SUCCESSION PLANNING AND TALENT RETENTION: EVIDENCE FROM THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *Manufacturing firms are regularly filling management and top leadership positions. Any organization's imminent performance depends on the rigor of succession planning and management commitment to it. With increased employee turnover rate, organizations risk losing a wealth of knowledge to old employees, which new employees cannot learn from reading manuals or hand over notes. One-way employee retention can be guaranteed in any organization is the employee's perception towards the possibility of taking up higher roles that are more challenging in the future. The study identifies ineffective succession planning strategy as a factor responsible for the increase in employee turnover in the organization. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, 218 respondents were purposively selected to examine how the improvement of the succession planning strategy could reduce the rate of employee turnover. Therefore, it recommends embarking on advocacy to gain management's commitment to the development of potential employees for future roles*

KEYWORDS: Succession Planning, Talent Retention, Nigeria's Manufacturing Sector, Top Leadership Position, Employee Turnover, Organizational Socialization

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the current global economic order has shown that more organizations are struggling with retaining their employees (Sullivan, 2004; Hunter, 2012; (Kaya & Ceylan, 2014). The need for better income, work-life balance, and career progression necessitated employees to desert their former organizations for others that have better pay, work-life balance, and career prospects. Rappaport, Bancroft, and Okum (2003) earlier argued that more organizations are becoming short of skilled personnel due to a low employee retention rate. It has a negative impact, as more organizations are becoming less competitive due to qualified employees' departure (Herman, 2005). Employee retention is a critical factor that guarantees organization performance. Market realities and competition have shown corporate managers how key employees are to achieving their organizational goals and performance. Many organizations redirect their focus to adopting staff-centered strategies that will guarantee employee loyalty, commitment, and above all, reduce the likelihood of employee turnover.

Successful organizations have identified employees as vital resources based on their skills and contributions to their success. Therefore, strategic efforts are put in place to ensure that skilful, productive, and high performing employees are retained within the organization over a length of time. To avoid the perpetual departure of employees, Human Resource practitioners and researchers in management and social sciences examined how the introduction of succession planning strategies can enhance employee retention and drive organizational performance.

Succession planning can be described as the management activity that focuses on employee planning, which entails identifying, recruiting, and developing employees who can assume leadership or managerial positions. Rothwell (2005) disclosed that succession planning could be defined as the process of having the right employee in the right role at the right time. Charan, Drotter, and Noel (2001) described succession planning as the strategic managerial function which identifies and develops employees within an organization that has the potential of filling leadership positions. Dessler (2000) pointed out that succession planning manages individual careers within an organization to guarantee the constant supply of job successors and optimized organizational needs.

In 2004, a survey of 711 human resource managers conducted found that 80 percent of the managers thought that succession planning was critical and that only half of their companies had a clear plan in progress (Taylor & McGraw, 2004). Worthy to note that some executives are reluctant to plan for succession due to multiple reasons such as fear of losing control, retirement, death, poor work-life balance, and a strong attachment to the organization (Ibrahim et al., 2001; Handler &Kram, 1988).

Armstrong (2012) opined that an effective succession-planning program provides answers to questions such as; are there available successors that can take up leadership roles in the long run? Do they possess the requisite skill and competencies for the future? Concisely, it is suggested that a successful succession-planning program considers the availability of skilled employees to occupy present and future capacities. Mandi (2008) opined that the search for successors starts at the point of recruitment. Accordingly, Sobol, Harkins, and Conley (2007) identified four (4) phases in succession planning: understanding the organization's future needs, identifying and selecting the qualified candidate, preparing a progression plan, and transiting individuals into positions. Rothwell (2005) averred that an organization's sustainability depends on its implementation of effective succession planning and management.

In the past 18 months, the researcher has observed an increase in the employee's exit from the organization, with most vacant leadership roles filled with external candidates. It is also worthy to note that there has been a spike in the rate Nigerians are relocating abroad, and so some resignations are linked to relocating outside of the country. However, there is still a link; the researcher had the opportunity to catch up with some of the employees during their last days informally. Those who were relocating mentioned that the company lacks a plan for them, so why should they consider staying. This strongly resonated with what other employees who moved to other companies shared.

The researcher is also amazed at how the vacant senior leadership and mid-management roles are filled within the organization. External candidates take the positions, and for the remaining filled by internal candidates, how were these individuals identified as potential leaders? There doesn't seem to be a coordinated and management-driven approach to how mid-level and low-level talents are developed and prepared. Ideally, they should make up the pool of candidates for senior leadership roles. Over time, I have been briefed by my line manager and Functional Head (Supply Chain VP) that I am considered for a leadership role, yet I do not see a difference in how an intentional effort is paid to developing a growth plan for me. I fear that several people feel the same way. If this continues, my organization will see decreased employee commitment and continue to lose a significant number of high potentials to competitors.

Given the aforementioned impact of succession planning strategy, the researcher intends to examine how the succession planning strategy's evaluation and improvement could reduce the rate of employee turnover in Nigeria's manufacturing sector. This study's findings are also relevant for managers of organizations who want to improve their onboarding processes. Although many companies have these processes in place, few pay it the attention it deserves, preventing them from getting the most benefits to their employees from these processes.

Finally, this study's findings contribute to the research literature on employee integration, performance, and organizational onboarding processes. This field of inquiry has not gotten the attention it deserves from researchers in the field. It does not provide the necessary empirical and methodological framework for building better onboarding processes in organizations. This study fills that gap in the literature.

EARLIER STUDIES

Imna and Hassan (2015) affirm that one of the main critical issues companies face today, particularly in the manufacturing industry, is retaining their workforce. Das and Baruah (2013) point out that an organization's weathering life-long success rests upon keeping talents. Organizations need to invest in human capital, but it calls for proper planning. Gulzar and Durrani (2014) further explain that appropriate talent management policies and practices that exhibit a commitment to employee development produce more committed staff members and reduce staff turnover.

For succession planning to be implemented to retain employees, the focus should be on career management and talent management (Tunje, 2014:61). He further emphasized that the existing succession planning practices should always lead to employee retention, and therefore, conscious decisions should be made when promoting talented employees. The outcomes of the research done by Eshiteti et al. (2013) indicate that succession planning programs enable employee development opportunities and job satisfaction, which has a significant influence on staff retention.

Studies have shown positive correlations between succession planning and employee retention (Armstrong, 2009; Chew 2005 and Morton, 2005). Chew (2005) carried out a study on organizational prosperity through employee motivation and retention at Malaysian Institutions. The study discovered that attractive pay packages amidst other benefits are pivotal in the retention of talents. Further, it was revealed that strategic HR practices, such as succession planning, helped reduce employee turnover. Waleed (2011) conducted a study on the relationship between human resource practices and employee retention in public organizations in the United Arab Emirates. It was observed that the absence of development and training opportunities are among the leading factors motivating employees to quit their jobs. Nyamekye (2012) studied the impact of motivation on employee retention at the standard chartered bank in Ghana. It pointed out that employees would prefer to build their careers at the bank. The study identified factors such as access to training opportunities and mentorship as the motivation for growing with the bank. Chikumbi (2012) studied the impact of talent management on staff retention at the bank of Zambia, where it was discovered that access to continuous learning opportunities, valued ideas, and encouraging creativity were highlighted as factors influencing employee's decision to stay at the bank.

Examining the impact of succession planning on organizational performance, K'Obonyo et al. (2013) studied the succession strategy and performance of family businesses in Nairobi, Kenya. They disclosed that there is no clear relationship between succession planning and organizational performance. Further, Chepkwony (2012) researched the relationship between talent management practices, succession planning, and corporate strategy amongst commercial banks in Kenya. It was disclosed that there is a positive relationship between talent management practices, succession planning, and corporate strategy in selected banks in Kenya. It was further noted that the banks have chosen to rely on training and career development strategies in retaining talented and productive employees. Eshiteti *et al.* (2013) studied the effects of succession planning programs on staff retention amongst sugar companies in Kenya. They observed that succession-planning initiatives are among the reliable indicators influencing staff retention, mainly through employee growth opportunities and job satisfaction.

Bernthal and Wellins (2001) examined talent retention in companies located in the United States and the rest in Australia, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. The study had a large sample size of 5,689 respondents from agriculture, mining, transportation, wholesale trade, retail trade, finance, services, government, and multiple industries. The research discovered that succession-planning programs in their various organizations effectively dissuade their respondents from leaving their jobs. Greiner, Cummings & Bhambri (2002) disclosed that the absence of a succession planning strategy in organizations could lead to a high employee turnover rate. The conclusion was arrived at when undertaking a study on succession planning on talent retention in the Ghanaian service industry. It was further indicated that the idea of outside succession increases employee turnover and the possibility of losing top management executives.

Huang (2001) studied the impact of succession planning on human resources outcomes and found no clear indication that organizations with succession planning strategies achieve better human resource outcomes. Michaels, Handfield-Jones, and Axelrod (2001) in the "War for Talents" stated that companies with effective succession planning strategy attract quality talents, which eventually rub-off on the organization's overall performance. Rowe, Cannella, Rankin, and Gorman (2005) studied the impact of succession planning on organizational performance and found that leadership succession is crucial to corporate performance. It was further suggested that to explore the benefits of succession planning effectively; organizations must consider the duration of successful execution and the timing of the successors' learning in the organization. It was noted that the length of successors' learning within the organization determines the type of impact succession planning will have on the organization's overall performance.

First, Miles and Dysart (2008) reported that most companies would agree they have a succession planning strategy in their corporate agenda. Meanwhile, most times, such strategies are high underdeveloped, unfairly implemented, and often time ignored. Therefore, it suffices to say that the organization's commitment to implementing succession planning is crucial to organizational performance. Khumalo and Harris (2008) reported that most organizations do not have succession planning in place, which leaves a dilemma when the situation arises. Vardiman, Houghston & Jinkerson (2006) opined that incorporating succession planning in an organization's corporate ideals helps avoid potential conflicts that might arise from having people occupy key leadership positions. Lamoureux, Campbell, and Smith (2009) argued that effective succession planning is positively correlated to business success.

Stadler (2011) affirms that employees with high job satisfaction are usually committed to the company as they believe the company has a great future for them and will care about their contribution to the organization. Committed employees are more likely to excel in their jobs, remain in employment longer, and resist job offers, subsequently increasing retention rates and productivity (Stadler, 2011). Oladapo (2014) asserts that successful retention practices begin with good hiring practices since competent and motivated people will stay longer. Branham (2005), as quoted in Oladopo (2014), ascertain that poor hiring practices escalate turnover in two ways: recruits that are incompatible and disorientated tend to leave quickly; experienced staff, on the other hand, can become highly frustrated at the revolving door of newcomers that places a continual burden on their time and performance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based **on Organizational Socialization Theory** as found in the work of Cooper-Thomas & Anderson (2006). Organizational Socialization Theory has a long history, from early pioneers' works into cultural organization studies such as John Van Maanen and Edgar H. Schein. Organizational socialization is defined as "the process through which a new organizational employee adapts from outsider to integrated and effective insider, though changes in or the development of new skills, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, values, and relationships, and the development of appropriate sense-making frameworks (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006: 492; De Vos et al. 2003: 45). Organizational socialization is important for four reasons. First, inadequately socializing new employees leads to unmet expectations on those employees as well as for the organization. This can lead to poor attitudes and negative behaviors in the workplace. Secondly, organizational socialization employees get up to speed in their new roles, thereby letting them contribute behaviors to the organization's objectives. Thirdly, organizational socialization is the primary way through which new employees learn to function in their new organization. Finally; organizational socialization has "rapid influence and lasting effects on the employment relationship (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006: 493).

Va, Maanen & Schein (1979: 209) identify six strategies that organizations use to influence new employees: collective-individual, formal vs. informal, sequential vs. random, fixed vs. variable, serial vs. disjunctive, and investiture vs. divestiture. Collective-individual describes whether socialization takes place in groups or individually for each new employee; formal-informal describes whether or not new employees are separated from outsiders during socialization; sequential vs. random describes whether or not new employees are told about the specific steps in the socialization process; fixed vs. variable describes whether or not there is a fixed timetable for the completion of the socialization process; serial vs. disjunctive describes whether or not new employees are exposed to older workers in the course of their socialization, and investiture vs. divestiture describes whether or not new employees 'receive positive social support from insiders" (Van Maanen & Schein 1979: 209; cited in Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006: 494).

Organizational socialization can be seen to serve five purposes: newcomer role performance, extra-role performance, social cohesion, internal stability, and external representation (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006: 500). Newcomer role performance refers to the extent to which new employees successfully perform the role assigned to them. Extra-role performance describes the extent to which new employees engage in "helping behaviors" beyond what they

are contractually required to do in the pursuit of organizational goals. Social cohesion describes the outcome that organizational socialization creates, emphasizing shared values, attitudes, and norms among organization members. This results in internal stability, which minimizes disruptive behaviors that undermine the organization's success. Finally, external representation describes 'how employees portray their organization to their communities' (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006: 501). There are interrelationships among these five purposes of organizational socialization, so experiences in one dimension are likely to affect other dimensions' outcomes.

In addition to the Organizational Socialization Theory is the **Scharmar's Theory U Model**. In 2007, Scharmer developed a succession model referred to as Scharmer's Theory U Model. He argues that top management must first embrace change to enact succession planning, and they must act to make it happen. The model views succession planning as beginning from the immediate future and supports a concept of a U process of five movements that support change. These movements are; Co-initiating, Co-sensing, Pre-sensing, co-creating, and co-evolving, they can help an organization embrace change, implement succession planning strategies and practices in the organization for an emerging future.
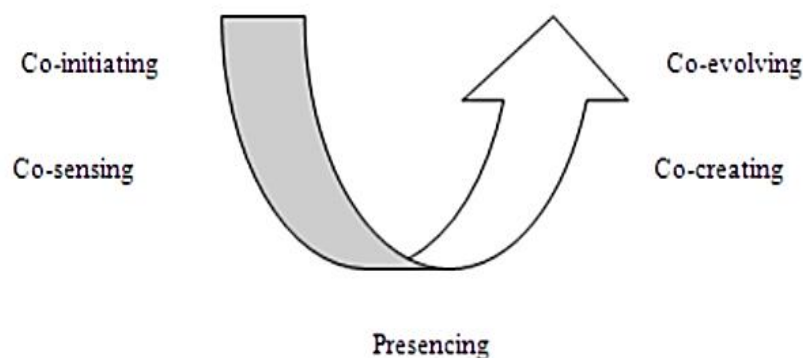
Figure 1: Otto Scharmer's Theory U Model (Scharmer, 2007)

The stages can be explained as followed;

1. Co-initiating: The organization establishes a common purpose with all stakeholders about a future event, in this case, about planning for succession.

2. Co-sensing: The organization tries to gather new ideas through collective input regarding the possible models and strategies to suit the organizational structure.

3. Presencing: The versioned future starts emerging as a possible reality. Failure to "presence" is one of the reasons why most organizations lulled into a false sense of security that ignores the possibility of facing challenges of vacant key positions without groomed successors.

4. Co-creating: The organization's top management involved in the succession planning process potential groom candidates for key positions before the predecessor may retire. At the co-creating stage, a group of change agents makes the future possible.

5.   Co-evolving: The leadership evaluates, out of many, which prototypes are practical and beneficial, and then the innovation is truly embraced as a strategy for the organization.

Scharmer's theory applies to the succession planning process. Companies that have adopted the principles have scaled to the next level and have seen lasting results.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive research method. It seeks to ascertain the nature of onboarding process in a leading manufacturing company in Nigeria, as well as the challenges hampering its effective execution (and how these may be improved). These are phenomena that can be described in interviews with respondents and other key informants. This study employed a triangulation method of data collection- that is, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods (qualitative data were collected using the in-depth interview guide while quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires). These data collection methods were of a cross-sectional nature, meaning that the data were collected at a specific point in time without regard to changes in trends over time.

The questionnaire used was the Onboarding Process Questionnaire for New Employees based on Haueter et al. (2003) Newcomer Socialization Questionnaire: the questionnaire measures employee onboarding along three dimensions: the organization, the group, and the job/task (Haueter et al. 2003). The questionnaire contained thirty-five items in all, 12 of which measured onboarding in terms of the organization, 12 for the group, and 11 items for the job/task (Haueter et al. 2003: 18). Responses to these items were presented on a four-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree). The complete questionnaire is presented in Appendix A. The same questionnaire was administered with managers/supervisors; the only difference being that they were asked to assess new employees along these dimensions; it is attached in Appendix B. The in-depth interview guide was used to collect data about the organisation's onboarding process and the ways it could be improved

The fieldwork was conducted at the manufacturing company's headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. This study's population was all employees who joined the organisation within the 12 months preceding this study, line managers, and Human Resources personnel at the organisation. This study used non-probability sampling methods, specifically convenience sampling. A non-probability sampling technique does not give all study population members an equal chance of being selected (Babbie 2010). The justification for using this sampling technique is that specific people within the study location possessed the requisite knowledge to offer useful insights into the research problem. Hence, it makes sense to survey those people. Convenience sampling was used to select study participants based on availability. A sample size of 218 employees and 5 line managers were selected to participate in the survey, excluding the Human Resources Manager.

RESULTS

The result from objective 1 shows the respondent's perception of succession planning strategy. 70% of HR managers agree that successors are identified from their performance evaluation rating. It aligns with insights shared in Organisation Analysis (Temilade Abass OA, 2018) on the organisation's robust performance evaluation system. 80% also agree that successors are picked from personality assessment, which is also in line with its strong focus on its standards of leadership. 100% of the HR managers agree that the Line manager identifies the next talent for a position within the organization. In comparison, 70% posit that the HR department is not solely responsible for identifying successors.

It was shown that 36% of the respondents were indifferent about being familiar with the organisation's succession planning practices. It was disclosed that another 36% disagree that groomed replacements in the organization's talent repository take up the role if a valuable or senior employee with critical knowledge leaves the organization. About 43% were neutral in the response that the organisation is committed to identifying talent from existing employees for future leadership utilization. Another 36% were indifferent about the notion that the organisation invests significantly in its employees' training and development, while 29% disagreed that the company invests in training. More respondents (43%) averred that job rotation is commonly practiced. Further, it was disclosed by 64% of the respondents that job enlargement or job enrichment is commonly practiced at the organisation. Also, 43% of the respondents thought that job shadowing is encouraged. Employee's views on talent development practices implemented in the organisation are in line with HR views. It was also reported by 72% of the respondents that high potential employees are often assigned short-term assignments within or outside the country; this is in line with HR perception as well. About 65% of the respondent opinionated that identified potential leaders take part in management/leadership development programs based on competency needs. Another 36% agree with the idea that even though people have been shadowing and taking on additional responsibilities, a successor is still not picked out of the pool of groomed potential leaders. About half of the respondents (50%) reported a deliberate effort to recruit outside talent for critical positions within the company.

A few respondents (36%) agreed that team leaders or managers are active and held accountable for coaching and developing their direct reports. About 36% of the respondents were indifferent about being clear on the next plans for you in the organization, which is also linked to people not being clear on the succession planning strategy. Over 57% of the respondents further showed signs of indifference in their response to having their development plan reviewed and signed off. Finally, the majority of the respondents disagreed that they are being considered and groomed for a leadership role

The result from objective 2 shows the respondent's perception of establishing the succession planning strategy's effectiveness in the organisation. It was disclosed that 36% of the respondents disagreed that the succession planning program is well developed, communicated, and implemented. Another 43% disagreed that there is a significantly low level of employee turnover in the manufacturing company. Above 70% of the respondents (72%) agreed that employee satisfaction is good compared to other companies. On the contrary, 43% were indifferent to the notion that employees/colleagues willingly go the extra mile to get the job done. Finally, another 57% were lukewarm about the organisation implementing a comprehensive workforce plan to ensure that current and future needs are met.

The result from objective 3 shows the respondent's perception of critical barriers hindering the effective implementation of succession planning strategy in the organisation. The result showed that 43% of the respondents were neutral because the succession planning initiative is aligned with its strategy. Another 36% were neutral on the idea that it invests significant resources in future leaders' training and development. It was further noted that half of the respondents (50%) agree that the management is committed to developing the next generation executives from within the organisation. Above 36% of the respondents were neutral on whether managers are afraid of replacement by a successor has an internal leadership grooming and retention program in place.

Further, another 39% of the respondents were neutral because management is proactive to workplace issues-HR analytics are used for predictions and projections; manning is strategically planned. Another 36% were indifferent about the idea that managers and top executives lack the requisite skill to develop talented employees in the organization. Finally, about 57% of them disagree that unit managers have plans in place to develop junior staff capacities for future roles.

The result from objective 4 shows the respondent's suggestions on strategies that could improve the current succession plan in the organisation. The result showed that 72% of the respondents opined that management's commitment to developing talents within the organization is critical to improving the current succession plan. Another 50% disclosed that the organization needs to align its succession planning program with its corporate strategy. It was further noted that half of the respondents (50%) of the organization should develop coaching programs for the senior management team. Above 40% of the respondents averred that the organization should have an internal leadership grooming and retention program. Further, 65% of the respondents thought that the organization should increase their human capacity development investment. Finally, about 36% of the respondents were indifferent to the idea that the organization should implement recognition and reward programs for team leaders or managers with outstanding contribution to team members' development and growth.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study set out to investigate how succession planning can be improved in Nigeria's manufacturing sector in order to mitigate high employee turnover. The field survey results reflect that the organization adopts job rotation and job enrichment as a significant strategy for developing employees for future tasks. It was further highlighted that the organization assigns high performing staff to short-term projects within and outside the country to gain experience. It agrees with Luna's (2012) findings, who reported that job rotation is an effective means of implementing succession planning in corporate organizations. The employees also revealed that it is a constant practice within the organization to have key positions occupied by sourcing externally. It means that even though employees have had the scope of their work increased, shadowed colleagues, and sometimes acted incapacity of their boss, they are still not considered for higher roles. Due to the negligence of the management and department heads in closely monitoring the progress of employees and their readiness for future roles. The impact of this was signaled by Reid and Barrington (2001), who noted that organizations with a culture of developing and training talents have a high tendency to attract and retaining quality talents for a long time. Further, Armstrong (2009) has highlighted the importance of talent development

and training, and Morton (2005) that trained talent has fewer propensities to leave an organization.

It means that the organization's failure to look inward for replacements and negligence in grooming junior staff for future roles would propel their employees to source for organizations where they have the chances of occupying leadership roles. Given the first objective that seeks to evaluate respondent's perception of the organisation's succession planning strategy, it can be deduced that the employees hold a negative perception of the succession planning initiative employed in the organisation. On the effectiveness of the adopted succession planning initiative at the organization, it was revealed that the organization does not have a well-implemented succession planning program or strategy that could prepare junior staff for leadership roles and reduce turnover. It is in tandem with First, Miles, and Dysart (2008) view where it was reported that most companies agree to have a succession planning strategy in their corporate agenda, but, most at times, such plans are high underdeveloped, unfairly implemented, and often time ignored. Furthermore, Khumalo and Harris (2008) reported that most organizations do not have a succession planning or have an undeveloped succession planning strategy, which leaves them in a dilemma when a situation arises.

The third objective focuses on critical barriers that hinder the effective implementation of a succession planning initiative in Nigeria's manufacturing sector. It was reported that managers' inability to nurse initiative and programs targeted at developing junior staff capacities hinders the effective implementation of a succession planning initiative in the organisation. It makes most of the employee unfit to work in the organization since there is no opportunity for carrier growth. They also facilitate their departure from the organization. Halbesleben & Wheeler (2008) has earlier stated that an employee's perception as being suited to their jobs is a significant measure for their choice to remain at their current positions.

Finally, the respondents averred that one significant way the organization can improve on the current succession planning initiative is by gaining management's commitment to developing leadership capacities in junior staff. It is in line with First, Miles, and Dysart (2008), who reported that the organization's commitment to implementing succession planning is crucial to organizational performance. It was also suggested that the organization needs to align its succession planning initiative with the organization's corporate strategy. It affirms Chepkwony (2012) assertion that there was a positive relationship between succession planning and corporate strategy when he studied the relationship between talent management practices, succession planning, and corporate strategy amongst commercial banks in Kenya. It was also suggested that the organization increase its investment in developing human capacities within the organization. It coincides with the findings of Rothwell (2010, which stated that having a succession-planning program in place ensures that organizations invest adequate resources in the development of human capital.

Interview Analysis

An interview was conducted with the Human Resources Manager to address the remaining two research questions that this study attempts to answer:

1. What are the challenges of the current onboarding process in your organisation?

2. In what specific ways can the onboarding process be improved to enhance employee integration and performance?

The Human Resources Manager identified two mains challenges of the current onboarding process in Nigeria's manufacturing sector. These are (1) the decentralization of the onboarding process that gives line managers complete control over the process, and (2) the relatively short time during which onboarding is executed.

The HR Manager observed that the onboarding process in the organisation's biggest challenge is the decentralization to line managers, who have almost total control over the process. According to the HR Manager, this has some downsides. For instance, the line managers focus almost exclusively on the job's technical aspects, without paying enough attention to new employees' cultural socialization. The HR Manager also observed that because the process is left largely to line managers, there is no consistency in how it is executed, so there can be significant variations in how new employees in the finance department are onboard compared to new employees in the sales and marketing department. The HR Manager believes that this inconsistency among the different departments' onboarding process undermines the integrity of the organization as one large, coherent unit.

The HR Manager also observed that line managers spend only five working days to onboard new employees. However, the HR Manager believes that intense onboarding should occur for at least ten working days and should continue at intermittent intervals over the next 6 months of the new employees' arrival at the organisation. According to the HR Manager, spending time onboard new employees this way yields dividends in the long-term over the employee's stay at the organisation, whereas failing to spend that time results in misunderstandings about job roles and performance expectations in the future. The HR Manager expressed the view that line managers are understandably reluctant to spend that amount of time because they want new employees to begin producing results right away, believing that spending a long time on onboarding is a waste.

Based on the challenges of the onboarding process identified previously, the HR Manager made two suggestions on how the onboarding process in the organisation can be improved. The first is for the onboarding process to be centralized, with the Human Resources Unit in the driving seat to coordinate onboarding across the entire organization. However, the HR Manager noted that this does not mean line managers will no longer have input in the onboarding process. Rather, that centralization will allow the company to ensure consistency of onboarding for the cultural socialization of employees, while line managers retain their role in the technical aspects of onboarding that have to do specifically with job requirements and competencies.

The HR Manager observed that the second way to improve the onboarding process is to extend the time required to onboard new employees, from the current practice of five working days to ten working days for the main onboarding, and monthly onboarding activities in one week of every month for the next six months. According to the HR Manager, this extended onboarding will provide sufficient time to get new employees acquainted with the company's culture and help them understand more clearly the subtleties of working effectively with teammates to perform the technical aspects of their jobs more effectively. The HR Manager believes that although extending the onboarding time in this way may slow down new employee productivity at first, the long-term gains outweigh the short-term impacts.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATION

From literature, it has been suggested that crucial to the implementation of succession planning is the management's willingness and commitment to invest the organization's resources in developing potential employees for future roles. Therefore, raising advocacy targeted at senior staff at the management cadre aims to raise awareness on the need to have the junior staff get adequate training that will enable them to stay in the organization while aspiring for higher positions in the future.

The findings concluded that the organization's current succession planning initiative is not aligned with the organization's corporate strategy, hence the reason for the negligence on the part of the management to uphold it. Therefore, suggesting that the organization align the succession planning program with its corporate strategy will ensure that the company is better positioned to attract and retain potential future talents within the organization. It could be a selling point for the organization in attracting other high fliers within the industry.

Implication for Theory

From the field survey, it was disclosed that the talent development pathway is almost non-existent in the organization at the moment. Therefore, revamping the talent training pathway will help identify capable hands that could fill into leadership roles in the future. This pathway will be made visible to all employees; identified talents can also track their own personal progress while motivating other employees to do better. It will further help increase the professional capacities of the employees in their current positions. The organization should also nominate a member of the leadership team as the program's guardian for accountability and visibility.

Limitations of the Study

This research employed a cross sectional research design (that is, the study of a group of respondents only at a given point in time), but this might not capture the changes that might occur over time taking into consideration the dynamics after the implementation of some proposed recommendations. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a manufacturing firm, hence, it might not reflect the dynamics of succession planning in other sectors.

Suggestions for further Research

Other factors that could be considered for further research would be

- Analyzing feedback of the respondent by department and function. Interestingly, the views or perceptions on succession planning vary within functions, and the problem might be more prominent in one than the others.

- Extend survey to senior management to get an overview of succession planning at the C-suite level in the organization

- Review, if available, exit interview reports of people that have exited the organization. It will provide more information on the link between succession planning, job satisfaction, and retention.

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