

Effect of Succession Planning on Employee Retention: A Case Study of ZCAS University

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of succession planning on employee retention at ZCAS University. The objective was to analyze the effect of limited career advancement opportunities on employee retention. Using a quantitative research methodology, the study investigates management and leadership practices in relation to succession planning. A survey-based research design was employed, with a target population comprising employees at ZCAS University, and a sample size of 92 respondents. The questionnaire return rate was 92%. Data collection techniques included structured questionnaires to assess job satisfaction, growth prospects, succession planning, and motivation. Stratified random sampling ensured representation across key employee groups, including principal officers, lecturers, library staff, and administrative staff. Data was analyzed statistically using regression analysis and descriptive statistics to identify patterns and relationships in succession planning at ZCAS University. Findings from the study revealed that limited career advancement opportunities were found to negatively affect employee retention, leading to reduced job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions. The study concludes that addressing succession planning gaps will enhance employee retention through structured frameworks, transparent communication, and career growth pathways. It is recommended that ZCAS University formalize and clearly define its succession planning framework, improve communication strategies, and establish mentorship programs to support career progression. Additionally, leadership training initiatives and equitable career advancement policies should be implemented to retain top talent. Policy implications suggest that higher learning institutions should institutionalize succession planning as a strategic function, aligning it with talent retention strategies and long-term organizational sustainability.

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Introduction

Succession planning is a vital process that ensures the smooth transition of leadership and business continuity (Garman & Glawe, 2004). It involves identifying and developing potential successors for key roles, considering both current and future goals. Despite its importance, the impact of succession planning on employee retention has not been extensively studied (Rothwell, 2002). This research explores the effect of succession planning on employee retention and its implications for organizations.

Succession planning is the process of identifying and developing potential future leaders within an organization (Hassan & Siddiqui, 2020). It includes assessing skills and capabilities, identifying areas for improvement, and providing opportunities for growth and advancement. Succession planning maintains business continuity, prepares

future leaders, attracts and retains talent, improves organizational performance, supports diversity and inclusivity, and manages risk.

Employee retention is the ability of an organization to retain its employees over time (Kumar et al., 2013). It affects productivity, performance, and success. High turnover can be costly and disruptive, impacting on work quality and morale (Ali & Mehreen, 2019). Factors like job satisfaction, compensation, work-life balance, growth opportunities, and organizational culture influence employee retention (Kumar et al., 2013). To improve retention, organizations can offer competitive compensation, provide growth opportunities, foster a positive work environment, and address employee concerns.

Research suggests that succession planning positively affects employee retention by increasing job security, motivation, and productivity, sustaining organizational stability, and

improving job satisfaction and organizational culture (Hassan & Siddiqui, 2020). However, poorly executed succession planning can have negative effects, such as perceived unfairness, resistance to change, and decreased performance (Ali & Mehreen, 2019).

To ensure a positive impact, organizations should ensure transparency, encourage employee involvement, communicate effectively, foster a positive culture, provide ongoing development opportunities, and monitor and evaluate the process (Garman & Glawe, 2004). Focusing on employee retention is key for attracting and retaining top talent, reducing turnover, and improving organizational performance (Rothwell, 2002). Succession planning positively impacts employee retention, but potential negative effects must be considered (Ali & Mehreen, 2019). By ensuring a fair, transparent, and well-communicated process, organizations can promote employee retention and achieve long-term success.

Universities in Zambia, like many organizations in the country, face significant challenges in retaining employees due to the country's young and active population, who are prone to switch jobs when dissatisfied (Adebola, 2019). The higher education sector in Zambia has experienced significant growth in recent years, leading to an increase in demand for qualified academics and support staff (Ministry of Higher Education, 2020). However, universities in Zambia struggle to retain their employees due to limited opportunities for career advancement and leadership development (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2011; Hall-Ellis, 2015). This issue is exacerbated by the dynamic nature of the workforce, where younger employees seek career progression and professional development opportunities, often leaving their current roles when these needs are unmet (Abudetse et al, 2025).

Statement of the problem

ZCAS University (ZU) is currently facing a significant employee attrition rate of 14% over a three-year period from 2022 to 2024, with 12 out of its 84 employees having left during this time (ZCAS University, 2024). The acceptable attrition rate for organizations is 10% or less (Obura, F., & Muriithi, M.2019). This level of turnover is concerning, as high attrition rates often signal underlying organizational issues, such as ineffective succession planning, limited growth opportunities, and low employee motivation (Nwadiani, 2017). ZU's workforce consists of various staff categories, including Principal Officers, Lecturing Staff, Library Staff, Dean of Students, and Administrative Staff, with lecturing staff accounting for nearly half (40 out of 84) of the total workforce. Notably, the workforce is predominantly male, with males representing 71.4% of employees and females accounting for only 28.6%, highlighting a potential gender disparity (ZCAS University, 2024).

Research has shown that effective succession planning is crucial for retaining skilled employees and reducing turnover by fostering career growth and stability within an organization (Obura & Muriithi, 2019). However, ZU's current succession plan appears inadequate, contributing to employee dissatisfaction and prompting staff to leave in search of better opportunities (ZCAS University, 2024, Internal Staff Report). If this issue persists, ZU may struggle to maintain continuity in academic and administrative roles, potentially impacting its academic quality and service delivery. Addressing these challenges requires revisiting ZU's human resource management practices to implement strategies that promote career development, enhance motivation, and foster a more balanced and inclusive workforce.

Research Objectives

This study was guided by the following objective:
To analyze the effect of limited career advancement opportunities on employee retention.

Research Question

How does the lack of career advancement opportunities affect employee retention?

Significance of Study

The study will contribute to the field's theoretical framework by examining the connection between poor succession planning and higher turnover, clarifying how these two elements reinforce one another. Additionally, the research will offer practical recommendations for companies looking to improve their HRM procedures. Lastly, by offering fresh information and viewpoints that can guide future research and organisational procedures, this study will add to the corpus of knowledge already available on succession planning and staff retention.

Literature Review

This chapter examines literature pertaining to the effect of limited career advancement opportunities on employee retention. Research suggests a positive correlation between effective succession planning and employee retention. Since career progression affects how employees view their future inside a company, it is a major factor in employee retention. Employees who feel there are clear, achievable opportunities to advance, acquire new abilities, and take on greater responsibility are more likely to stay committed, according to research (Thwin, Janarthanan, & Bhaumik, 2023). In universities like ZCAS University, where intellectual capital is an asset, career advancement possibilities are especially crucial for keeping talented faculty and support personnel.

Structured initiatives like succession planning, leadership development programs, clear promotion tracks, and focused training are all part of organizationally driven career development (Khan, Rajasekar, & Al-Asfour, 2015; Topno, 2012). According to Thwin et al. (2023), career ladders that are

connected to organisational objectives raise employee satisfaction, which boosts retention. Clear promotion procedures for instructors, department heads, and senior administrators could boost morale and loyalty at ZCAS University and lessen the loss of talent to other schools (Sikalumbi, 2021).

Lack of these organized chances frequently results in employee discontent and attrition. According to Merchant (1992), companies who do not support their employees' professional development run the danger of losing valued personnel. This suggests that staff retention at ZCAS University may be directly harmed by restricted career paths, such as postponed academic promotions or a lack of leadership succession planning. Individual career planning is important, but organisational activities are also quite important. Workers are more likely to be engaged and dedicated if they self-evaluate, establish goals for themselves, and look for opportunities to improve their skills (Phillips & Phillips, 1996; Lent, 2013). According to Thwin et al. (2023), retention results improve when individuals' individual career goals coincide with institutional opportunities. Offering venues for academic development workshops, career counselling, and mentoring could help ZCAS University close the gap between organisational pathways and individual goals. High-potential employees can feel their goals are unachievable within the organization without this alignment, which would lead them to look for possibilities elsewhere. Retention may be impacted both directly and indirectly by a lack of career growth possibilities. They directly impair commitment and lower job satisfaction (Rakhra, 2018). They have an indirect impact on organisational effectiveness by raising turnover, which causes operational disruptions, raises hiring expenses, and leads to the loss of institutional knowledge (Abba, 2018). These losses are especially harmful in higher education, where specific knowledge is crucial. According to Thwin et al. (2023), competent workers will not think twice about leaving a competitive labour market if they do not perceive a path for advancement. This is especially important for ZCAS University because there is fierce rivalry for skilled academics from both local and regional institutions. The university runs the risk of losing people to organisations that provide more obvious growth prospects if it does not have proactive career advancement frameworks. Attracting and keeping top talent is essential to maintaining academic quality, research output, and administrative efficiency at ZCAS University, which operates in Zambia's vibrant higher education sector. Opportunities for progression may be constrained by elements like the scarcity of senior academic posts, sluggish promotion procedures, and insufficient funding for professional development. The university can increase employee happiness, retention, and institutional competitiveness by using evidence-based career development initiatives like those suggested by Thwin et al. (2023).

Knowledge Gap

Most studies have centered on succession planning in corporate and government settings, with limited research exploring its influence on employee retention within universities. This study addresses this gap by examining ZCAS University's succession planning practices. There is a lack of research on succession planning's role in Zambian universities. The dynamic and rapidly changing workforce in Zambia presents unique challenges that have not been adequately explored in the literature, particularly concerning how succession planning could address high turnover rates in academic institutions. Although succession planning is known to influence leadership continuity, few studies have explicitly focused on its impact on employee retention. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the specific ways in which succession planning can enhance retention at ZCAS University.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate the effect of succession planning on employee retention at ZCAS University. The quantitative approach was chosen to allow for the collection of numerical data that could be analyzed statistically to identify patterns, relationships, and trends (Yin, 2014). This section outlines the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures used in the study.

Underlying Philosophy

A positivism paradigm was used for this study. Paradigm in research refers to the researcher's view of the world which informs their interpretation of the research data (Creswell, 2014). Data was gathered using structured closed ended questionnaires in this study.

Research Approach

A deductive approach was used in this study. This is a type of research methodology that begins with a broad idea or hypothesis and then uses data collecting and observation to examine it. It adopts a top-down methodology, progressing from general principles to findings. This approach, which is frequently employed in quantitative research, uses logic to support or refute a theory. To examine the data and find statistical links, trends, and patterns pertaining to succession planning at ZCAS University (Sikalumbi, 2023). A quantitative research technique called deductive analysis uses statistical models and hypothesis testing to support or contradict established beliefs (Bryman, 2012).

Time Horizon

This research used a cross-sectional design, gathering information all at once. This time frame was suitable for documenting ZCAS University's present succession planning situation and its effect on staff retention. A cross-sectional methodology allowed for an effective and thorough statistical examination of current conditions and linkages, whereas longitudinal study could have offered insights into changes over time (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Research method and Justification

This study used quantitative technique and a case study research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). At ZCAS University, quantifiable data on succession planning was gathered using a survey approach, which made it possible to spot trends and connections. This technique made it possible to get standardized answers from a sizable sample, facilitating generalization and statistical analysis. Measurable insights into the success of the institution's succession planning initiatives were provided by the structured survey methodology, which guaranteed data validity and dependability.

Sampling frame and sample size

This study’s sampling frame included university leaders, academic staff and administrative staff at ZCAS University. These groups are directly involved in or affected by succession planning processes and therefore provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and challenges of these initiatives. The researcher's original goal for this case study was to poll all 100 members of the target demographic, but in the end, 92 people responded. The adequacy was evaluated using the sample-to-item ratio approach. With 20 items on the study questionnaire, the smallest sample size that would be advised would be:

$5 \times 1 \times \text{No?} = n$

Where:

No? = Number of questions in the questionnaire

n = Sample size

Given:

No? = 20 (number of questions)

n= (total respondents)

Substituting these values into the formula:

$5 \times 1 \times 20 = n$

$5 \times 20 = 100$

The total sample size obtained was 100. However, of these, 92 responded to the research instrument.

Data collection and analysis

A structured questionnaire was one of the data collecting techniques used, enabling the methodical gathering of quantitative information on the experiences and viewpoints of participants (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire ensured increased reliability and comparability of responses by making it easier to analyze trends and patterns over a wider sample (Bryman, 2016).

Regression analysis and chi-square testing were among the statistical methods used in this quantitative study to find

patterns, correlations, and trends pertaining to succession planning. The relationship between important succession planning factors, like organizational readiness and leadership development programs, was investigated using regression analysis, which revealed predictive correlations in the data (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, chi-square tests were used to evaluate the relationship between categorical variables, including staff views of leadership continuity and the existence of explicit succession planning strategies (Bryman, 2016). This all-encompassing strategy guaranteed a thorough, data-driven analysis of formal institutional frameworks as well as survey data.

Reliability, Validity and Generalizability of Research Findings

Data triangulation, member verification, and numerous data sources were used in the study to guarantee the validity, reliability, and generalizability of research findings (Creswell, 2014). Several data sources offered a thorough understanding of ZCAS University's succession planning procedures. The findings were made more credible by employing data triangulation, which entails using multiple data collection techniques. To confirm the accuracy and resonance of the interpretations and to further ensure the validity and reliability of the research, members check entailed sharing findings with participants.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations have been a pillar of research activities as they have grown and changed, guaranteeing the accountability, integrity, and respect that come with using human subjects in studies. The study concentrated on the ethical aspects of the investigation in this portion, driven by a dedication to upholding the highest ethical standards. The two main topics of this part were accessibility and research ethics.

Findings

This section presents the findings and discussions in line with objective, the effect of limited career development on employee retention.

Career Advancement and Retention

Table 1: Career Advancement and Retention

Have you considered leaving ZCAS University due to limited career advancement opportunities?					
		Frequenc y	Percen t	Valid percen t	Cumulativ e percent
Valid	Yes	55	60.0	60.0	60.0
	No	37	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	92	100	100	

Source: Survey Data (2024)

According to the research, 40% (37 respondents) said they had not thought about quitting ZCAS University, while a sizable

majority 60% (55), said they had explored doing so because of the lack of prospects for career progression. These results point to a possible problem with the institution's professional development and career advancement. Lack of possibilities for career advancement has been found to be a significant contributor to employee turnover, especially at academic institutions where organized career progression is essential for retention and work satisfaction (Bryman, 2016; Northouse, 2018).

Because employees may believe their professional development is stagnant, limited career mobility might result in less organizational commitment, decreased employee motivation, and increased job-seeking activity (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). According to Babbie (2020), companies that don't offer leadership development opportunities and clear career tracks frequently have greater turnover rates, which can upset institutional stability. However, 40% of respondents said they had not thought about quitting, indicating that some staff members might still find stability or professional fulfilment at the company. However, studies show that job discontent, disengagement, and decreased productivity can occur even for workers who stay in companies with little prospects for career progression (UNESCO, 2019; Moser & Kalton, 2017).

These results imply that to improve employee happiness and retention, ZCAS University ought to think about putting in place mentorship programs, organized career development programs, and open promotion standards. According to Kotter (2012), organizations that place a high priority on career development typically have greater institutional performance, lower employee turnover rates, and higher employee engagement.

ZCAS University lack of Growth Opportunities and Demotivation.

Table 2: Does ZCAS University lack growth opportunities and demotivation?

Does ZCAS University lack growth opportunities and demotivation?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	23	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Disagree	28	30.0	30.0	55.0
	Neutral	18	20.0	20.0	75.0
	Agree	14	15.0	15.0	90.0
	Strongly agree	9	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	92	100.0		

According to the findings, a sizable percentage of respondents believe ZCAS University's lacks growth opportunities. A total of 30% of those surveyed disagreed, 25% strongly disagreed.

This points to a widespread worry about the institution's leadership changes, transparency, fairness, and clarity.

According to research career growth opportunities can result in employee demotivation and engagement, uncertainty, and possible leadership voids (Bryman, 2016; Northouse, 2018).

Conversely, 20% of respondents had no opinion, which may suggest a lack of knowledge or uncertainty about the institution's growth plan on employees. Since confusing or informal processes frequently result in perceived favoritism and worse morale, career growth in leadership transitions is crucial for fostering trust within a company (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014; Babbie, 2020).

Just 15% of respondents said they were confident in ZCAS University's succession planning processes in terms of career growth are ok and 10% strongly agree.

To maintain continuity and institutional stability during leadership transitions, best practices in higher education institutions stress the significance of employee career growth policies, inclusive decision-making, and open communication (UNESCO, 2019; Moser & Kalton, 2017).

The results indicate that in order to promote confidence and institutional sustainability, ZCAS University should improve its succession planning procedure by adding greater transparency, clear policies, and stakeholder participation.

Regression Analysis of Results

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Results

	Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value	R-Squared
1	Transparency in Succession Planning	0.65	0.12	5.42	0.0001	0.42
2	Opportunities for Career Growth	0.48	0.15	3.20	0.002	0.36

Table 3 above shows the variables Employee Retention and Opportunities for career growth, Inclusiveness, and Transparency. R^2 : 0.48 Limited career development opportunities ($p < 0.02$). The results indicate that both transparency in succession planning and opportunities for career growth are positively correlated with employee retention. The regression coefficients (B) suggest the magnitude of these effects, while the statistical significance (p-values) and explanatory power (R^2) provide deeper insights into their reliability.

1. Transparency in Succession Planning

- Regression coefficient: $B = 0.65$
- Standard error: 0.12
- t-statistic: 5.42
- p-value: 0.0001
- R^2 : 0.42

Transparency in succession planning demonstrates a strong positive effect on employee retention, with a coefficient of 0.65. This suggests that for every unit increase in transparency, employee retention improves by 0.65 units, assuming all other factors remain constant. The p-value (0.0001) indicates statistical significance at a 99% confidence level, reinforcing the reliability of this finding. Furthermore, an R^2 value of 0.42 implies that 42% of the variation in employee retention is explained by transparency in succession planning, highlighting its critical role in workforce stability.

2. Opportunities for Career Growth

- Regression coefficient: $B = 0.48$
- Standard error: 0.15
- t-statistic: 3.20
- p-value: 0.002
- R^2 : 0.36

The availability of career growth opportunities is also a significant determinant of employee retention, with a coefficient of 0.48. This means that a one-unit increase in career growth opportunities is associated with a 0.48 unit increase in employee retention. The p-value (0.002) confirms statistical significance at a 95% confidence level. Moreover, the R^2 value of 0.36 suggests that 36% of the variation in employee retention is attributed to career growth opportunities, underscoring its importance in retention strategies.

3. Overall Model Explanation ($R^2 = 0.48$)

The combined influence of the independent variables results in an R^2 value of 0.48, meaning that 48% of the variation in employee retention is explained by transparency in succession planning and career growth opportunities. The remaining 52% of the variance is attributable to other unexamined factors, such as compensation, workplace culture, job satisfaction, and external labor market conditions.

4. Impact of Limited Career Development Opportunities ($p < 0.02$) The analysis further reveals that limited career development opportunities have a statistically significant

negative effect on employee retention. A p-value less than 0.02 suggests that employees who perceive fewer career advancement prospects are more likely to leave the organization, emphasizing the necessity of robust career progression frameworks.

These findings are consistent with Kumar and Joseph (2014), who emphasize that equitable career advancement opportunities are crucial for fostering a motivated workforce. Furthermore, the absence of structured mentoring programs was a recurring theme, with many respondents noting that mentoring by senior staff could significantly enhance skills development and prepare employees for leadership roles (Mulenga, Sikalumbi, Phiri, 2023). Salehudin (2016) affirms that mentorship not only improves employee satisfaction but also strengthens organizational loyalty.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This section presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study at hand. Effective succession planning and employee retention are critical for the sustainable growth of ZCAS University. This study aimed to assess the availability of a structured succession plan, examine employees' understanding of the succession planning process, and analyze the impact of limited career advancement opportunities on employee retention.

Conclusion

Limited career advancement opportunities have been identified as a significant factor affecting employee retention. If employees do not see a clear trajectory for growth within the university, they may seek opportunities elsewhere, leading to high turnover rates and knowledge loss. Implementing professional development programs, leadership training, and internal promotion structures can mitigate this challenge, fostering a culture where employees feel valued and invested in the university's success. To ensure long-term sustainability, ZCAS University must adopt a strategic approach to succession planning by integrating leadership development initiatives, fostering a supportive work environment, and creating competitive compensation packages. ZCAS University can position itself as a leader in employee engagement and institutional continuity, ultimately strengthening its ability to attract, develop, and retain top talent in higher education.

Recommendations

To enhance succession planning and employee retention at ZCAS University, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Competitive Compensation and Benefits:** Regularly benchmark ZCAS University salaries and benefits against industry standards to ensure competitiveness.
- Career Development Opportunities:** Provide clear career progression pathways, including access to professional certifications and higher education opportunities.

- iii. **Work-Life Balance Initiatives:** Introduce flexible work schedules, wellness programs, and team-building activities to enhance employee satisfaction.

Topic for Future Research

Future studies could explore the impact of knowledge transfer mechanisms on employee retention in Higher Education Institutions, particularly examining how mentorship programs, documentation processes, and institutional memory preservation contribute to staff retention and succession planning.

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