

SUCCESSION PLANNING ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: LESSONS DRAWN FROM TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANIES IN NAIROBI CITY COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The Kenyan telecommunication sector, has endured numerous challenges arising from stiff competition in its operation and service delivery, immense pressures from the state agencies, stringent policies and close monitoring, as well as interference with the kind of information passed coupled with infringement of data privacy. These challenges have negatively affected their performance with some such as Airtel experiencing reduced profit while Safaricom has experienced reduced market share and market capitalization in the last twenty-four months. These companies have also experienced high labour turnover and numerous restructurings. Therefore, there is need to attract, develop, and retain key employees for better succession planning and improved employee performance. The objective of the study was to determine the influence of succession planning on employee performance in telecommunication companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study adopted talent-based theory as the preferred theory. Explanatory research design was utilised in the study. The population comprised of 280 employees from the human resource, accounting and finance, sales and marketing, operations, information technology and research and development departments at Safaricom and Airtel. A sample of 165 respondents was selected

from this population using stratified random sampling technique. Primary data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Data was analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistics. Coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to determine the model's goodness of fit. Beta coefficients were used to determine variations in employee performance as a result of variations in talent attraction. F-Test was to ascertain the overall robustness of the analytical model. Significance of the variables was assessed through the p-values of the independent variable at 0.05 level of significance level. The study revealed that there were observable succession planning practices in telecommunication companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Results also showed that there was a strong positive and significant correlation between succession planning and employee performance (0.794 ; $p=0.000<0.05$). Further, regression analysis results showed that succession planning had a significant influence on employee performance ($\beta=0.411$; $p=0.000<0.05$). It was thus concluded that succession planning has a significant positive influence on employee performance. The study recommends that succession planning should be institutionalized as a core component of human resources management strategies.

Keywords: Succession Planning; Employee Performance; Telecommunication Companies

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Kenya's mobile telecommunications sector has seen remarkable growth. Over KES 300 billion comes from the mobile telecoms sector, and consumers may get an additional KES 100 billion in intangible advantages. In Kenya, it provides jobs for almost 250,000 people. Mobile network operators have been involved in public works projects, such as helping with the installation of power (Communications Authority, 2023). Extremely fast-paced and

competitive is the mobile telecommunications industry. Working conditions, particularly hours, are a source of stress for employees because of shift work and limited opportunities for advancement within the company. Along with this, there are other connected difficulties, such as talent management techniques, which might lead to their underperformance. The telecommunications business is very lucrative and ranks high among the most significant economic drivers. Telecommunications firms in today's fast-paced, competitive industry must improve their market performance by careful planning, management, and monitoring of their operations. Providing communication services to consumers and encouraging subscriber growth ultimately results in increased profitability and expansion for telecommunications firms (Buil et al., 2019).

There has been tremendous expansion in the Kenyan telecom market in recent years, and experts predict that trend will continue all the way up to 2025. The proliferation of mobile phones capable of using 3G, 4G, and 5G networks, together with the growing number of people living in metropolitan areas, is driving the sector forward. The increasing number of connected devices in the telecom industry, both wireless and wired, bodes well for the industry's future expansion throughout the projection period. Already, some 2G networks have gone dark, and by the end of 2025, it is projected that all of the main 2G/3G platforms will have gone dark. Most mobile connections will be upgraded to 5G by 2029. Official government statistics on broadband and wireline phone subscriptions for 2017 are now available; by 2025, mobile connections are projected to outnumber wireline connections by a wide margin, with hundreds of millions of fixed broadband connections compared to tens of millions of voice connections (Communications Authority, 2023).

Among the most prominent names in Kenya's telecom market are South African conglomerates MTN and Vodacom, as well as local powerhouses Telkom Kenya, Safaricom, and Airtel. Companies like Jamii Telecommunications, which provides data communications services, and The East African Marines Systems, which operates underwater cables, are also major participants (CA, 2022). When broken down by revenue, profit, and subscriber count, Safaricom dominates with an 80% share. Its other three main rivals have all posted losses in the last several years. Airtel has a 9% share of the market, while Telekom Kenya and Equitel each own 3% and 7%. Telecommunications businesses including MTN Access Kenya, Jamii, and Wananchi have entered the market as fibre internet service providers offering Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) calls and data via indirect competition (CAK, 2022). This study was based on Safaricom and Airtel because they are the two largest telecommunication companies in Kenya in terms of market share that provide both voice and data services.

In spite of this potential for growth, the sector has faced numerous challenges, some of which are attributed to employee performance (Otera, 2018). It is noted that employee performance is an essential component of every enterprise because it influences the overall company performance as well as its sustainability (Warui & Karanja, 2024). As a result, there is need to continuously improve employee performance. This enables the organization to improve its overall performance and remain competitive in the market. Employee performance is often evaluated on the basis of quality of work, quantity of work and efficiency of work done.

However, employee performance may also be viewed as the extent to which an employee meets the expectations (Triansyah et al., 2023). At the heart of improved performance is succession planning. Without proper succession planning, there is little transfer of skills which negatively affect future performance of the organization.

The relevance of succession to ensure the smooth transition of power inside an organization (Bano et al., 2022). Succession planning involves identifying and grooming future leaders and managers from within. At its core, it's about finding, training, and replacing employees in a way that makes any prospective change in roles and responsibilities go off without a hitch (Atwood, 2020). By creating a connection between employee performance goals and the organization's strategic goals, talent development and performance management help businesses achieve their objectives. This, in turn, helps employees understand what their expectations are in terms of performance and helps to foster a performance culture (Schiemann, 2024). Succession planning was put into action in this research by ensuring that participants have certain competences, participate in ongoing professional development, and regularly assess any gaps in their knowledge.

Proper succession planning may be associated with better employee performance because employees are placed in jobs that best fits them based on their skills and expertise (Siambi, 2022). This is because succession planning allows top management to evaluate employee performance overtime and map them based on their efficiency in performing certain tasks which allows for more efficient placement (Olubiyi et al., 2022). Jindal and Shaikh (2021) postulated that succession planning is critical for talent retention in the organization which in turn leads to better employee and organizational performance. On their part, Aladejebi (2021) opined that succession planning is critical to the sustainability of family business. It is thus postulated that for organizations to realize better performance there must be continuous improvement in employee performance.

Employee performance has been of great concern in the telecommunication industry. In such a competitive environment as the telecommunication sector there is need for improved and sustainable employee performance (Otera, 2018). However, optimization of employee performance within telecommunications companies is a major challenge. While it is acknowledged that the overall success of an organizations is dependent on individual employee performance, concerns have been raised about employee performance in telecom companies (Wadhwa & Tripathi, 2018). Statistical evidence points to persistent issues that impede workforce efficiency and organizational effectiveness. This evidenced by the numerous restructurings in Telkom, Safaricom and airtel which are the main players in the industry (Odhiambo et al., 2024). Besides, Chege and Gakobu (2017) reported that there are high incidences of staff turnover in the industry. In addition, inadequate training in technical areas and challenges with job satisfaction among employees have also been observed in the sector. Moreover, companies such as Airtel Kenya have been forced to lay off key employees which is often associated with poor performance. In addition, the study noted that there is over reliance on temporary employees offering short-term productivity and cost-effectiveness at the

expense of long-term continuity and succession planning. This situation suggests that there is poor employee performance in the sector.

Despite attempts by previous scholars to unravel the relationship between succession planning and employee performance, existing literature shows existence of literature gaps. For instance, Njiru (2022) studied the influence of leadership styles on succession planning among private telecommunication firms in Nairobi County, Odhiambo et al. (2024). Studied the relationship between training and employee performance in selected telecommunication industry in Kenya while Kaburu (2017) succession management and performance of telecommunication firms in Kenya. On the other hand, Rukunga and Nzulwa (2018) studied the role of talent management strategies on organizational performance. However, none of the reviewed studies showed the relationship between succession planning on employee performance in telecommunication companies in Kenya. This study sought to fill the gap by determining the influence of succession planning on employee performance in telecommunication companies in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study was anchored on the Talent Based Theory proposed by Roberts (2008) which argues that talent is the only resource that gives organizations a competitive advantage. Consequently, companies should focus their attention towards talent development and retention to create a competitive advantage and better performance (Kaliannan et al., 2023). There is therefore need for organizations to plan of how to train employees for future roles. With proper succession planning organizations are able to map the existing talent and identify gaps so as to develop talents for efficient transition. The theory also posits that although individual employees are responsible for their own talent, the firm is responsible for integrating talents by providing institutional channels for coordination and collaboration among workers with specific skill sets. As a result, the business pays close attention to all of the administrative activities that take place inside these structural arrangements and are utilized by people to generate, store, and deploy talent (Ntaopane & Vermeulen, 2019).

The study also reviewed empirical literature from studies previously conducted by other scholars. For instance, in their study, Ali and Mehreen (2020) explored ways to include succession planning into the JD-R model, which is used to forecast individual performance. A standardized questionnaire was used to assess commercial banks in a large metropolis in Pakistan. Structural equation modelling allowed the researcher to validate the suggested model. According to the JD-R model, succession planning has an indirect effect on engagement and performance as well as a direct one. Succession planning and job performance are mediated by factors such as employee engagement and available work resources. Since structural equation modelling was used in the prior research, there is a methodological gap that needs to be filled. The current study analysed data using Least squares regression.

Abdullahi et al. (2022) reported that succession planning techniques were used to assess the involvement and effectiveness of private institutions in Malaysia. The faculty and staff of MPU were polled for this survey-based investigation. In order to test research hypotheses, the study

used questionnaires and partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). Though EE has a mediating role in the connection between SPP and EP, the findings show that SPP has a significant effect on EP. Interestingly, whereas employee participation was the dependent variable in the previous study, employee performance were used in the present investigation. Methodologically, this study will vary from its predecessor in that it used an explanatory research strategy rather than a survey research methodology.

Rotich and Kiiru (2021) embarked on a mission to discover if there was any correlation between the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, Innovation, and Youth Affairs' productivity and the execution of a succession plan in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The talent-based assumption provided support for the study. Researchers used a descriptive research strategy to conduct the investigation. One hundred thirty-two managers from the Youth, Innovation, and Information and Communication Technology Ministry made up the target sample for this study. Using a stratified random sampling technique, 175 individuals were able to be a part of the research. In this study, questionnaires served as the main means of data collection. Experts, academics, and managers were asked to offer input on the questionnaire's sufficiency in order to evaluate its content validity. The study evaluated the dependability of the variables using Cronbach's alpha (α). Descriptive statistics, such as the mean and standard deviation, were used to examine the quantitative data. When dealing with inferential data, regression analysis proved to be the most productive strategy. Results were presented in the form of tables. The results showed that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, Innovation, and Youth Affairs' staff performed much better after implementing a succession plan. In contrast to the previous study's emphasis on youth creative issues, the current one looked at the effect of talent management techniques on telecom workers' productivity. Consequently, there exists conceptual and contextual gaps.

Researchers Malokani et al. (2023) looked at private organizations in Sindh, Pakistan, to see how career development mediated the relationship between succession planning and retaining employees. The questionnaire survey method, which has been successfully employed in prior trials, was used to gather primary data. The collected data was subjected to statistical analyses using AMOS version 25, which included CB-SEM and confirmatory factor analysis. Succession planning and employee retention are mediated via career development, according to the study's findings, which were seen in private firms in Sindh, Pakistan. Sindh, Pakistan is home to a large number of private universities, making competition fierce for outstanding faculty. Before this study, researchers only looked at how succession planning affected employee retention rates; now, they want to know how it affects employee performance. Consequently, there is a conceptual and a methodological gap.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted positivism philosophy because the researcher was independent of research subjects. The philosophy was also preferred because it allows for statistical analysis to make inferences as postulated by Almalki (2016). The study used explanatory research design. Explanatory research design was used because it enables the researcher to explain the cause-and-effect relationship between the study variables. It also allows the researcher to have a

broader understanding of the topic and refine subsequent research questions to augment the study's conclusions (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The study population comprised of 280 employees from the human resource, accounting and finance, sales and marketing, operations, information technology and research and development departments at Safaricom and Airtel. A sample of 165 respondents was selected from this population using stratified random sampling technique. Primary data was utilised collected using semi-structured questionnaires.

Data was analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics adopted included mean score, standard deviation and frequencies. Inferential analysis was done using correlational and regression analysis. Correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson moment correlation to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables. Regression analysis was used to determine the influence of talent retention on employee performance. Coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to determine the model's goodness of fit. Beta coefficients were used to determine variations in employee performance as a result of variations in talent attraction. F-Test was to ascertain the overall robustness of the analytical model. Significance of the variables was assessed through the p-values of the independent variable at 0.05 level of significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study analyzed the data using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis.

Descriptive Analysis

The study used mean score and standard deviation in summarising the collected data. Descriptive statistic results were summarised in table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Succession Planning

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.
The company has a policy on how succession is done	3.623	1.271
Every employee is required to give adequate notice if they plan to leave the organization	3.926	1.019
The company provide opportunities for potential successors	3.432	1.225
The company has a policy of identifying potential employees and grooming to managerial level	3.679	.969
Potential successors are rotated through different managerial roles to gain experience	3.827	1.067
Employee are encouraged to acquire additional skills in preparation for additional roles	3.796	1.046
The company offer training to employees to equip them for additional roles	3.827	1.025
We do regular performance assessments to identify potential successors	3.846	1.095
We always do competence mapping to identify skills gap	3.722	1.023
There is an organizational structure outlining the career path for employees	3.852	1.035
Aggregate	3.753	1.078

The findings indicate that succession planning practices highly adopted in the companies as reflected by the aggregate mean score of 3.753, indicating a positive perception. The standard deviation of 1.078 shows moderate variability in responses, suggesting relative consistency among participants.

The highest-rated statements relate to the organizational structure outlining career paths for employees (mean = 3.852) and the practice of conducting regular performance assessments to identify potential successors (mean = 3.846). These findings highlight that respondents recognize the importance of structured pathways and assessments for identifying and developing future leaders. Employees also positively rated the practice of rotating potential successors through managerial roles to gain experience and offering training to equip employees for additional roles, both with a mean score of 3.827. These practices suggest that organizations provide opportunities for skill development and leadership preparation, which are critical components of succession planning.

The statement regarding employees being encouraged to acquire additional skills in preparation for expanded roles received a mean score of 3.796, further reinforcing the organizations'

commitment to continuous learning and development. The policy of identifying and grooming potential employees for managerial roles was also positively perceived, with a mean score of 3.679, reflecting active efforts to prepare employees for leadership. Similarly, the presence of a policy on succession scored 3.623, suggesting that formal guidelines exist to guide succession planning. However, the provision of opportunities for potential successors recorded a slightly lower mean of 3.432, indicating a moderate agreement and suggesting room for improvement in this area.

Overall, the results suggest that telecommunication companies in Nairobi City County have well-structured succession planning practices that include performance assessments, training, and defined career paths. These practices contribute positively to preparing employees for leadership roles, ultimately enhancing employee performance and organizational stability. These findings align with Rotich and Kiiru (2021), who emphasized that effective succession planning positively influences employee performance by ensuring business continuity and reducing disruptions in leadership. Ali and Mehreen (2020) also highlighted that structured succession planning, including training and role rotation, enhances employee engagement and readiness for leadership roles.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the direction and strengthen the relationship between succession planning and employee performance of telecommunication companies in Nairobi City County. Results were summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

		Employee Performance	Succession Planning
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	162	
Succession Planning	Pearson Correlation	.794 **	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	162	162

Results showed that there was a strong positive correlation between succession planning and employee performance with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.794 ($p=0.000$). This indicates that effective succession planning practices, such as grooming potential leaders and conducting performance assessments, are highly associated with improved employee performance. Rotich and Kiiru (2021), as well as Ali and Mehreen (2020), similarly found that succession planning not only ensures business continuity but also motivates employees by providing clear career pathways and growth opportunities. The high correlation in this study underscores the importance of preparing employees for leadership roles in enhancing their engagement and productivity.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis aimed at determining the influence of succession planning on employee performance. Results were summarised in table 3.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	0.794 ^a	0.630	0.628	0.44183		
Model	Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	53.291		1	53.291	272.990	0.000 ^b
Residual	31.234		160	0.195		
Total	84.525		161			
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	.266	.114			2.323	.021
Succession Planning	.390	.062	.411		6.299	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Employee Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Succession Planning, Rewards, Training, Talent Attraction

Model summary results showed that the adjusted R^2 value was 0.628 suggesting that the model as constructed predicted 62.8% of variation in employee performance. Thus 37.2% of variations in employee performance was explained by other factors other than succession planning. The high explanatory power of the model aligns with findings from earlier studies. For example, Denisa (2019) demonstrated that integrated talent management practices significantly enhance organizational performance. ANOVA results illustrated that the F-statistic for the model was of $272.990 > 3.9002$. The P-value for the F-statistic was $0.000 < 0.05$ indicating that the F-statistic was significant. These results show that the model was fit in predicting employee performance.

Coefficient results showed that succession planning had a standardized coefficient at 0.411 indicating that a unit increase in succession planning would increase employee performance by 41.1% if all other factors remain constant. The influence was significant ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The results are consistent with Ali and Mehreen (2020), who found that well-structured succession planning enhances employee engagement and ensures leadership continuity. In telecommunication companies, succession planning not only prepares employees for future roles but also boosts their confidence and motivation, leading to improved performance. Results were also consistent with the findings of Rotich and Kiiru (2021) who demonstrated that succession planning improved employee performance in Kenya's Ministry of ICT, Innovation, and Youth Affairs, while Abdullahi et al. (2022) found similar results in Malaysian private institutions. These studies reinforce the idea that succession planning is a universal driver of employee performance, irrespective of sector or geography.

Conclusion

It was concluded that succession planning has a significant positive influence on employee performance. Structured succession plans that include competence mapping, leadership development, and clear career pathways prepare employees for future roles while maintaining organizational stability. Succession planning fosters employee confidence and engagement by providing clear advancement opportunities and aligning individual aspirations with organizational goals. This supports talent-based theory, which highlights the strategic importance of developing and retaining high-potential employees to sustain performance during leadership transitions. Telecommunication companies that institutionalize these practices ensure long-term success and resilience.

Recommendations

The study recommends that succession planning should be institutionalized as a core component of human resources management strategies. Companies should establish clear career pathways, conduct regular performance assessments, and provide opportunities for leadership development to prepare employees for future roles. These practices not only ensure business continuity but also enhance employee engagement and loyalty by aligning individual aspirations with organizational goals.

Suggestions for Further Research

The study suggests that longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in examining the long-term effects of succession planning on employee performance. Such research could capture the evolution of succession planning and its effect on employee performance over time. Further exploration of mediating variables, such as organizational culture or technology adoption, could also provide deeper insights into the mechanisms that drive performance.

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