CHALLENGES FACED IN SUCCESSION PLANNING IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of the study was to find out what challenges are faced in succession planning at the five star Hotels in Kenya. The study considered one major five star hotel in Kenya that has a chain of hotels, resorts and lodges in different regions of Kenya. The study was guided by three theories namely: Transformational Leadership Theory (MacGregor 1978), Contingency Theory (Fiedler 1960) and Trait Theory (Allport, 1936). The study adopted a case study research design and the respondents were 18 senior managers in the hotels who included: Directors, Head Office Executives, General Managers and Lodge Managers. The data collection instrument was an interview guide where interviews were administered in person to all the respondents. Data analysis was done through content analysis. Graphs were used to analyze general information whereas quotes from the interviewees were used in presentation of the main findings. The findings revealed that succession planning is practiced and there is a general understanding of what it is in the organization. In addition to this, the findings also revealed the major challenges that were experienced which included the size of the organization, financial resources, lack of proper mentorship and training of successors as well as their predecessors, unprofessionalism in the process of succession planning, lack of involvement of all key stakeholders, micromanagement of successors and lack of seriousness in implementation of the process. The study recommended that

there is need for clear guidelines on identification of successors; successors should be continuously engaged through tailor-made trainings and mentorship; ensuring better pay for successors to avoid leaving; regular review of succession plans; ensuring all people relevant to the process are involved and finally avoiding stereotyping of candidates and positions. It is evident that the organization is faced with challenges in succession planning. However, it can overcome these challenges by paying more attention to the process and treating it with a lot of seriousness. There is need for further research in this area of succession planning, and specifically the challenges facing succession planning in other hotels would help draw a better conclusion in the hotel industry.

Key words: Succession Planning, Five star Hotels, Kenya

1. Introduction

The quality and effectiveness of leaders is what sets apart a company's performance. Aided by succession planning, majority of organizations seek to implement change in leadership in a well laid manner. However, the more advanced the position, the more challenges of succession planning become (Landau, 2010). Firms that are more complex in structure spend more when candidates recruited externally are hired to fill key leadership positions (Naveen, 2006). This is due to high costs of transferring organization-specific knowledge to a new successor (Sweeney, 2012). Succession planning helps in recruitment of the best fit people to take over future key openings, it also helps in development of the skills, knowledge and abilities of the successors while preparing them for a promotion. An active involvement in succession planning ensures continuous development of employees to fill vacancies in the organization. As an organization grows, key staff leave, promotions are offered and sales increase, having a succession plan ensures there are readily available employees who will take over upcoming new roles (Heathfield, 2016). With succession planning, an organization understands the critical jobs and positions that need not be left vacant as they can cause a serious breakdown in the system, and such jobs can only be done by the most qualified people. Well done succession planning ensures there is a process that is clear and effective in identifying, developing and also retaining of top talent and leadership in an organization (Zargar, 2013).

The hotel industry is a major player in the development of any nation's economy. According to Heywood (2009) he describes a hotel as an establishment providing accommodation paid for a short-term. Kenya's growth in economy and continual increase in revenue from tourism has led to the expansion as well as new investments in Kenya's hotel industry (Billy, Edwin, Oscar & Lucas 2010). An extensive share of the national GDP comes from domestic travelers. Some of the centers and towns around tourism destinations have also become more recognized (Jameel, 2016). Hotels have been losing key talent to competitors, this leaves the company exposed due to the difficulty in filling these key positions. With the industry rapidly growing, it is important for organizations to identify their critical positions and identify suitable people who can take over in case of exit from the company by the key position holders. With new hotels entering the market, loss of key talent is expected in the current leading hotels.

At the five star hotels chain under study, succession planning is a key function of the human resource department. Various techniques are used to ensure continuity of the business while trying to replace lost talent for key positions. This however has not been very successful. A majority of senior positions and key positions take a long while before they are filled after exit of the previous

position bearer. This is majorly attributed to the assumption that the holders of these key positions will not leave the company. It is also a challenge due to lack of proper mentorship across the board and too much inbreeding which causes reluctance on the management as well as junior managers who assume that upon exit of the senior managers, the positions will be given to them automatically.

Berzon (2007) in his study on Practical Strategies for Comprehensive Succession Planning and Knowledge Management at California's Union Sanitary District, points out the steps to follow to ensure that staff are well trained and groomed for senior positions. The study however does not show how to retain this talent to ensure availability in case of loss of talent. Campbell (2004) in his study on Succession Planning: developing leaders for the future of the organization at Daytona Beach University College, USA, found that the major challenge in succession planning is lack of training and development. Training and development is key in terms of growing employees in preparation for key positions however, we need to also address the issue of, what next after training? Muhoho (2014) did a study on challenges that face succession planning in organizations in Tanzania: The case of public and private work organizations based in Dar-es-salaam region. The findings revealed that some of the challenges included ineffective business practices, company lacking a vision that is effective, inactive periodical succession plan being among the challenges that face succession planning in work organizations in Tanzania. This study only points out the challenges with inconclusive solutions hence the importance to delve further to try and diagnose the succession planning problem and come up with viable solutions.

This study considers a different context which is the hotel industry in Kenya where minimal research has been done on succession planning. This study aims at filling the research gaps by attempting to answer the question, what are the challenges faced in succession planning at the five star hotels in Kenya?

2. Literature Review
Theoretical Foundation

MacGregor (1978) developed the Transformational Leadership Theory. The theory discusses about positive change that makes followers of a particular leader act in ways that are beneficial to the whole group as well as the followers, this is a result of leadership that brings about this change. The theory explains some fundamental ways in which leaders influence their followers and insists on creation of meaningful work (Purvanova, Bono & Dzieweczynski, 2006). It explains leadership as a process through which people in authority engage with others and can to create connections that result in an increase in motivation and morale by followers. As a result, these leaders provide personalized consideration to the needs for growth and development of their followers (Bass, 1985). This theory fits into succession planning in this way, while considering an individual for succession plan, a transformational leader would be best fit because their work would result in employees that are more engaged and devoted and less self-concerned as well as in employees who perform beyond expectations (Purvanova, Bono & Dzieweczynski, 2006).

Fiedler (1960) developed the Contingency Theory. He states that effectiveness of styles of leadership varies depending on different situations. This theory asserts that managers should put into consideration all aspects affecting a situation before making a decision on the same situation.

In relation to succession planning, the decision on who to identify as a successor should be informed by assessing the needs of that position and the candidates adaptability. Gareth (2007) talks about careful management so as to balance and satisfy internal needs and also adapt to the environmental circumstances. Organization by an individual relies on the environment to which one must relate (Scott, 1981). It now becomes easy to assess a candidate identified for succession planning. The way in which the candidate handles different situations and their level of adaptability, it becomes easier to make a choice on who best fits that position. It can be concluded that there is no single approach in doing things, different situations call for different approaches to handle, manage, and solve the arising issue concerned.

Trait theory was developed by Allport (1936). This personality approach focuses on individual differences. The combination of varying traits form a personality tailored to every individual. The theory focuses on identification and measuring individual personality characteristics. Cardinal traits according to Allport are dominant and bring out an individual's behavior whereas central traits are found in every individual while secondary traits only appear in particular circumstances. This theory suggests that personality determines one's greatness and efficiency in a leadership position. This insinuates that leaders are born not groomed leaving one's traits to be their greatest predictor of successful leadership (Holdford, 2003). Personality traits cannot be an independent way of selecting a successor because their prediction value is very little; other factors should be put into consideration other than one's personal traits such, factors like skills and environment.

Succession Planning
Succession planning is an approach that is systematic. It helps build a talent pool for leadership to ensure continuity in the same, it also helps develop an organization's successors whose skills fit the organization and strengths that are merged, it also helps identify candidates for different positions. The return on investment is greater when resources are concentrated well (Zargar, 2013). Fayol introduced succession planning and he believed that if needs of succession planning were ignored, transition for organizations would be affected (Rothwell, 1994). It paves the way for any sudden loss of an individual in an organization. It ensures continuity in culture and retention of key skills in organizations (Blaskey, 2002). Succession planning is a critical component for HR planning. All critical and key positions ought to be identified and future succession plans put into place to avoid loss of key talent and experience. Succession planning should not only focus on senior management positions but all positions that would be difficult to replace (Howe, 2004).

Succession planning enables alignment of talent in the organization vis-a-vis the needs of the organization; it also boosts morale of the identified successors. It is important for key people occupying these positions to pass down their knowledge and wisdom to the identified successors. It helps in creation of a healthy work environment (Zargar, 2013).Organizations ensure that employees with right skills are employed and their talents developed to ensure in case of vacancies, key positions are filled through proper succession planning. Since the late 1990s, the awareness of the need for formalized strategic planning of workforce at all levels has been emphasized to HR professionals and decision makers. Succession planning helps in planning for the required number of quality and qualified managers with the right and special skills required to fill in key positions in case of loss through retirement death, promotions or even terminal illness (Sambrook, 2005).

There are various degrees of complexities that each company's plan will differ in order to reduce the transition impact. All succession plans are unique and no single succession plan is similar to

another (Hadelman, 2005). All roles in any organization, especially key roles need to be planned for to avoid any position gaps in the future. Employees will always leave organizations but succession plans will ensure thatgaps are filled with the help of an effective succession planning process (Heathfield, 2016).

Challenges of Succession Planning

Challenges of succession planning as highlighted in this chapter are: Size of the organization & lack of financial resources, lack of adequate mentoring & training, hesitance on grooming successors, unprofessionalism, the challenge of deciding who to promote and the challenge of biasedness while selecting a successor. These challenges have been discussed as follows;

Size of the Organization and Lack of Financial Resources

Size of the organization can be a hindrance in succession planning especially in small firms since they have few positions and may lack the ability to offer advancement opportunities. These employees that have potential lack the opportunity for career growth with the same companies and at times forced to move to larger organizations. The talent pool from the organization to fill these positions may be too limited also to have a successful succession plan. Employees especially those with high potential tend to leave for better paying organizations due to lack of enough financial resources in their current employment (Axelrod, 2010).

Some organizations depend on funding from projects and this reflects on their manning thus having few core members of staff translating to few core positions**.** At times during short term contracts and projects**,** the staff taken work and short term contracts and fail to be include in the firm's talent pool even though they possess talent and unique skills (Zwick,1999).

Lack of Adequate Mentoring and Training

Lack of adequate training and development leads to an employee that is unprepared for a promotion and this leads to succession planning gaps (Howe, 2004). In an organization where promotions are not done in a timely and orderly manner leaves employees in distraught with no understanding of what succession planning is about (Robinson, 2004).

Lack of continuously developing talent in the organization inhibits a company from growing future leaders. This brings about a gap in succession planning due to lack of required skills to tackle the more senior positions. It is advised that companies need to identify high potential candidates and groom them for continuity of the business and easy succession. Most family businesses neglect provision of proper education and formal training to the possible successors identified within the family. Incompetent successors are as a result of their ignorance to the skill of training successors from an early stage whilst providing the relevant training required (Zwick,1999).

Hesitance on grooming successors

Ankita (2012) states that emotional involvement from members of the family make it difficult for succession planning in family businesses. They never want to discuss succession planning even though they know that owner of the business will one day die. Thus, the issue of succession planning is often avoided. Most family businesses have a very unprofessional way of handling succession planning (Luhn, 1996). Most family firms end up not doing succession planning or whenever done, it is done in confidentiality and most times leads to wrong decisions (Ankita, 2012).

The thought of replacing managers who have been in a position for long is usuaaly difficult. There are also managers who never want to leave their positions and want to remain at their jobs. Other leaders concentrate so much on retaining their jobs and forget to focus on what matters (Conger & Nadler, 2004). Implementation of a strategic succession planning process encounters barriers that once identified will bring out the importance of human resources and developing trainings in line with the training needs to create an easier platform to implement the strategic plan of the organization (Rothwell, 2005).

Unprofessionalism

Most family businesses have an unprofessional approach in conducting succession planning. Some family businesses ignore succession planning and fail to factor it as an integral part of HR management. For those that practice succession planning, they tend to appoint a person to that role without consultation or any set succession planning practices. Most of it is a result of a gut-feeling (Manjkutty, 2011).

Deep down, everyone worries about retirement, or redundancy. The importance of succession planning is at times undermined by the fear of discussing about moving on slowing down the strategic process. Some of the people in senior positions view the process of succession planning as a reminder of their possible exit, this is due to lack of adequate training on the importance of succession planning (Jackson, 2004).

Deciding who to promote

Being very good at one thing is not an automatic assurance that someone has the required skills and talents to take up a more senior position in an organization. There are employees who tend to be comfortable in their positions and would not want a promotion. Including them in the succession plan would be a mistake since they lack the drive, ambition or motivation for a more senior role. The fear of being unable to handle the pressure of more responsibility also makes them shy away from moving up the ladder (Richardson, 2006).

Loyalty and hard work could also put pressure on the human resources personnel and they are forced to give a promotion a. Promotions should not be treated as rewards; the decision on who to select should be based on which candidate is likely to perform best if given that opportunity. Different levels in an organization have different challenges and whenever an individual succeeds in one level, it is no guarantee that they will pass in the next position as lower levels have less challenges, selection should be done on the qualitative differences (Glen, 2017).

Biased selection

Familiarity makes people comfortable and managers are no exception to this. It is very easy for males to have a bias for males and the reverse is true. In a group where all managers are male, they will tend to have a bias in selection of a male making it difficult for a woman to get selected. This is not a bias out of intentional discrimination but because of the comfort of familiarity (Glen, 2017). When selecting people required for different levels in an organization, the person specifications of the positions should be very clear and an objective comparison done against individuals to ensure a best fit (Stinchcomb, 2010). Stinchcomb further says that trying to fit an individual to a stereotype can affect the process and it is no longer a skill based process hence the importance of identifying required successor characteristics that will best suit the job.

3. Research Methodology

The research design used was a case study research design. The study focused on one of the leading five star hotel chains in Kenya. An interview guide was used as the data collection tool. Data was collected from the target group which consisted of 18 senior managers. The senior management comprised of directors, general managers and head office executives who are in charge of various operational functions across the hotel chain. Quantitative data mainly on the respondents' characteristics was analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages and content analysis was used to analyze the data which was qualitative in nature.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The target respondents were the senior management of the five star chain of Hotels and general managers of the various units. The managers that responded were 15 out of the expected 18. This translated to 83.3% response rate. The general information about the respondents included their gender, age, highest academic qualifications and the period worked for the company.

4.1 Gender of Respondents

Figure 4.1 shows the gender of respondents. They were 3 Female respondents and 12 male respondents.

Figure 4.1: Gender of Respondents
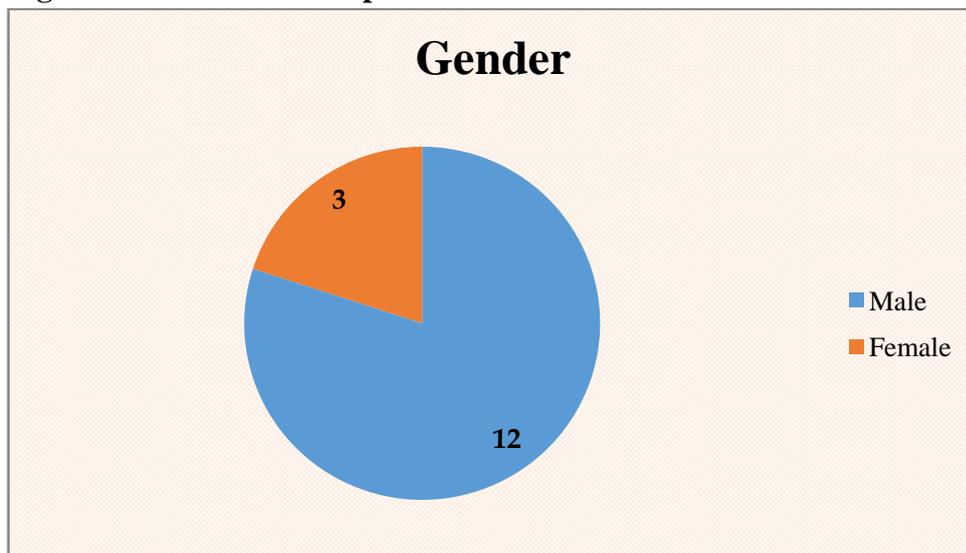
4.2 Highest Academic Qualifications

The researcher also sought to find out the highest education level of the respondents. Their education levels ranged from bachelor's to master's degree with 6 having masters and 9 having bachelor's degree. Figure 4.2 demonstrates the same.
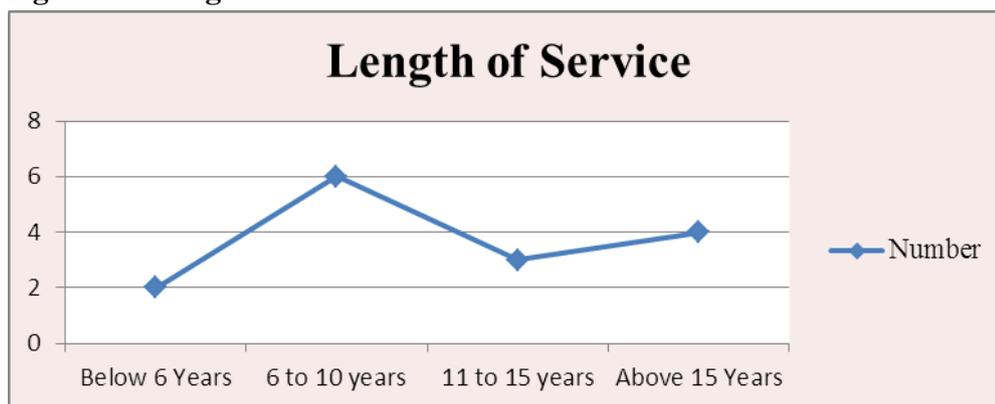
Figure 4.2: Highest Academic Qualification

## 4.3 Length of Service in the Organization

Majority of respondents worked with the organization for over 6 years hence understood the system better. The same is represented in Figure 4.3

Figure 4.3 Length of Service

4.4 Age Distribution

2 of the respondents were between 30-39 years, 7 were between 40-49 years and 6 were between 50-59 years. The same is presented in Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4: Age Distribution
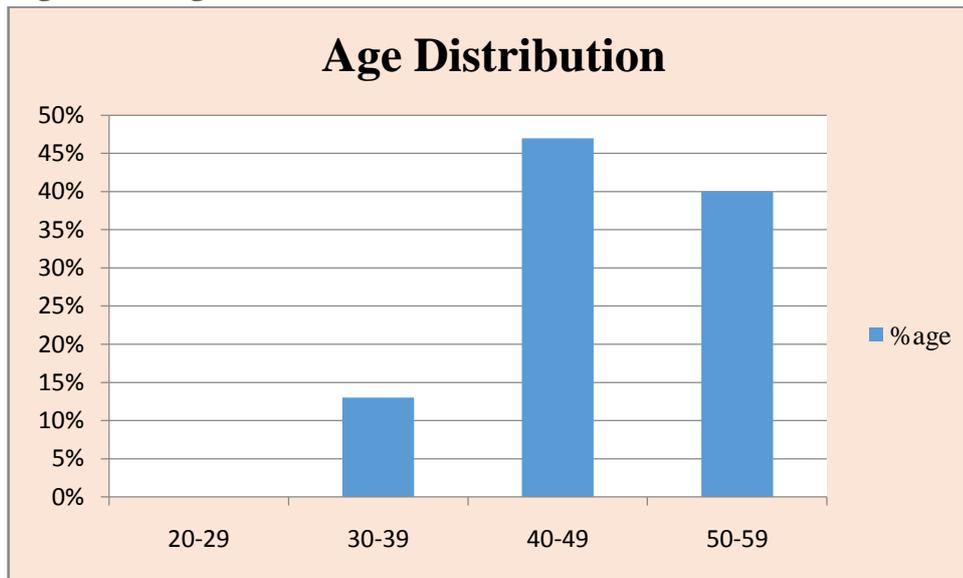
4.5 Succession Planning

This section discusses the views presented by the respondents on Succession Planning. It gives the researcher information of whether the respondents understood the concept of succession planning, its importance, their role in succession planning and the effects of succession planning. All participating respondents were aware of the process of succession planning. They all had an understanding of the process. The below excerpts were derived from the interview:

"Yes, it is a process that enables the hotel plan for future leaders and continuity of the business." (Lodge Manager, 48 years). "….it is not only about identification but also grooming and mentoring of employees who would best fit a senior role in the case of loss of the person in that position." (Group Sales Manager, 32 years). The respondents highlighted the process as a way of ensuring continuity in terms of human resources as well as improving performance. One of the respondents went ahead and explained how much succession planning increases motivation of the identified persons. "As the in charge of my department, it is my duty to identify key positions and suitable successors……my position has a successor whom I am grooming." (Reservation Manager, 39 years). The respondents were however not in sync about the period after which they review the succession plans. 3 managers admitted to have never reviewed theirs, 3 said they reviewed their succession plans annually, 7 said they did their reviews after 2 years and 1 reviewed theirs upon need and explained that was when asked by the directors to do so or whenever a key person from their department left.

4.6 Challenges in Succession Planning

The major objective of the study was to find out the challenges faced in succession planning at the chain of Hotels. The challenges that were identified were: size of the organization, financial resources, mentorship & training, hesitance in grooming successors, professionalism, and lack of involvement, micro-management and lack of seriousness.

Size of the Organization

"Size does not affect succession planning for any serious organization, if it was about size then this company should have the most effective succession planning." (General Manager, 58 years). "Our small size as a bush property makes us get neglected and succession planning is not given a lot of attention as our sister properties in the city." (Lodge Manager, 53 years). The respondents were of different opinions with the lodge managers agreeing more to size of the organization being a factor affecting succession planning. Their counterparts in the city units however, felt different and objected the view that size of an organization affects succession planning.

Financial Resources

"…when business was good, we had bigger budgets and we had an allocation for training and developing high potential associates, at the moment we try our best to have impactful programs but they are not as effective." (Group Training Manager, 40 years). "Money is not the answer to our problems but it helps a big deal, enough finances ensure proper allocation of resources towards succession planning." (Group Internal Auditor, 45). The 15 respondents mentioned lack of financial resources allocated for succession planning being a major contributor towards a flawed process. It was evident that finances help improve the process of succession planning.

Mentorship and Training

Mentorship was an issue of concern raised in different capacities by 9 respondents. Their major concern was lack of a well laid out system of mentoring identified successors. A system was in place but with no guidelines on how well to manage and mentor successors. Similarly, a generic training module had been developed but it did not fit every candidate's needs thus a need for tailor-made trainings based on each person's needs.

Hesitance in Grooming Successors

"…sadly, some of the managers we have are too selfish to groom people working below them." (Director of Operations, 54 years). "You ask HODs to identify successors in their departments but they take it as a threat to their jobs," (General Manager, 47 years). "We fail to groom our people due to laziness." (Director of Food & Beverage, 51 years). These statements are a depiction of the level of laxity among senior people in grooming successors. Some fail to do it due to the fear of losing their jobs to their successors whereas others are just lazy to take the challenge of grooming them.

Professionalism

Some of the respondents mentioned that how the process of succession planning was conducted failed to meet professional standards. It was evident that the processed was marred with favoritism where managers selected candidates they liked rather than the right successors. There was also the issue of lack of proper knowledge in the process of selection of successors, promotions as well as managing succession planning. Respondents advocated for serious training to all people in senior positions to enlighten them on how to best carry out succession planning. They also insisted that the HR office should be fully involved to ensure 100% professionalism to ensure credibility and success in succession planning. This was evident when uttered by the Purchasing manager (56), "…involvement of the HR team from the beginning would help a lot of us when going through the

process…then I would be a successful leader, a 'professional succession planning champion'." "Professionalism? Not with the current way of doing things." (Group Marketing Manager, 40).

Lack of Involvement

A general concern of lack of involvement was raised. This majorly affected people in the units not in Nairobi. The issue was that most of the succession plans are done in the head office and decisions made from head office. It created a big gap in terms of decision making since the people who are best placed to give recommendations on successors and how to best mentor them are their direct managers who in this case are hardly consulted. Lack of involvement of all relevant parties creates a skill gap as well as demotivate other candidates who would also fit the gap. This creates a loophole in the selection of candidates process and further undermines the line managers who work directly with the successors.

Micromanagement

The study also revealed that there was micromanagement which highly affected the succession planning process. This challenge faced successors who had been identified for development. The challenge was explained to show that successors were not given a chance to express themselves and most of their ideas were not listened to. The respondents discussed how managers select successors but instead of mentoring them, give instructions and constantly want to know what the successors are doing and only want things done their way. This has previously led to frustrations of the successors who end up leaving the organization. One of the respondents, the eldest, pointed out the importance of teaching someone how to do something while explaining the reason as to why it is done in a particular manner. They further highlighted why it Is important to give juniors a chance to express their views and also have a buy in of their ideas as a way of retaining them and making them feel appreciated.

Lack of Seriousness

"When I was still new, HR asked me for my department's succession plan, all they sent me was a template which I filled names…..I hardly even knew my team….Head office also brings their own people disregarding what we have done as a unit so we do not push as much." (Lodge Manager, 48 years). "…..the last time I did mine was 6 years ago; I have not changed it since then." (Group Marketing Manager, 40 years). According to this study, the issue of lack of seriousness was evident. Respondents discussed on how the process of succession planning is done because it is expected of managers to do so. Some respondents attested to doing it since it is a deliverable in their balance score card. Other respondents admitted to not doing it at all since they viewed it as a HR process and others said it was explicit to the head office and it was not in their place to follow up with the same.

4.7 Responses on Implementation of Succession Planning

The respondents had successors already identified for their positions but the question of whether they follow up on them in terms of mentorship was unclear since the process seemed to be done as a formality. The issue of having a successor identified while one was still in office was welcomed by different sentiments. There were respondents who believed it was a good thing since the successor would get an opportunity to learn more but others felt like it was a way of undermining a

manager making them feel like they are not performing enough, others felt like it was a threat to them and one respondent mentioned that it was a way of reminding someone that they should be prepared for exit.

Most respondents advocated for trainings for young people and high potentials to give the organization an easy time in identifying successors as well as have mentorship programs for the identified successors. The respondents gave varying responses on what to change in the process: Most of the managers (General & Lodge Managers) said they would completely keep the process as a unit process to avoid head office interruptions; one respondent insisted on regular reviews of the plans as well as full involvement of the HR teams in liaison with heads of departments; there was also a view on regularly having meetings with the identified successors to keep them in check and more motivated; the training manager advocated for a change in the policy and involvement with departmental heads to be able to develop trainings that are specific to individual needs rather than one generic training for all.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Succession planning is an important aspect in human resource development that ensures continuity of an organization. The practice of succession planning is well understood but it is not put into practice as should be. There are many challenges facing the process at the leading chain of Hotels in Kenya, some of which are simple challenges that can be overcome by line managers and all people in authority. The challenges identified from the study were: size of the organization; constraint in financial resources; lack of adequately mentoring and training successors; hesitance in grooming of successors; lack of professionalism in the process; lack of involvement of some of the stakeholders and relevant parties; micromanagement of high potential candidates and a lack of seriousness in running the process of succession planning.

The respondents said that the head office of the hotel chain seems to be part of the problem because it interferes with the units' plans in succession planning and would be best if they would oversee the process rather than run it. Attitude towards the process is also a challenge and the people in charge of the process in the various sections and departments ought to change their perceptions towards the process. For the process to be flawless, the organization needs to look into the identified loopholes.

Succession planning is very vital to any organization's growth and success. From the findings of the study, the researchers recommend clear guidelines in identification of potential successors and high potential employees. This way, identified candidates are selected through a credible process. In addition to identification, the employees need to continuously get trained and mentored, this way there are no skill gaps especially when there is sudden loss of a person holding a key position. There is also need to ensure high potential employees are looked after in terms of better pay as well as how they are engaged, organizations need to look into what extra responsibilities the successors can be given to avoid boredom and stagnation which easily gives them a reason to exit. Their remuneration should be benchmarked with other organizations; this will assist in ensuring that they do not leave for competitors who pay better.

Continual reviewing of succession plans will also be ideal for the organization; it would help the hotel chain to be in touch with changes that affect positions as well as successors. Another key consideration is full involvement of all relevant parties, in the hotel chain. This should be from the head office executives all the way down to line managers in different units. Line managers who work directly with employees are better placed to make decisions on best successors. Finally, disregarding successors for certain positions because of their age should be discouraged. Where an organization feels that a successor is too young for a position, the organization should take responsibility of growing the identified candidate into that position as they continue maturing with time.

The researchers suggest that a further study on challenges facing succession planning in other industries can be carried out in order to identify any common challenges across the industries as well as to identify any unique challenges faced in specific industries.

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