integrate new employees through various conditions of self-efficacy. They explicated connections between and benefits of self-efficacy, leader development, and organizational readiness (Day et al., 2009). It evoked numerous examples from my professional experience and observations of others in leadership positions, primarily in a military context, throughout a 26-year career as a Soldier and Army Civilian Professional (ACP). I remained keenly aware of my internal levels of comfort as I progressed in new roles, and the self-awareness I innately possessed enabled me to remain acutely attuned to similar conditions in others. The experiences inspired me to tailor my development approach toward incoming personnel based on their initial levels of self-efficacy as they transitioned into new positions.

Soldiers usually rotate from assignment to assignment and/or location to location once every two to three years on average, while ACPs generally remained in place at one location for as long as they desired. While ACPs may remain in one location, they may also change roles within the same organization due to lateral or vertical promotions. This created conditions in which effective continuity or succession planning and leadership development in homogenous organizations (comprised entirely of Soldiers) and heterogeneous organizations (comprised of a Soldier-civilian mix) became essential to organizational readiness. Therefore, a broader examination of the interconnectedness between effective succession planning, individuals' self-efficacy, and their combined impact on organizational readiness seemed worthy of further exploration.

Background Context and Current State of the Workforce

The age of implementing strategies to prepare individuals to assume new roles or leadership positions to solidify continuity and organizational readiness might surprise some people. One of the earliest known instances dated back to 1400 BCE when Moses

decentralized tribal leadership by selecting dozens of tribal elders to perform additional duties as leaders (Ndinjiakat, 2019). Fast forward to the 19th century when French businessman Henri Fayol published the first known compendium of theories on succession planning and its value to organizational continuity and developmental readiness (Ndinjiakat, 2019). Succession planning evolved since the 1950s from a human resources task to a more holistic endeavor. However, modern succession planning across sectors seemed like it needed more cohesion and standardization. Some contexts primarily focused on C-suite executives due to the top-down driven nature of those organizations, even though the business environment in various sectors continued to become more complex and interconnected (Ndinjiakat, 2019). This underscored the need for organizations to consider deliberate succession planning at all levels to face contemporary challenges and prepare for the future, mainly as executive leaders contend with overall organizational development concerns, particularly conditions of gender developmental inequality.

Women were radically underrepresented in succession to senior leadership positions. A 2019 study revealed women represented 34% of senior executive positions (Kimball et al., 2021). Another study a year later discovered only 6.6% of women occupied CEO positions in Fortune 500 companies despite representing nearly 50% of the global population (Hartman & Barber, 2020). The statistical status of gender inequality stressed the necessity for executive leaders to at least consider, if not outright implement, appropriate interventions to close the gender inequality gap and align the makeup of key leadership positions somewhat proportional to the population their institutions represented. Nevertheless, individual self-efficacy among men and women contributed to overall organizational effectiveness (Dwyer, 2019), which this analysis explored in more depth in subsequent sections. The forthcoming evidence illustrated the importance of leader and leadership development in bolstering individual self-efficacy and organizational readiness.

Efficacy, Leadership Development, and Succession Planning

Self-Efficacy Defined

No single definition of self-efficacy existed. While some variations included estimating one's ability and willingness to perform specific tasks, the most widely accepted version pertained to one's perceived capability to perform specific tasks to lead others and support the organization's objectives (Dwyer, 2019). Some authors identified a distinction between self-efficacy and leader self-efficacy and leaned on earlier research from the 1980s for the foundational definition of the former. Liu et al. (2021, p. 11) defined self-efficacy as a "judgment of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations." The more nuanced version of leader self-efficacy (LSE) extended the base definition to characterize it as "one's belief about his or her abilities to take leadership roles or perform leadership behaviors" (Liu et al., 2021, p. 11). Both forms contributed to organizational effectiveness, defined as "a company's long-term capability to achieve its strategic and operational goals consistently" (Ndinjiakat, 2019, p. 50). Considering the implications one or both forms of self-efficacy might contribute to organizations' durability, the consequences of not considering their inclusion as a factor in development programs seemed clear.

Outcomes of Self-Efficacy

The demand for competent, influential leaders worldwide underscored similar challenges faced in Western contexts (Mango et al., 2019). Leadership self-efficacy (LSE) in specific burgeoning sectors of the economy in countries like Kenya, for example, directly and positively affected leader effectiveness across multiple standards (Mango et al., 2019). Positive self-perceptions of one's confidence correlated to their effectiveness, and studies of leader performance resulted in similar outcomes (Dwyer, 2019). Compared to their counterparts with low LSE, leaders with high LSE experienced less stress and steady performance, maintained an ability to receive constructive criticism and leveraged it to enable positive group performance, and engendered positive perceptions from superiors on promotion potential (Dwyer, 2019). The

interrelation between self-efficacy and developmental efficacy also connected to leadership development, which emphasized the importance of their consideration by executive leaders for inclusion in succession planning processes. Developmental efficacy related to the “leader’s judgment regarding whether he or she can develop a specific ability or skill to employ in a leadership context” (Mango et al., 2019, p. 71). A study by Mondo et al. (2019) showed that subjects who demonstrated high levels of developmental efficacy also maintained high levels of leadership development, including qualities indicative of perseverance through challenges, confidence to take on leadership roles, and perceptions of opportunity through failure (Mango et al., 2019). Sanou (2021) highlighted the devastating effect on organizations without a succession plan and identified six consequences, including the detrimental impact on professional development, whose conclusions complemented the research above by Mondo et al. (2019). Three effects, impairment of internal professional development, disruption to productivity, and risk of protracted leadership voids, underscored the risk incurred to organizational sustainability and goal achievement when ignored as factors leading to sound succession planning in contemporary contexts (Sanou, 2021).

Criticisms of Self-Efficacy

Most available scholarly research chronicled the advantages and benefits of individuals who internalized and demonstrated positive self-efficacy, including the selected source material for this analysis. Thus far, Liu et al. (2021) and Mango et al. (2019) demonstrated its effects on leadership development in general and across one’s lifespan. Research by Hartman & Barber (2020) and Kimball et al. (2021) revealed the positive outcomes of self-efficacy produced among women within organizations with support mechanisms and structures to build a bench of qualified, confident leaders while creating an environment that closed the gap in gender equality in the workplace. Very little criticism in the literature existed. However, while most studies revealed the positive effects of self-efficacy, some scholars challenged certain assumptions and questioned the value of high leader self-efficacy in specific contexts. Extreme levels of self-

efficacy led to complacency and little interest in development actions, lackluster performance in some cases due to arrogant attitudes, and weakening of collective self-efficacy when subordinates did not meet their leader's high expectations (Dwyer, 2019). Overconfidence was the common theme represented throughout those negative behaviors. Extreme self-efficacy bred overconfidence, which tended to create situations in which over-optimism prevented individuals from recognizing deficiencies (Dwyer, 2019). The practical, systematic conduct of assessment tools may provide the antidote required to mitigate issues of extreme self-efficacy. Nevertheless, more remains to be discovered, and the nascency of the current research provided opportunities for future exploration. Executive leaders should account for evolving scholarly criticism to enable the refinement or establishment of their succession planning processes and policies. Doing so will encourage them to lean into emerging trends that connect leadership development, self-efficacy, and succession planning.

Selected Leadership Development Trends of the 21st Century

One of the reasons leadership development remained so disjointed across sectors was that no one agreed upon a standard definition of leadership (Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020). Therefore, the multi-faceted nature of leadership development made its comprehensive integration into organizational systems and processes elusive. Job rotation as a leadership development method, also known as experiential leadership activities, refers to placing members and leaders with demonstrated potential into different roles as preparation to assume greater responsibility at the time of placement or as a stepping stone to future opportunities (Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni, 2020). Echoes of job rotation as a developmental activity resided elsewhere in the literature and gave credence to the concept. Specific leader development programs designed for women, for example, leveraged experiential learning through deliberate practice and individualized growth activities, sometimes through challenging assignments, that created opportunities after the experience (Kimball et al., 2021). Liu et al. (2021) also identified leadership succession as one of eight leader development indicators. Leaders who embodied

positive LSE throughout developmental processes like job rotation maintained a favorable leader identity and contended well with pressure situations related to previous experiences (professional and personal) (Liu et al., 2021). Thus, the interconnection between LSE and self-awareness created a nexus of confidence among those who exemplified these qualities, and their mindset helped propel them along an effective developmental path. The initial notion of job rotation as a development tool inspired an exploration into potential connections between continuous leader development and succession planning.

Leader Development Across the Lifespan

Much research surrounding leader development focused on on-the-job training, while examinations of leader development across one's lifespan still needed to be developed. Pre- and post-adulthood experiences imbued with multiple factors and experiences outside the workplace positively influenced leader proficiency (Liu et al., 2021). Various theories of leader development muddied the waters, and organizations often relied on the most common or widely accepted frameworks, such as those directed toward skill-based applications (Liu et al., 2021). Thus, a holistic view of the individual through organizational processes like succession activities and periodic assessments of those activities might enable executive leaders to leverage previously unknown capabilities. Accordingly, multidimensional development, "processes that incorporated the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational level influence one possessed inside and outside of leadership roles" (Liu et al., 2021, p. 4) helped drive individuals toward performance goal achievement. One model of leader development compartmentalized it into growth stages, called experiential windows, and aligned them with specific periods of one's life by age (Liu et al., 2021). The establishment of the model implied the necessity to ensure executive leaders consider a multigenerational workforce. Other experts also concluded the modern workforce consists of two to three generations working side by side at any moment (Sanou, 2021). Younger employees, especially those born of the Millennial and Gen Z cohorts, often encountered confidence and motivation challenges while working alongside their

multigenerational counterparts (Sanou, 2021). The situation created conditions where institutions faced opportunities or challenges (depending on organizational senior leaders' prevailing points of view) for succession planning and leadership development based on employee technical and self-efficacy (Sanou, 2021). What other conclusion could one reach about the need for organizations to review, refine, and establish leadership development and succession plans that meet modern-day challenges, considering the aforementioned research concerning experiential learning and experiential leadership activities, the realities of workforce longevity, and gender roles in the workplace?

Leadership Development and Gender Considerations

Research is abounded by studies and scholarly perspectives on the status and statistics concerning women in the workplace across various contexts. More research was conducted recently on the connection between occupational self-efficacy and women's and men's decisions concerning career advancement and leadership activities (Hartman & Barber, 2020). More than gender-related discriminatory stereotypes, occupational self-efficacy accounted more for women's underrepresentation in senior executive roles (Hartman & Barber, 2020). Men often viewed successful women negatively, despite evidence of women's ability to build fruitful collaborative environments that benefitted organizational readiness ("Solutions for Tackling Workplace Gender Inequality," 2020). This dynamic represented one of many factors contributing to low self-efficacy among women and impacted their professional aspirations ("Solutions for Tackling Workplace Gender Inequality," 2020). Individual self-efficacy often contributes to certain career decisions made by men and women. But they sometimes made decisions within contexts that perpetuated stereotypical cultural gender differences and perceptions of power and competition, conditions that supported systems and processes that promoted biases and less access to resources, resulting in less of a desire to pursue leadership opportunities (Dwyer, 2019; Hartman & Barber, 2020; "Solutions for Tackling Workplace Gender Inequality," 2020). Yet, organizations that employed a robust leadership development and

succession planning process with gender considerations in mind developed individuals motivated to seek leadership opportunities, enabling sound business continuity (Hartman & Barber, 2020). So, how should executive leaders build systems to shrink the efficacy and development gap women experience in the workplace to make progress toward gender equality and boost representation in senior positions?

The three authors above recognized the effect of cultural stereotypes and systemic program inequalities on women's willingness to engage in leadership development activities and pursue leadership opportunities. Nevertheless, women who internalized negative stereotypes remained open to new experiences (Dwyer, 2019), which suggested the possibility of greater participation in development activities and ascension up the leadership ladder within organizations that recognized the value of a capable, diverse workforce. Women's leader development programs focused on experiential learning and feedback through deliberate practice and individualized growth activities enabled women to help themselves and each other maintain mindful engagement over their lifetimes (Kimball et al., 2021), which coincided with research by Liu et al. (2021) in two respects. First, women role models who maintained active connections with other women leaders contributed to their self-efficacy and often contributed to positively channeling the behaviors of women whose propensity to develop and advance their careers frequently experienced systemic challenges in some organizations (Liu et al., 2021). Second, staged development that accounted for holistic experiences across one's lifespan affected one's ability to lead (Liu et al., 2021). The nexus of these concepts across the literature lent credence to the perspective of a system built on experiential learning as a factor in development and succession planning. To that end, some standard methods appeared in the selected source material that could apply to women just as well as men.

First, complex and ambiguous experiences (factual or fabricated) with high stakes and diverse stakeholders created opportunities for women to collaborate thoughtfully on problems, question assumptions, and carefully observe outcomes (Kimball et al., 2021; Hartman & Barber,

2020). Second, mentorship and coaching are components of effective networking for women, including influential men and women who developed a robust social support system capable of promoting their involvement in senior levels of leadership while addressing succession plan development (Kimball et al., 2021; Ndinjiakat, 2019). Men's participation proved vital, especially when it included programmatic encouragement to advocate against discrimination and bias (Kimball et al., 2021). Finally, women's leader development program improvement relied on an organization's ability to align program evaluation with objectives within four lines of effort: participant reactions, learning, transfer of behavior, and results (Kimball et al., 2021). Most assessments, however, only consisted of participant feedback (Kimball et al., 2021), which significantly undercut the opportunities gained by incorporating the other three areas of emphasis and limited program effectiveness. Structured 360-degree feedback proved the most effective in building program effectiveness, mainly when used with other program components such as mentorship or coaching, and they often enabled organizations to meet their current and future needs (Ndinjiakat, 2019). 360-degree assessments seemed to illuminate individual and collective patterns, which leaders could use to influence the strategic direction of their organization. Therefore, leaders who include them and the other components mentioned above could go a long way to ensure a more even playing field among their members and gain a competitive advantage in their context.

Succession Planning

Succession planning will prove a crucial component of organizational stability in the future. Nearly 22% of the population in the United States will retire by 2040 (Ndinjiakat, 2019), and a 2018 study of management practices concluded that less than half of financial sector institutions established a succession plan for their senior executives (Sanou, 2021). Consider, then, the potential state of succession planning in other sectors like emergency services, critical infrastructure management, or strategic supply chain management. Definitions of succession planning varied within the literature. Still, one that encapsulated the most common elements

stated the following: succession planning is “a systematic, long-term process of determining goals, needs, and roles within an organization and preparing individuals or employee groups for responsibilities relative to work needed within an organization” (Mehreen & Ali, 2022, p. 530). The definition described a methodical process rather than emergency or unplanned personnel replacement. Deliberate succession planning impacted all levels of institutions, and sound succession plans provided a double benefit. They often satisfied individual development goals while mitigating organizational employee turnover intentions (Mehreen & Ali, 2022). Employee orientation was a crucial first step in an individual’s introduction to their new organization. Incoming employees became familiar with the culture and vision at the outset through formal and informal socialization processes, which enabled them to adjust more quickly and fostered a sense of belonging (Mehreen & Ali, 2022). The dynamic sets the culture of commitment to, rather than compliance with, systems and processes meant to establish a sustainable strategic path.

The selected literature thus far established succession planning as a multi-component process designed to enable leader & leadership development while enabling employee self-efficacy. As such, aspiring or junior leaders at all levels deserved as much attention as senior leaders in a multi-level approach to identify the next generation, and succession planning best practices included multi-level leadership development programs. Organizations focus senior leader development on their ability to set a strategic direction for succession planning, manage executive transitions, and promote accelerated but deliberate assimilation of new employees (Sanou, 2021). Aspiring leaders who participated in activities that focused on self-evaluation activities, in-depth feedback processes, and mentorship contributed to program success. The model aligned with Liu et al. (2021) perspectives, promoting multidimensional development’s importance, especially among a multigenerational workforce, and Megheirkouni & Mejheirkouni (2020), who argued that multi-purposed leadership development programs prepared individuals to face the challenges presented in a contemporary environment.

Discussion & Conclusions

Personal Vignette

My interest in the topic on which this analysis was based stemmed from professional experience dealing with personnel turnover and self-efficacy after rotating into new assignments at new geographical locations every two to three years as an active-duty service member. My level of technical and self-confidence rose as a particular assignment progressed. Then, as part of the military's usual practice, I rotated to a new duty assignment about three years later in a new geographic location. Service members who share the same experiences must re-acclurate to their new situation and organization, learn how to operate in their new role, build stakeholder networks, and gain the trust and confidence of their new chain of command, peers, and subordinates. That change presented initial self-efficacy challenges similar to those described by Liu et al. (2021), where they differentiated between self-efficacy and leader self-efficacy. My level of judgment in handling new situations initially suffered, which also affected my belief in leading through those situations. As time passed, I grew more confident in both components of self-efficacy, mainly when I took advantage of the institution's compulsory and optional professional development training. The institutional support my various organizations provided nurtured the same combination of holistic, individual, and contextual factors Mondo et al. (2022) contended as more conducive to building self-efficacy and bolstering commitment to the organization.

Although I retired from active duty, I continue to serve as an Army Civilian Professional (ACP). I have since observed service members transition differently, as I am now one of many ACPs who serve as the stability and continuity within my organization. I have also witnessed the effects of Soldier rotations in my current context. Succession planning took on a new meaning for me as I learned how to institute systems and processes designed to maintain long-term continuity of operations on my team, no matter who filled a vacancy. Similar to outcomes discovered by Sanou (2021) and Ndinjakat (2019), I strived to mitigate the risks of

organizational disruptions by implementing prudent steps to efficiently assimilate and acculturate new Soldiers and ACPs while creating opportunities for the kind of development that built self-efficacy at a reasonable pace. My process remained imperfect, but the lessons learned throughout this research will help refine it.

Summary

Overall Assessment

This analysis synthesized theoretical and topical research and focused on key concepts of self-efficacy, succession planning, their relationship to organizational readiness, and their relevance to executive leadership. The literature on leadership development, self-efficacy, and succession planning was immense. Therefore, the confines of this analysis represented a small glimpse into the promise and possibilities of the concepts contained herein.

Most of the source literature strongly connected succession planning and organizational readiness. Multi-faceted succession plans enabled successful transition management practices (Sanou, 2021) and mitigated turnover intentions, which produced employees committed to their institution and bolstered self-efficacy (Mondo et al., 2022; Ndinjakat, 2019). Moreover, support structures inherent in organizations' succession plans that addressed developmental needs at all levels added to self-efficacy levels and promoted performance outcomes among members (Dwyer, 2019; Mehreen & Ali, 2022). Yet, executive leaders needed to do more to address common gender inequality issues and multigenerational workforce dynamics, particularly as they seek to remain competitive deep into the 21st century. Women leaders and aspiring leaders remained severely underrepresented across sectors and industries globally, and traditional gender stereotypes that continue to permeate institutions solidified barriers to psychological safety and professional growth (Kimball et al., 2021; Hartman & Barber, 2020). Meanwhile, today's leaders contend with multiple generations working together in the same space. At the same time, the United States hurtled toward a future with nearly one-quarter of the population consisting of retired persons by 2040 (Liu et al., 2021; Ndinjakat, 2019). Thus, the current and

future contexts present great responsibility for top-level leaders to close the gap if they intend to remain competitive.

Emerging conceptual gaps in the literature presented current and aspiring scholars an opportunity to discover more and extend the intellectual community's understanding of certain concepts and their correlation to more established perspectives. Two examples stood out. First, very few studies examined the adverse effects of leader self-efficacy on workplace dynamics in group contexts (Dwyer, 2019). Second, Ndinjiakat (2019) eluded to the tangible (money) and intangible costs some organizations incur when they choose successors from an internal pool of candidates rather than those hired outside the organization. Yet more scholarly research was needed. Cost comparisons (monetary and otherwise) would vary greatly depending on the context. The scope and scale of local, regional, and national level institutions would undoubtedly drive resource outcomes.

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