

Succession Planning In Academic Libraries In Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria: An Evaluative Study

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Abstract

The study X-rayed succession planning in academic libraries in Owerri, Imo State Nigeria. It seeks to explore the existence of succession plans, the type of succession plan applied in academic libraries, strategies used in implementing succession plan, the impacts and constraints to succession plan and implementation. The study adopted the survey method in the collection of research data. The findings show that succession plan exist and written/ unwritten succession plan is mostly applied, with job assignment and job rotation between departments as strategies used in implementation. The perceived impact of succession planning includes ensuring continuity of leaders for key positions as well as increased opportunities for high potentials. The study recommended among other things that library organization should establish a well structure plan in a formal and written form.

Introduction

It is axiomatic that the library is a growing organism. The growing in this context relates both to the material and physical resources as well as the human resources. The library as an organization is not static but dynamic; Right from the ancient period, through the revolutionary age and in this modern age, the library has been moving along with the trends of development. Hence the library as an information agency is flexible, proactive, re-inventing and prospective with focused leadership and management.

The success and failure of any organization is largely dependent on the leadership of such organization of which the library is not exempted. Leaders of libraries according to Ifidon & Ifidon (2007) have the prime responsibility to blend the library's resources and ensure their efficient use for the accomplishment of the library's objectives. Human resources are part of the library resources that must be blended by the heads of libraries. A good library leader can be said to have failed if there is no one to build and consolidate his success. No wonder, Ifidon & Ifidon (2007) contends that leadership and management are crucial to a library's success in today's challenging global environment. Today, one of the tools used in sustaining the leadership success of many organizations is succession planning.

Businesses according to Ezeali and Esiagu (2009) are continually searching for effective leaders, which are not easy to find. In their view, the shortage of effective leaders are not confined to businesses but evident due to lack of able administrators in government, education, foundations, churches and every other form of organization. This aptly points to the need for succession planning in any organization. Leaders in any organization who wants the organization to continue after their exit must engage the principle of succession planning. Every acts and decision of leaders in any organization should be

geared towards achieving organizational goals. This must have informed Ifidon and Ifidon (2007) when they define leadership as the dynamic process of influencing staff so that they will be willing and enthusiastically work with zeal and confidence toward the accomplishment of the library's corporate goal of harnessing and providing quality library and information services to clients from all manner of information resources

The business world as buttressed by Nixon (2008) has successfully used succession planning to identify, train and prepared employees to be ready to step up the executive positions. Succession planning is a form of risk management (Singer, 2010). As pointed out by Whitmell (2002) succession planning is slowly coming to the forefront within the library and information management community. The philosophy of succession planning according to Adams (2002) as cited in Harris (2006) is aimed at fostering communication between branches, regions and divisions, to exchange expertise and innovative techniques, and to provide a vehicle for the development of the skills of staff.

Therefore, succession planning is a process by which any organization be it private or public ensures the continuity of its leadership which involves the adaptation of specific procedures to ensures that the identified personnel in such organizations are repositioned to take up responsibility when the need arises. Succession planning focuses on strategic and systematic capability and capacity readiness (Geroy et al, 2005). A succession plan is a tool to help an organization prepare for planned or unplanned absence of a leader, clarifying authority and decision making and thereby maintaining accountability, continuity and stability. Succession planning which according to Nixon (2008) is a strategy for developing leaders from within the organization is a technique that could be useful to libraries even

though it has been understood to be widely used in business and industry.

However, Murray (2007) argued that neglect of succession planning reflects a series of widespread assumptions which, even if once valid, can no longer inform strategic planning for academic libraries. To him, academic libraries require strong leadership in order to thrive in this era of constant change. While Harris (2006) contends that succession planning ensures that an organization has the right personnel to function at peak efficiency.

Historically, succession planning can be traced back to Henri Fayol, who was believed to have introduced it. Therefore, succession planning can be seen or viewed as a long term process and in whichever way we view it, succession planning is an activity that must be developed in consonance with the library's objectives or goals.

It is therefore hoped that the findings of this study will help academic libraries design and implement a successful succession plan that will help actualize the objectives of their parent institution.

Objectives of The Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out if academic libraries in Imo state have a succession plan;
2. Ascertain academic libraries in Imo state do implement their succession plans;
3. Identify the strategies used in implementing succession planning in academic libraries in Imo state;
4. Determine the factors militating against successful implementation of succession planning in academic libraries in Imo state; and
5. Proffer the solutions to identified problems.

Review of Literature

Though no existing literature on succession planning on academic libraries with Nigeria background could be traced, the available ones within reach are hereby reviewed. Conceptually, succession planning according to Masias et al (2008) entails assessing the current workforce situation to better adjust to the changing workforce environment of the future, most specifically developing a plan to adjust to the changing workforce environment of the future, including developing a plan to address succession of current as they leave the workforce due to retirement in which case, the current situation must be appraised before developing any form of plan. Also, Rothwell (2005) as quoted by Knight (2010) defines succession planning as the process that ensures that the right people are in the right place at the right time to do the

right things. Here, the emphasis is the process aimed at getting the right people into the right place with a view of actualizing organizational goals.

Succession planning as rightly captured by McMahan and Masias (2009) involves assessing the current organizational situation-taking into consideration rapid technological advances, striking budgets, and preparing the workforce for the future. In their view, it also involves developing a plan to implement deliberate and systematic tools to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual capital for the future and encourage individual advancement.

Whitmell (2002) prophetically stated that libraries in developed countries could soon face a shortage of skilled librarians and other library staff and an increasingly competitive labour market. If this be true with developed countries, then the scenario will be worst in developing countries and this apparently justifies the need for succession planning in our libraries. The benefit of succession planning is that it warrants a stronger partnership with human resources management (Knight, 2010). Similarly, the immediate benefits include the retention of staff who see a place for themselves in the organization in the future, improvement of employee's morale, the development of stronger groups and teams who have greater understanding and awareness of the responsibilities of others.

Succession planning as buttressed by Geroy et al (2005) allows an organization to prepare for the absence, departure, death, retirement or termination of an individual from the employ of an organization. In their view, succession planning identifies necessary developmental opportunities and strategies for talented employees who otherwise might be lost due to turnover.

The benefit of succession planning as noted by McMahan and Masias (2009) often help identify specific staff members to receive specific training and/or professional development opportunities. The goal of succession planning as captured by Whitmell (n.d) is to ensure that libraries will have the needed staff to continue to offer quality and timely services to clients in the future. No wonder Masias et al (2008) contend that succession planning will play a critical role in ensuring that library staffing levels and skills sets rely not only on recruiting new librarians and library technicians, but also retaining incumbent library staff in support of the future of the library's mission.

Therefore, succession planning is a necessity since the continued survival of the organization depends on the right people being in the right place at the right time. However, Nixon (2008) identified the basic steps of succession planning as:

- analyzing the demographies of your key positions,
- Identify potential employees for leadership positions.
- assess conditions of strength and weaknesses
- Develop a training programme to build competency.

While succession planning as pointed out by Whitmell (n.d) is done through the identification, development and long-term retention of talented and qualified individuals with the needed skills and competencies. While the steps for developing leaders of the future according to Cambridge University Libraries succession planning initiative includes: assessing the current situation, carry out a risk analysis, identify high potential individuals, establish a formal mentoring system, and create individual development plans.

Nevertheless, for succession planning to be accepted as successful, the plans must include constant communication among management and staff. According to Whitmell (n.d), individuals, should not be identified for specific positions or advancement without discussing with the individuals involved to be sure that they want the job and willing to undertake needed training and coaching to get there. Also, Harris (2006) quoting Rothwell (2007) explains that:

A good succession planning process should begin with an informed evaluation of the knowledge and skills required for success in a particular job, the target profile. While, the next step is to undertake accurate assessment and evaluations of staff member knowledge and skills which would be matched against the target profile.

No wonder Knight (2010) opines that successful succession planning involves the assessment of all the key positions that could become vacant in the near future so that training and developmental opportunities can be provided to the likely successors. In spite of the benefits of succession planning, Murray (2007) argues that even if the need for succession planning seems clear, it is equally prudent to anticipate the challenges that inevitably accompany cultural change within any institution. One of the obvious limitations to successful succession planning is that most organizations, not just libraries view succession planning as being

important only when there is need to replace someone who has left or is leaving (Whitmell, 2002). He also identified lack of finance the development and implementation of succession plan as a limitation.

Therefore, one can affirm from the literature review that succession plan can help to accomplish the following goals for libraries and these amongst others include: creating and increasing career advancement opportunities for interested staff thereby leading to the retention of young librarians aspiring for a more challenging and career developments. It is therefore important that our culture continues to evolve with the philosophy and expectation that leaders can be found and developed in all levels of the organization, thus ensuring a collective responsibility for the challenge that fosters and lays the foundation for smooth leadership transitions, continuity and stability in organization

Research Methodology

The population of this survey research included librarians working in the academic libraries in Imo State. The instrument used for the study was a well structured questionnaire containing six items questions designed to elicit information on succession planning. The sampling design used for the study was the simple random sampling technique where every librarians working in the selected academic libraries has an equal chance of being selected as a member of the sample. A total of 70 respondents were chosen to represent

The data was collected by distributing the questionnaire personally to the staff except in FUTO where the questionnaire was distributed with the help of the librarian working there. The data was collected within a period of three weeks. A total of 70 questionnaires were distributed and a total of 64 were returned but 55 questionnaires were properly filled and could be analyzed giving a response rate of 78.6%. The simple frequencies, tables and percentages was applied to analysed the generated data

Data Analysis and Interpretation.

The analysis and interpretation of data collected through the questionnaire distributed is provided below: From table 1, 37 (67.2%) of the total respondents confirmed that succession plan is in existence in their library, 6 (11.0%) stated otherwise, while 12(21.8%) are not too sure. Table 2 reveals that libraries in Imo State do implement its succession plan as confirmed by 36 (65.5%).

Table 1: Existence of Succession Plan

Response	Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Library, Owerri	Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri	Imo State University Library, Owerri	Federal Polytechnic, Nkede Library, Owerri	Total
Yes	3	14	13	7	37 (67.2%)
No	1	2	2	1	6 (11.0%)
Not too sure	1	7	2	12	12 (21.8%)
Total	5	23	17	10	55 (100)

Table 2: Implementation of Succession Plans

Response	Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Library, Owerri	Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri	Imo State University Library, Owerri	Federal Polytechnic, Nkede Library, Owerri	Total
Yes	3	14	12	7	36 (65.5%)
No	1	3	3	2	9 (16.4%)
Not too sure	1	6	2	1	10 (18.1%)
Total	5	23	17	10	100

Table 3: Nature of Succession Plan Applied

Response	Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Library, Owerri	Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri	Imo State University Library, Owerri	Federal Polytechnic, Nkede Library, Owerri	Total
Written succession plan	3	18	1	3	25 (45.5)
Unwritten succession plan	1	6	13	7	27 (49)
Unwritten but formal succession plan	1	2	14	—	17 (31)
Written/formal succession plan	—	19	2	—	21 (38.2)
Written/ informal plan	—	2	1	—	3 (5.5)

Table 4: Strategies for Implementing Succession Plan

Response	Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Library, Owerri	Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri	Imo State University Library, Owerri	Federal Polytechnic, Nkede Library, Owerri	Total
Through job assignment	1	21	15	8	45 (81.8)
Through mentoring programme	1	17	4	-	22 (40)
Job rotation between department	2	23	17	6	48 (87.3)
Internal workshop/Seminar	2	14	-	-	16 (29)
External workshop/Seminar	4	18	2	1	25 (45.5)
Use of a team approach	-	12	1	-	13 (23.6)
Through participating management	1	16	3	-	20 (36.4)

Table 5: Perceived Impacts of Succession Planning

Response	Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Library, Owerri	Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri	Imo State University Library, Owerri	Federal Polytechnic, Nkede Library, Owerri	Total
Ensure continuity of leaders for key positions	4	15	7	3	29(52.7)
Increased opportunities for high potentials	2	17	8	1	28(51)
Assist individuals to realize their own career	1	9	6	6	22(22)
Developing strong leadership team for strategic tasks	1	10	6	-	17(31)

Table 6: Factors militating against effective implementation of succession plans in academic libraries.

Response	Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education Library, Owerri	Federal University of Technology Library, Owerri	Imo State University Library, Owerri	Federal Polytechnic, Nkede Library, Owerri	Total
Lack of support from top mgt	-	21	15	3	39 (71%)
Corporate politics	2	18	13	2	35 (63%)
Internal politics	5	18	17	1	41 (74.5%)
Inadequate qualified librarians to train the younger ones	1	3	3	-	7 (12.7%)
Fear of insubordination	2	16	12	13	31 (56%)
Inadequate finance to fund training	2	11	5	-	18 (32.7%)

Table 3 reveals that while some libraries applied written succession plan, while, others do apply unwritten succession plan. In other words written/unwritten succession seems to be more predominant in the libraries under study. Table 4 reveals that job assignment and job rotation between departments is the most predominant strategies used in implementing succession plans.

Table 5 reveals that the perceived impact of succession planning includes: ensuring continuity of leaders for key positions and increased opportunity for high potentials as affirmed by 29(52.7%) and 28 (51%) respectively.

Table 6 reveals the factors militating against effective implementation of succession plans in academic libraries. Internal politics ranked highest with 41(74.5%) followed by lack of support from top management 39(71), 35 (63%) indicates corporate politics, with 31(56.4%) indicating fear of insubordination

Conclusion

Based on the results of the findings of the study, the following conclusions have been made:

- i. That succession plan exists in the academic libraries under study.
- ii. Libraries in Imo state do implement their succession plans.
- iii. Written and unwritten succession plan is applied in the libraries under study.
- iv. The most predominant strategy used in implementing succession plans in libraries in Imo state is through job assignment as well as job rotation between departments.

- v. The perceived impact of succession planning amongst others includes ensuring continuity of leaders for key positions and increased opportunities for high potentials.
- vi. The major constraints to succession planning and implementation includes: internal politics, lack of support from top management, corporate politics and fear of insubordination.

Recommendation

1. Library organization should establish a well-structured succession plan in a formal and written form. It is disheartening to note that at this level, the concept of succession plan sounds strange to some librarians. The written succession plan should be well defined in terms of seniority or educational qualification devoid of internal politics.
2. Internal / External workshop should be extensively explored as means of improving succession plans in academic libraries. In other words, Head of libraries should be fair in grooming younger librarians for succession devoid of ethnic or political bias. The whole effort should be tailored towards producing those with greatest aptitude for managerial position.
3. With regards to internal / corporate politics, it is recommended that heading an academic library should be based on purely on managerial ability and efficiency irrespective of the social and political background of the person, as this will go along way to curtail the internal politics. The issue of Federal character has to be done

away with if librarians are to move on with effective succession plans.

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