

“The role of top management support and effective communication on succession planning effectiveness: An empirical study of Omani civil service organizations”

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ARTICLE INFO	Abdullah Al Jahwari and Mohd Nur Ruzainy Alwi (2023). The role of top management support and effective communication on succession planning effectiveness: An empirical study of Omani civil service organizations. <i>Problems and Perspectives in Management</i> , 21(3), 244-254. doi: 10.21511/ppm.21(3).2023.19
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.21(3).2023.19
RELEASED ON	Thursday, 03 August 2023
RECEIVED ON	Saturday, 10 June 2023
ACCEPTED ON	Thursday, 20 July 2023
LICENSE	 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License
JOURNAL	"Problems and Perspectives in Management"
ISSN PRINT	1727-7051
ISSN ONLINE	1810-5467
PUBLISHER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”
FOUNDER	LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

47



NUMBER OF FIGURES

1



NUMBER OF TABLES

9

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BUSINESS PERSPECTIVES



LLC "CPC "Business Perspectives"
Hryhorii Skovoroda lane, 10,
Sumy, 40022, Ukraine
www.businessperspectives.org

Received on: 10th of June, 2023

Accepted on: 20th of July, 2023

Published on: 3rd of August, 2023

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Conflict of interest statement:

Author(s) reported no conflict of interest

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THE ROLE OF TOP MANAGEMENT SUPPORT AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ON SUCCESSION PLANNING EFFECTIVENESS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF OMANI CIVIL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract

Succession planning is vital to protecting any organization's growth, development, and survival. While a good organizational strategy intends to ensure growth and strong management provides profitability, only an effective succession plan can make organizations sustainable. Top management support and effective communication are considered among the dominant factors that impact the effectiveness of succession planning. This study aims to investigate the impact of top management support and effective communication on the effectiveness of succession planning implementation in civil service organizations in the Sultanate of Oman. A survey was adopted based on the research objectives and administered to 160 employees from civil service organizations in Oman. Random purposive sampling was implemented due to its effectiveness in obtaining a representative sample for this study. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, standard deviation, correlations, and regression analysis, were applied using SPSS software. The findings revealed that most participants considered the current succession planning and talent development practices ineffective in preparing talents for future needs in Oman. Moreover, the results demonstrated that effective communication has a positive and significant impact on succession planning effectiveness. Surprisingly, top management support and succession planning effectiveness are positive but insignificant. Finally, effective communication and support from top management through the succession planning stages are required to achieve the targeted objectives of the plans.

Keywords

succession planning, factors, management support, effective communication, public sector, Oman

JEL Classification

O15, M12

INTRODUCTION

Today's fundamental strategic objective for organizations is talent management to maintain business growth and success. Attracting, hiring, and developing talented people is essential and challenging for employers. However, ensuring the talent pipeline for future vacancies is even more critical, especially for leadership and vital professional roles.

Today, many companies and agencies invest time and money in creating succession plans to ensure a proactive strategy when leaders or key professionals leave the organization. Even though researchers and practitioners profess the importance of succession plans for organizations, numerous studies demonstrate that the succession planning and execution processes frequently do not produce the anticipated results

(Dauda, 2013; Bano et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these plans is still debatable, as several factors impact the successful implementation of succession planning (Mckee & Froelich, 2016; Mehrabani & Mohammed, 2011). Research revealed that top management support and effective communication are among the most important factors that affect the implementation of succession planning (Golden, 2007).

Civil service organizations have been chosen as the setting for this study due to their vital role in both the services they provide to citizens and the country's economic growth. The most crucial reason succession planning is critical to the civil sector is the link between organizational effectiveness and planning. The productivity and sustainability of civil service organizations are highly dependent on ensuring their talent supply for future needs, which demonstrates the need for proper succession planning (Leland et al., 2012; Mutunga, 2020). Thus, organizations must implement succession planning effectively to guarantee the availability of prepared talents for future needs.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Succession planning considers the effort taken by organizations to prepare their talents for future expected vacancies by implementing realistic and systematic plans to overcome the unplanned costs of employing unprepared employees, strategic decision-making delays, operational progress disruption, and loss of organizational knowledge (Berns & Klarner, 2017). The "intentional and systematic effort by an organization to assure leadership continuity in critical positions, to retain and build intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and to promote individual progress" is called succession planning or succession management (Rothwell, 2022). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) provided a wider definition of succession planning by considering all essential jobs within the organization, not only top management, as some other definitions do (CIPD, 2022).

Succession planning differs from standard replacement practices as it has specific characteristics. Dessler et al. (2020) presented the key elements of succession planning:

- 1) It is a systematic, ongoing process.
- 2) It focuses on identifying the high potential.
- 3) It follows a professional evaluation process to measure the capabilities and potential.
- 4) It includes a development process to fill the gaps and prepare selected talents to be ready for future requirements.

- 5) It continues evaluation and improvements.

Similarly, Couch (2013) defines succession planning and describes its characteristics and stages. First, it is a deliberate and thorough process that begins with identifying leadership needs. Second, it is followed by the identification of high-potential personnel. Third, development activities enhance candidates' leadership capabilities before picking high-potential candidates for critical posts from the pool.

To sum up, all definitions of succession planning share four basic characteristics. To begin, it is a methodical process. Second, it is a never-ending procedure that must be followed. Thirdly, it involves identifying and fostering great people and assigning them to crucial duties that will become vacant in the future. The fourth significant feature is the demand for routine process review and measurement to make necessary adjustments to achieve the goals.

Succession planning can be considered a risk management approach for mitigating and resolving the loss of significant leaders in large firms. Studies proved that organizations that do not invest in preparing future leaders will find themselves in difficult situations to maintain continued growth in the absence of strong and prepared leaders who drive the organization in the rapidly changing economy (Bottomley, 2018).

Moreover, Reeves (2010) professed that the brain drain occurs when key personnel depart cannot be easily replaced unless there is a pool of successors waiting in the wings to take over the respon-

sibilities of retiring staff, which makes knowledge transfer an essential part of the succession planning process. Even though researchers are in consensus on the importance of succession planning and its benefits for organizations, many organizations still fail to implement it or implement it ineffectively (Dauda, 2013; Bano et al., 2022).

Very few studies have examined the factors that influence succession planning implementation and its effectiveness, whereas most of the current organizational research focuses on the succession planning process (Li Qi et al., 2021). According to Mckee and Froelich (2016), top management support and effective communication are among the significant success predictors that favor the effectiveness of succession planning.

Top management support focuses on the employees' perception of organizational care about their well-being and contribution to the organization, represented by the supervisors' and managers' support (Pila et al., 2016). Current studies of top management support focus on the relationship between management support and commitment (Newman et al., 2011), job satisfaction (Ramesh, 2020), turnover intention (Newman et al., 2011), performance, knowledge sharing (Jeung et al., 2017), and training transfer (Islam & Ahmed, 2019).

Moreover, top management or supervisor support has been found to impact succession planning implementation, but this relationship has not been discussed thoroughly (Pila et al., 2016). Those studies focused more on the reasons behind the absence of management support during the succession planning process. They came up with some reasons, such as fear of unpleasant circumstances that may occur, e.g., the leave of some talents who were not selected to have high potential (Mckee & Froelich, 2016). Bano et al. (2022) stated that some leaders hesitate to engage in succession planning because of the false expectation of the results and benefits that it will bring to the organization. Moreover, some leaders hesitate to implement succession planning because they believe grooming high-potential candidates will lead to losing their positions (Payne et al., 2018).

Top management's supportive behavior with employees was found to be significantly and positive-

ly related to the effective implementation of succession planning because the success of such plans depends highly on the support and control of the organizational leaders who initiate the process and ease its implementation (Pila et al., 2016; Bano et al., 2022). Nevertheless, Ijaz and Nawaz (2022) added that if employees perceived the working environment as more supportive, this would increase their readiness to participate in the organizational initiative and help implement the new changes.

Even though top management support is essential for the success of succession planning, managers seem not to spend enough time interacting with employees, which is one of the main reasons for the failure to effectively implement succession planning in various organizations (Leland et al., 2012).

In addition to top management support, effective communication throughout the succession planning process is essential to gaining buy-in and engagement from all staff affected by the plan (Cairns, 2011). Lack of adequate and transparent information about the succession planning process, policy, and benefits may cause false expectations and doubt about the fairness of the process, which may lead to frustration and resistance from employees toward succession planning implementation (Islam & Ahmed, 2019).

Succession planning is considered long-term as it includes several activities starting with identifying critical roles, then identifying and assessing the potential, until the final stage of promoting high potentials. During these stages, employees require direct and supportive interactions from their managers. However, managers focus more on preparing forms, charts, long meetings, checklists, and development plans (Armstrong, 2021). To sum up, effective communication is considered a fundamental element of the succession planning process for all employees in the organization to gain collaboration and support (Pila et al., 2016).

This study intends to investigate the factors that affect the effectiveness of succession planning. It includes two independent variables: top management support and effective communication. Top management support is a strong driver for effective succession planning implementation (Mckee

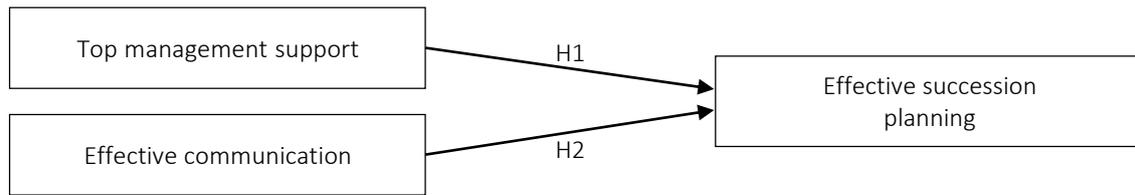


Figure 1. Research framework

& Froelich, 2016; Pila et al., 2016; Bano et al., 2022; Ijaz & Nawaz, 2022). Similarly, effective communication significantly affects succession planning effectiveness (Cairns, 2011; Armstrong, 2021; Pila et al., 2016).

According to the literature review, the conceptual model describes the potential relationship between these independent and dependent variables, as depicted in Figure 1. The study hypotheses are:

H1: Top management support is significantly and positively related to effective implementation of succession planning.

H2: Effective communication during the succession process is significantly and positively related to effective succession planning implementation.

2. METHODOLOGY

To answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, the study deployed a quantitative approach using a survey study design. The primary quantitative data tool used to gather the data was an online questionnaire. Quantitative methods are more efficient at finding the correlation between different factors by allowing a larger group to be tested with predetermined instruments and analyzing the numbers statistically.

The total of 160 participants recruited were all Omani nationals working in civil service public sector organizations with more than five years of experience, holding a bachelor's degree or above, having supervisory and management roles, or working in HR or planning departments. Nonprobability purposive sampling was used in the online survey since it was the optimal method of recruiting the necessary and best-qualified participants.

The survey consists of four sections. The first section gathers demographic information about participants, including gender, length of service, job role, and educational level. The second section consists of five questions evaluating the current implementation of succession planning-related initiatives and the effectiveness of these initiatives. The third section focuses on evaluating effective communication using five questions about how clear the plans, policies, and guides are and their effectiveness. The fourth section evaluates top management support and its role in succession planning. To ease the survey distribution and data collection process, the survey has been designed using the online platform www.surveymonkey.com. A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree) was used to grade the employees' perception toward each item. According to Bryman and Bell (2015), using closed questions on a Likert scale helps ease the process of computer-based data analysis as the questions and answers can be pre-coded by giving weight to each answer.

The raw data were analyzed using SPSS version 22.0 to measure the descriptive and inferential data to draw meaningful conclusions. A descriptive analysis of statistical measures has been presented, including percentage distribution frequency, mean, and standard deviation. Moreover, t-tests, correlation analysis (Pearson correlation), and multiple regression were used to test the research hypotheses.

3. RESULTS

Cronbach's alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) tests were implemented to measure the initial consistency and convergent validity of the study. According to Carrión et al. (2017), an AVE big-

ger than 0.5 or a composite reliability bigger than 0.7 means the indicator measuring the latent variable is considered reliable. Succession planning effectiveness, top management support, and effective communication have an AVE value larger than 0.5, according to the reliability test in Table 1. Thus, all constructs to be implemented in the study are reliable. Nevertheless, as presented in Table 2, factor loading has been applied, and all the measurement items are above 0.7, which indicates that they are statistically significant (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 1. Reliability and validity analysis

Variable	α	CR	(AVE)
EC	0.883	0.922	0.672
SPE	0.930	0.886	0.781
TMS	0.920	0.934	0.756

Note: EC = effective communication; SPE = succession planning effectiveness; TMS = top management support.

The demographical analysis in Table 3 demonstrated that most respondents are in middle management and supervisory positions, and 61% of participants have working experience ranging from 11 to 20 years. Regarding the educational level, results revealed that more than half of the respondents held master's degrees (n = 96, 60%). The lowest number of participants are those with diplomas (n = 5, 3.1%).

Table 2. Measurement items

Code	Item	Loading	Source
SPE1	My organization has plans to fill vacant key management positions.	0.862	Rothwell (2022)
SPE2	My organization has various types of on-job training to prepare high talents for higher positions in the future.	0.894	
SPE3	My organization has a talent pool in which employees are developed for advancement.	0.861	
SPE4	My organization implements a comprehensive workforce plan to meet current and future needs.	0.918	
SPE5	The current talent management and development programs effectively develop employees' competencies for future needs.	0.882	
TMS1	Top management supports the implementation of succession planning.	0.879	Pila et al. (2016)
TMS2	Top management frequently talks about career development.	0.941	
TMS3	Top management allocates the required resources for training and career development.	0.859	
TMS4	Employees' development and retention are a priority in the organization's strategy.	0.868	
TMS5	My supervisor guides me in developing my potential.	0.795	
EC1	My organization informs employees at all levels about the succession plan.	0.790	Saan et al. (2018)
EC2	My organization runs continuous meetings to communicate the succession strategy and its implication.	0.821	
EC3	Guides are available about the succession planning program.	0.840	
EC4	The succession planning policy is communicated clearly.	0.900	
EC5	Assessments and selection criteria are clear for all employees.	0.739	

Note: A Likert scale was used (1 = strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). SPE = succession planning effectiveness, TMS = top management support, EC = effective communication.

Table 3. Demographics of survey participants

Category	F	Percentage
Job level		
Senior Management	22	13.75
Middle Management	75	46.88
Intermediate (Supervisory level)	50	31.25
Professional	13	8.13
Educational level		
PhD	20	12.5
Master	96	60
Bachelor	39	24.4
Diploma	5	3.1
Years of Experience		
5 to 10	14	8.8
11 to 15	39	24.4
16 to 20	59	36.9
21 to 25	32	20
Above 25	16	10

Succession planning effectiveness was measured using five items. Table 4 indicates that most of the civil service organizations in Oman do not have succession plans for future expected vacancies, as 44% of participants disagreed. Moreover, survey results indicated that training and development programs were implemented in civil service organizations in Oman as a means for leadership development, as they got the highest mean (3.16) among the items related to succession planning effectiveness. On the other hand, participants considered that the current talent development prac-

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the succession planning effectiveness items

Survey item code	Survey item	Mean	Std. Deviation
SPE1	My organization has plans to fill vacant key management positions.	3.11	1.244
SPE2	My organization has various types of on-job training to prepare high talents for higher positions in the future.	3.16	1.218
SPE3	My organization has a talent pool in which employees are developed for advancement.	3.05	1.321
SPE4	My organization implements a comprehensive workforce plan to meet current and future needs.	3.04	1.271
SPE5	The current talent management and development programs effectively develop employees' competencies for future needs.	2.89	1.234
Average		3.050	1.258

tics are ineffective in preparing talents for future needs (mean, 2.89 and SD, 1.258) for the survey item SPE5, which is below the average mean of 3.

The standard deviation of the items studied ranged from 1.231 to 1.322. The item with the highest standard deviation is SPE3 (1.322), and the item with the lowest deviation is SPE2 (1.231). Items SPE1, SPE4, and SPE5 got in the middle. Unlike the mean results, SPE3 got the highest response deviation, while the mean was among the lowest.

Regarding top management support related to succession planning and career development, results revealed that the mean of the responses to the five survey items ranged from 2.94 to 3.33, as most items above 3 indicate that there is high agreement among participants that they receive management support regarding succession planning and employee growth for future leadership roles. The feedback received is that top managers frequently discuss career development, allocate resources for training and development, support employees, and prioritize employee development as part of the organizational strategy.

The standard deviation of the items studied ranged from 1.044 to 1.211. The item with the highest deviation is TMS5, with 1.211. In contrast, the item with the lowest deviation is TMS1, with 1.044. Similar to the mean results, TMS5 got the highest deviation in the responses, and the mean was among the highest (3.16).

Table 5 represents the descriptive analysis for effective communication. The mean of the responses to the five survey items ranged from 2.51 to 2.86, as all items below 3 indicate disagreement about the effectiveness of communication regarding succession planning and leadership development practices implemented in the study. The highest mean is only 2.86 for the EC1 about organizations informing employees at all levels about the succession plan implemented. In general, the data indicated that most respondents disagree with the effectiveness of communication about succession planning practices in the Omani civil service sector.

The standard deviation of the items studied ranged from 1.029 to 1.208. The item with the lowest deviation is EC2, with a 1.029. Items EC2, EC3, and EC4 are in the middle. The item with the highest deviation is EC5, with 1.208 (Table 6).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the top management support items

Survey item code	Survey item	Mean	Std. Deviation
TMS1	Top management supports the implementation of succession planning.	2.94	1.044
TMS2	Top management frequently talks about career development.	3.33	1.067
TMS3	Top management allocates the required resources for training and career development.	3.24	1.148
TMS4	Employees' development and retention are a priority in the organization's strategy.	3.08	1.087
TMS5	My supervisor guides me in developing my potential.	3.16	1.211
Average		3.150	1.111

Table 6. Descriptive statistics for the effective communication of succession planning items

Survey item code	Survey item	Mean	Std. Deviation
EC1	My organization informs employees at all levels about the succession plan.	2.86	1.049
EC2	My organization runs continuous meetings to communicate the succession strategy and its implication.	2.83	1.029
EC3	Guides are available about the succession planning program.	2.79	1.088
EC4	The succession planning policy is communicated clearly.	2.59	1.146
EC5	Assessments and selection criteria are clear for all employees.	2.51	2.51
Average		2.716	1.364

In summary, the average mean and standard deviation values for the study variables are presented in Table 7. Top management support shows the highest average value of 3.150, with an SD value of 1.111. On the other hand, effective communication got the lowest mean value of 2.716, with an SD value of 1.364. The success planning effectiveness mean is 3.050, and the SD value is 1.258.

Table 7. Mean and SD values

Variables	Average mean	Standard Deviation
Succession planning effectiveness	3.050	1.258
Top management support	3.150	1.111
Effective communication	2.716	1.364

As presented in Table 8, correlation statistics are used to evaluate the relationship between variables or factors. To be more specific, it assesses the degree of association between the ordering of two random variables; however, a significant correlation does not always imply causality but rather a common linkage in a sequence of events. Hence, this study analyzed the relationships between independent and dependent variables and among the independent variables.

Table 8. Inter-relation coefficient results for the study variables

	Job Level	Education Background	Length of Service	SPE	TMS	EC
Job Level	1					
Education Background	.240**	1.000				
Length of Service	.485**	.172*	1.000			
SPE	.031	.074	-.005	1.000		
TMS	-.014	.102	.043	.362**	1.000	
EC	.050	.038	-.033	.563**	.767**	1.000

Note: *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). EC = effective communication; SPE = succession planning effectiveness; TMS = top management support.

Based on the results presented in Table 8, all the demographic data variables (job level, educational background, and length of service) were not significantly related to the dependent variable, succession planning effectiveness. Moreover, they were not significantly related to any of the independent variables of succession planning.

The analysis of the first hypothesis (top management support is significantly positively related to succession planning effectiveness in the civil service in Oman) indicated a moderate and positive relation ($r = .362, p = 0.01$). Thus, top management support was moderately positively related to succession planning effectiveness.

The examination of the second hypothesis (effective communication is significantly and positively related to succession planning effectiveness) indicated that effective communication is highly positively correlated with the dependent variable, succession planning effectiveness ($r = .563, p = 0.01$).

Multiple regression analysis was employed to explore the effect of the two succession planning factors on the effective implementation of succession planning, and the numerical results are presented in Table 9. The regression analysis indicated that

Table 9. Multiple regression results for the effect of the study factors on the effectiveness of succession planning implementation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.124	.247		4.555	<.001
TMS	-.459	.153	-.396	-2.996	.003
EC	.565	.150	.458	3.754	<.001

Note: a. Dependent Variable: SPE. EC = effective communication; SPE = succession planning effectiveness; TMS = top management support.

top management support was not a significant indicator of succession planning effectiveness, as the beta coefficient was $-.396$. Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected. In addition, the regression analysis indicated that the beta coefficient for effective communication was $.458$, indicating that effective communication is a vital contributor to effective succession planning implantation in the Omani civil service sector. Therefore, the results showed strong support for the second hypothesis.

4. DISCUSSION

Data indicated that most of the civil service organizations in Oman do not have succession plans for future expected vacancies, as the mean for succession planning effectiveness was 3.050 , indicating that most participants expressed disagreement regarding that. This finding is in line with previous studies, which suggested that there is a lack of focus on succession planning in public sector organizations and that the level of effectiveness is low in most organizations that have implemented succession plans (Mutunga, 2020; Gallardo, 2018; CIPD, 2021). Even though results revealed that most effort is directed toward leadership training and development practices, this effort still needs to be more effective in developing competencies for future needs, as shown in SPE5. In summary, the empirical findings of the current study have supported the findings of Dauda (2013), who demonstrated that leadership development practices employed frequently do not produce the anticipated results due to the lack of a direct link between the training practices and the succession plan.

Interrelation coefficients and multiple regression analysis test the relationship between the study constructs. The present study hypothesized that top management support is significantly and

positively related to the effective implementation of succession planning. Even though succession planning is moderately positively related to succession planning relations ($r = .362$, $p = 0.01$), the results of hypothesis testing were contrary to expectations, as top management support was not found to be a strong predictor of succession planning effectiveness ($r = -.396$). Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected. This finding contradicts previous studies on succession planning that confirmed that top management support is a strong and dominant factor in succession planning implementation and effectiveness (Pila et al., 2016; Bano et al., 2022). This could be explained as the new generation in Oman has moved their dependability from people to systems and policies.

Moreover, previous experiences of top managers, who usually talk about the glorious future of new systems that have not been transferred to reality, lead to mistrust and disbelief in the importance of those leaders and make employees eager to see the results first. This finding suggests the importance of testing the mediating role of trust between top management support and succession planning effectiveness. These findings confirm Pita (2015) and Carins (2011), who stated that some leaders who show initial support for succession planning hesitate to implement it effectively due to the effect of interpersonal relations at the time of assessment and selection. The lack of consistent implementation led to a lower level of employee commitment and supportive behavior toward the initiative, consequently affecting the effective succession planning implementation.

The second hypothesis emphasized the significant impact of effective communication on succession planning effectiveness. Statistically, this study has proved that effective communication is highly related to succession planning ($r = .563$, $p = 0.01$) and

is at the same time considered to be a high indicator of succession planning effectiveness ($r = .458$). This is in line with the findings of previous studies that professed the importance of having effective communication tools and channels in organizations in order to be able to drive any change, as employees need to know, understand, be involved, and be answered when they have inquiries (Cairns, 2011; Pila et al., 2016; Steffens et al., 2018). Thus, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Nevertheless, survey items EC4 and EC5 indicated consistently strong disagreement regarding communication of succession planning policy, selection criteria, and assessment process, with the lowest mean of 2.51. The empirical discoveries supported the findings of Singh and Kataria (2021), who found that sufficient communication about the assessment criteria and selecting future leaders is lacking in many organizations, leading to a lack of high-quality succession planning.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the current succession planning practices implemented in the civil service organization and to test the relationship between the identified top management support and effective communication on succession planning effectiveness.

The results suggest that study participants perceive the current practices related to succession planning as not reaching a satisfactory level of effectiveness, which requires much effort to build a culture and awareness about succession planning. The empirical findings have demonstrated that effective communication is an effective indicator of succession planning effectiveness in the Omani civil service sector. At the same time, top management support is not a strong predictor.

Previously, limited studies had investigated the impact of top management support and effective communication on succession planning effectiveness in public sector organizations. In this regard, this study adds to the body of knowledge related to succession planning as it is one of the very limited papers investigating succession planning factors in Arab countries and the first in the Omani public sector.

The current study was limited to the impact of top management support and effective communication on succession planning effectiveness. Thus, future studies should expand and build on testing more organizational factors that impact succession planning. Moreover, the study used a sample size of 160 employees from public sector organizations, limiting its generalizability. Future studies may use a larger sample from both the public and private sectors in Oman and compare the findings from the two sectors. This is expected to add a novel study to the succession planning literature.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Abdullah Al Jahwari, Mohd Nur Ruzainy Alwi.

Data curation: Abdullah Al Jahwari.

Formal analysis: Abdullah Al Jahwari.

Investigation: Abdullah Al Jahwari, Mohd Nur Ruzainy Alwi.

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Visualization: Mohd Nur Ruzainy Alwi.

Writing – original draft: Abdullah Al Jahwari.

Writing – review & editing: Mohd Nur Ruzainy Alwi.

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