

2020

## Successful Talent Management Strategies Business Leaders Use to Improve Succession Planning

Louai Damer  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Louai Damer

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2020

Abstract

Successful Talent Management Strategies Business Leaders Use to Improve Succession  
Planning

by

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MBA, University of Leicester, 2014

BSe Engineering, University of Jordan, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

August 2020

## Abstract

Surveys on organizational training and development expenditures in the United States showed a total spend of \$83 billion in 2019; however, 40% of new leaders still fail in the first 18 months. Managers need to devote attention to improve talent development programs since employees who receive talent training in organizations are 75% more likely to succeed in senior positions and future leadership roles. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore successful talent development strategies that support succession planning. The participants were 6 business leaders holding different corporate positions such as managing directors, business unit leaders, HR managers, and learning and development managers in 6 multinational manufacturing corporations (MNCs) in the Southeast Asia region. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and organizational documents and policies. Thematic data analysis identified three main themes: organizational culture and its importance for talent development, talent identification and development strategies, and strategic human resource management for succession planning. Business leaders who deploy the appropriate talent management strategies may help their organizations manage succession planning efficiently. The development and deployment of successful succession programs may have a positive social change in local communities by creating robust employment prospects and job stability. Creating robust employment prospects and job stability could increase leaders' morals and develop a personal growth mindset, extending beyond their organizations to support social programs that benefit individuals and communities.

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Planning

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BSc Civil Engineering, University of Jordan, 1999

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## Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral study in the loving memory of my friend, Maher Anabtawi, who inspired me to take my academic aspirations to a new level and embark on this academic journey. Maher was instrumental in growing my self-belief in this dream; his remarkable support in my first baby steps in this program was unparalleled. Though Maher left us to a better place just after completing my first year in this doctoral program, however, his memory, values, and inspiration were not only present with me throughout the full journey, but empowered me during demanding and challenging times.

Maher, my friend, I hereby promise you that I will push it forward and support others to fulfill their dreams, may you rest in peace. Thank you for everything.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Business leaders need competent future leaders to fill vacant leadership positions to meet changes in workforce demographics and to address market dynamics. Talent management is fundamental in succession planning and organizations' sustainability strategies (Berns & Klarner, 2017). Talent management programs help business leaders to identify, retain, and nurture high potential employees to develop the essential skills and competencies to fill leadership positions. Nevertheless, business leaders need to have the right tools, enabling strategies, and leadership skills to shape and promote the succession planning process. Transformational leaders exhibit corresponding leadership skills that drive self-development, challenge norms, and set a role model for talented junior employees to aspire to leadership positions (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2016; Liborius, 2017). Using a multiple case study design, I explored talent management strategies that business leaders use to improve succession planning.

### **Background of the Problem**

Organizations are in need for future leaders to fill vacant positions in line with business growth strategies and to contrive evolving workforce demographics (Grayson, 2016; Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Business growth pace and dynamics state that organizations should be agile in their HR policies to refine qualified business leaders all the time (Maamari & Alameh, 2016; Rossington, 2015). Moreover, the retirement of executive leaders poses business disruption, knowledge erosion, and business continuity risks (Pandiyani & Jayalashmi, 2016). Talent management is evolving as a critical element in organizations' sustainable strategies; talent management programs can provide

high performers with career advancement prospects and development opportunities. Further, talent management can act as a talent retention initiative and provide organizations with a pool of talents that support succession planning, improve competencies, and develop sustainable performance (Al Shamsi, Dixon, Hossan, & Papanastassiou, 2015; Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Despite the growing interest in talent management programs, many business leaders suffer from the lack of talent development strategies that support succession planning.

The available empirical research can be grouped into three main areas: talent and leadership development, succession planning, and HR strategies. Some researchers acknowledged that talent management is becoming an integral activity in strategic human capital management (SHCM), but many business leaders struggle to integrate talent management in their succession planning (Farndale, Pai, Sparrow, & Scullion, 2014; Jacobson, Sowa, & Lambright, 2014; Maamari & Alameh, 2016; Walker-Fraser, 2011). As a result, some HR managers are restraining possible benefits from talent development programs due to limited HR competencies and skills. Moreover, some business leaders in multinational corporations (MNCs) fail to fill vacant leadership positions due to the lack of appropriate succession planning.

### **Problem Statement**

Managers need to devote attention to improve talent development programs since employees who receive talent training in organizations are 75% more likely to succeed in senior positions and future leadership roles (Downs, 2015). The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development indicated that only 17% of HR managers have integrated

talent development processes within organizations (Foster, 2015). The general business problem was that some business leaders lack effective talent development strategies to improve future leaders' succession planning. The specific business problem was that some business leaders in MNCs lack talent development strategies to improve succession planning.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore talent development strategies MNC business leaders use to improve succession planning. The target population included business leaders who engaged in effective succession planning in four to six MNCs in the Southeast Asia region. The implications for social change include career growth opportunities and organizations' improved sustainability for supporting the communities' citizens. Consequently, an increased focus on effective talent development can grow interest in succession planning and coaching, and create new jobs for qualified coaches, regulators, and certification bodies.

### **Nature of the Study**

Scholars use one of three primary research methods to investigate a research topic: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Researchers utilize the qualitative research method to investigate research inquiry rather than validating objectives (Abadie, Diamond, & Hainmueller, 2015; Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017). Turner and Crane (2016) noted that qualitative research methods are used to explore social phenomenon through the interpretation of how and why some events interact in their natural environment. For this particular study, the qualitative approach was



appropriate to explore the talent development strategies and processes from varying practitioners' experiences. Researchers adopt a quantitative research approach when they want to define either variables' causes and effects or correlations statistically (Hesse-Biber, 2016). Therefore, the quantitative method was not appropriate for this research as I did not intend to examine variables' causes and effects or relationships. Researchers use the mixed methods approach to capitalize on the strength of both the quantitative and qualitative research methods (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). However, the research method selection should depend on the nature of the study and the research question (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). The qualitative approach was the appropriate research method as I intended to explore talent development strategies MNC business leaders use to improve succession planning.

Researchers can employ different designs in qualitative studies. A case study design enables the researcher to explore a particular phenomenon in its natural environment (Bell & Bryman, 2007). I used a multiple case study design to study differences and similarities among various cases; I used this approach to produce stronger and more reliable conclusions since I invited different participants from varying business functions to share their experiences in an open and transparent discussion. Therefore, a multiple case study design using semistructured interviews and reviews of organizational documents and archives supported the nature of this research. Researchers apply phenomenological designs when they intend to explore personal experiences regarding a particular phenomenon. Researchers use an ethnographic design when they investigate groups' cultures and how cultures can impact businesses (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015;

Saunders et al., 2009). Neither the phenomenological nor the ethnographic research designs were appropriate for exploring strategies that could support effective business succession planning. I used a multiple case study to reveal an in-depth understanding of real-life talent development applications in different successful organizations; therefore, the multiple case study was an appropriate design for this type of exploratory research.

### **Research Question**

What talent development strategies do successful business leaders of MNCs use to improve succession planning?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What strategies have you used to deliver a successful talent development program to improve succession planning?
2. What strategies do you use to identify high potential employees entitled to a talent development program for succession planning?
3. How have you evaluated the succession planning strategies' efficacy?
4. What talent development strategies did you find worked best to improve succession planning?
5. What, if any, human resources strategies have you used to support talent development programs for succession planning?
6. What other information would you like to add that we did not address to help me understand the talent development strategies your organization uses to improve succession planning?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative case study was the transformational leadership theory. In 1978, Burns introduced the transformational leadership concept, which was later developed by Bass in 1985 (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). The transformational leadership theory comprises four leadership concepts: individual consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence through attributed or behavioral charisma (Bass & Avolio, 1993). I used the principles of transformational leadership theory to explore talent development as a tool for succession planning (see Zhao, Seibert, Taylor, Lee, & Lam, 2016).

The transformational leadership theory was suitable for this study because transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers to achieve personal and organizational growth objectives (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & Derks, 2016; LePine, Zhang, Crawford, & Rich, 2016). Moreover, transformational leaders have the vision to continuously improve their organizations and human resources capital (Schaubroeck, Lam, & Peng, 2016; Top, Akdere, & Tarcan, 2015). Additionally, transformational leaders can align their followers' development plans with organizational changes to achieve a targeted future state (Bhandarker & Rai, 2015; Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch, & Shamir, 2015). Furthermore, transformational leaders are transparent and value-driven; they embrace learning, accept challenges, develop their followers, invest in leader-follower relationships, and have confidence and trust in their teams (Abouraia & Othman, 2017; Bass, 1999). Transformational leaders are role models who inspire and influence their followers to discover and develop leadership skills (Liborius, 2017; Mittal & Dhar,

2015; Top et al., 2015). Transformational leaders stimulate their followers to challenge the status quo, take up leadership responsibility, and seek career progression and growth through self-worth, self-belief, and self-development (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2016; Lan & Chong, 2015). I used the transformational leadership theory to provide an appropriate framework for understanding the findings from my study on talent development strategies to improve organizations' succession planning processes.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Baby boomer:* A baby boomer is an individual born between 1946 and 1960 (Reis & Braga, 2016).

*Executive coaching:* One-to-one professional and systematic relation where coach and coachee work together to set personal development goals that improve individuals' professional and organizational performance, through providing coachee with the time and space to self-explore available options and facilitate development change in behaviors and performance (Coulter & Salas, 2015; Tang, 2015).

*High Performers:* Employees who exhibit superior performance consistently, and have a great depth of knowledge in specific business areas, they show passion and joy in what they do and are referred to as subject matter experts, high performers are not necessarily high potential (Downs, 2015).

*High Potential:* Employees who can easily learn new skills and develop competencies faster than others, and are promotable beyond their current roles to fill senior positions; their agility, curiosity, and aspiration improve their tolerance to handle ambiguity, complexity, and risks (Cerdin & Brewster, 2014; Downs, 2015). High

potential employees have the ability to cope with uncertainties and complexity that are crucial for organizational sustainable growth (Khoreva, Vaiman, & Van Zalk, 2017).

*Mentoring:* A non-formal knowledge transfer vehicle where senior employee leads and guides a junior employee to cope with new assignments, develop competencies and transfer skills and knowledge in various fields (Ibidunni, Osibanjo, Adeniji, Salau, & Falola, 2016).

*Millennials:* The generation born between 1980 and mid-2000s (Taylor, 2018).

*Succession planning:* Succession planning is the process where one or more are identified based on their performance and development needs as successors for key roles (Patidar, Gupta, Azbik, & Weech-Maldonado, 2016).

*Talent management:* Organizations' ability and competency to attract, recruit, develop, and retain high potential, high performers, and talented employees (McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi, & Schuler, 2017).

*Talented employees:* Individuals who achieve exceptional results due to their distinctive competencies and behaviors that are aligned with the company's value and vision, they are hard to find and replace with plenty of open and attractive job opportunities externally (Schuler, 2015).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are the product of researchers' beliefs and derived logic from collected knowledge without tests or verification that is unstated and may or may not be verifiable by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Researchers need to identify,

assess, and validate all assumptions to determine their validities based on evidence, facts, and supporting materials. I made the following assumptions: (a) participants would engage transparently in the interview, and provide candid answers that reflect their experiences and perspectives, (b) I would have full access to participants' organizations' database and HR policies, (c) participating business leaders had adequate and professional experience in talent management and succession planning, (d) the utilization of talent management development supported succession planning, and (e) the multiple case study is the most appropriate research methodology for this research.

### **Limitations**

Limitations consist of potential weaknesses that are beyond researcher's control which might affect the study's findings, and yield constraints on findings' applicability and transferability (O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014). In this study, I identified four limitations: (a) the possibility that interviewed business leaders were obliged not to share some parts of their HR policies externally, or that some organizations' documents that link to this research are classified; (b) the inconsistent understanding of talent management initiatives, and the varying application of succession planning; (c) my personal experiences on some talent management programs might create a biased perception about talent management efficacy; and (d) the lack of participants' trust and confidence that researcher might share some of their details and identifiers.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the design controls and framework that a researcher uses to narrow the research scope; delimitations include the theoretical framework, research

methodology, research question, geographical location, type of organizations, and participants' qualifications, all of which help in improving research focus (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A delimitation in this study was the focus on MNCs in the Southeast Asia region, which I used to maintain focus on one geographical location, and centered research on MNCs to exploit potential corporate culture synergies. Another delimitation was my focus on talented employees' development; this focus discounted general and standard development programs that are part of all employees' development programs.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The findings from this research may help HR directors and business leaders in developing high potential and talented employees fill future leadership positions. Business leaders may use the results of this study to develop succession planning programs to enable high potential and talented employees to explore and develop their leadership skills (Al Shamsi et al., 2015; Farndale et al., 2014). Moreover, succession planning may positively influence other talent management activities, including talent retention, knowledge transfer, access to a succession pipeline that caters to refilling leadership positions and preparing candidates to fill new leadership positions as part of an organization's growth strategy.

The results of this study provided business leaders with recommendations to improve succession planning design, implementation, and delivery. As a result, these research findings may encourage more business leaders to adopt succession planning to foster talent management and development (Okechukwu & Raymond, 2015). Proper

succession planning may positively affect employee retention, improve adequate talent development processes, enhance staff selection and recruitment, cater to transparent talent nomination process, develop coaching program delivery, enrich leadership skills, and increase the probability of new leaders succeeding in senior roles.

Proper talent development programs and effective succession planning strategies can improve organizations' competitive strategies (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). Talent development strategies include competitive employer branding, enhanced management competencies, increased trust in the coaching industry, and enriched career progression. Moreover, business managers adoptign talent development strategies can reduce recruitment and replacements' costs, maintain knowledge wealth within organizations, and support organizations' growth strategies. Business leaders need to align the succession pipeline with business strategies to identify and qualify gaps in talent pipeline (Makarius & Srinivasan, 2017). Leaders conducting an HR gap analysis against their internal succession pipeline can identify the required external recruits and their qualities that would help in delivering business strategy.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The development and deployment of successful succession programs may cause positive social change in local communities by creating robust employment prospects and job stability. Sharma (2016) stated that the increased focus on talent development might support workplace diversity. Performance-based career progression can help business leaders promote dignity and provide equal growth opportunities with a focus on employees' skills and performance. The benefits of long-term employment may result in



career progression and increased earning potential (Letchmiah & Thomas, 2017), which in turn increases spending, upgrades living standards, enhances the ability to invest, supports local businesses, increases tax revenues for schools, and other social programs that benefit communities.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The literature review encompassed current peer-reviewed research on integrated succession planning, strategic HR management, executive coaching, business mentoring, learning organization, sustainability, talent management, and leadership development.

The research question for the study addressed succession planning and talent development strategies. The keywords that I used for my literature search included: *business coaching, executive coaching, succession planning, talent management, future leaders, tacit knowledge, knowledge management, transformational leadership, and mentoring.*

In addition to Walden University Library, I used the following databases and search engines to complete my search for literature: EBSCOhost, ProQuest Central, Sage Premier, Business Source Complete, ABI/Inform Complete Database, Emerald Management Journals, and Google Scholar. To refine my literature research, I used Boolean operators with different keywords' combinations and applied timeline filters on articles published beyond 2014 to improve the ratio of published articles within the last 5 years. The research resulted in 497 articles, 10 books, and three dissertations. The scholarly articles cited in this section include 183 references, out of which 166 (92%) are less than 5 years old, and 179 (97%) are peer-reviewed articles.

The literature review process included sorting and identifying key themes that emerged and corresponded to the research question. Literature research themes encompassed strategic HR, talent definition, talent identification, assessment tools, assessment transparency, succession planning, talent development, leadership development, leadership development efficacy, business coaching, workplace demographics, transformational leadership, learning organizations, knowledge management, and sustainability.

### **Strategic Human Resources Management**

There is a growing need for HR to play a strategic role within organizations because HR activities have a direct impact on organizations' strategic fit. Market dynamics and technology advancements are driving growth strategies faster than usual and creating pressure on organizations to revisit their business plans and HR strategies more frequently to ensure adequate alignment to the external environment and prevent obsolescence (Stone & Deadrick, 2015; Tsao, Newman, Chen, & Wang, 2016). The growing interest in strategic HR is evident by the mounting empirical evidence that human resource management (HRM) should develop into strategic human resource management (SHRM), as it has a direct impact on organizational performance and organizations' strategic fit (Farndale et al., 2014). HRM strategies can foster the appropriate environment to support organizations to develop competitive advantages, build core competencies, and improve sustainability. However, the SHRM is still a new arena for many organizations, and some business leaders perceive it as a standard extension of traditional HRM activities.

HR functions are evolving to capture a broader spectrum of activities due to business stipulating needs. Atkins (2013) stated that HR includes three primary levels: administrative, operational, and strategic. Zhu and Warner (2019) associated administrative HR with day-to-day personnel support functions, such as maintaining HR records. Sumah and Baatiema (2018) referred to the decentralized or operational HR as a series of activities and objectives that collectively deliver the strategic HR plan. Operational HR includes selection and recruitment, training programs, compensation analysis, and performance appraisals. HR managers need to have alignment with business needs and deliver continuously on agreed objectives.

Human resource managers need to elevate HR department responsibilities through consistent performance and competent HR managers. Chams and García-Blandón (2019) emphasized that business leaders need to create credibility around the HR department structure and the competency of its administrative and operational resources to ensure they are capable of delivering strategic HR activities. Human resource setups can grow internal organizational credibility and legitimacy on future strategic HR projects through continuous delivery of committed operational objectives. Kuipers and Giurge (2016) supported Atkins' (2013) perspective that an HR setup that cannot consistently deliver on basic activities would not develop the required competencies around strategic needs analysis (SNS) and develop HR strategies and measures. The realignment of HR operating plans, competencies, policies, and goals to strategic HRM trends is mandatory to remain in business.

Evolving business strategies and market dynamics are requiring HR managers to develop new skills and competencies that were not needed in the past. Stone and Deadrick (2015) highlighted that emerging HR issues and challenges that business leaders need to address in HR operating plans are knowledge management, talent mobility, globalization, baby boomers' exit, and increased workplace diversity. In addition to the need to develop the required HR skills in managing SHRM, the complexity in introducing SHRM centers on the limited and overlapping borderlines between conventional and strategic HR activities. Samantara and Sharma (2014) stated that HR leaders need to develop their HR skills to adapt to new HR tasks and assignments; in particular, Tafvelin, Stenling, Lundmark, and Westerberg (2019) emphasized selection and recruitment, training and development, succession planning, mentoring, coaching, incentives, virtual management, and employer branding. HR leaders should continuously align HR strategies and policies to support business growth by upgrading HR skills and competency levels.

Strategic HRM processes and policies support HR development programs, cultural upgrades, and business activities alignment. Shakerian, Dehnavi, and Ghanad (2016) noted that strategic HRM is used by organizations to interact with their surroundings and environments, and preserve scarce human capital through proper alignment between organizations' direction and market dynamics. Sheehan, De Cieri, Cooper, and Shea (2016) added that strategic HRM provides different stakeholders long-term benefits through adequate selection and recruitment, transparent performance appraisals, functional succession planning, and strategic talent development programs. As

a result, HR is developing into a strategic partner, and increasing numbers of organizations recognize that Strategic HRM is vital for their sustainability. Jacobson et al. (2014) highlighted that HR managers and business leaders lacked the ability to identify the breadth of the HR role in strategic performance due to excessive engagement in administrative activities rather than HR strategic roles. HR directors should have the appropriate competencies to upgrade the HR function, align with the overall strategy, and deliver on assigned strategic actions.

### **Human Resources Impact on Talent Management**

Business growth strategies mandate that business leaders develop and retain their existing talents. Foster (2015) stated that talent development is creating unprecedented pressure on HRMs to develop new skills and competencies to manage additional HR activities. Moreover, executive managers need to develop policies that support HRM talent development initiatives. Galpin, Whittington, and Bell (2015) stated that HRM policies influence talent development programs and succession planning. However, Haugh and Talwar (2016) disputed that it is still unclear how Strategic HRM initiatives linked to talent management can directly affect HR policies to accommodate the growing demand for future leaders through proper succession planning programs. Market dynamics and emerging HR trends demand business leaders develop new HR strategies to support talent management and talent development initiatives.

HR strategies are incrementally focusing on personal development programs as part of talent development strategies. Janson (2015) noted that organizations achieve five main opportunities through talent development programs. First, employees can benefit

from HR once they appreciate the value HR brings (Hitka et al., 2018). Second, business leaders need to ensure that their employees are assigned to the right jobs (Sivathanu & Pillai, 2018). Third, business leaders presume that employees are in the right positions and have the right skills to perform their jobs (Maamari & Alameh, 2016). Fourth, managers need to develop proper job segregation, duties, and rewards for every position (Abu Khalaf, Hmoud, & Obeidat, 2019). Finally, managers ensure that enough time is provided for job development and succession planning (Lacerenza, Reyes, Marlow, Joseph, & Salas, 2017). Business leaders are increasingly appreciating talent development initiatives and associating them with organizations' strategy. Accordingly, business leaders should develop HR skills and competency strategies that accommodate and match talents' demands and growth.

Business leaders play a pivotal role in deploying their skills and competencies in talent development and succession planning programs. Janson (2015) pointed out that some business leaders underutilize succession planning due to a lack of some specific HR skills. Some talent development programs are isolated and fragmented, while some HR leaders lack business knowledge that enables them to develop proper talent development programs. Jacobson et al. (2014) and Maamari and Alameh (2016) agreed that many organizations are limiting possible benefits from business coaching programs due to their intrinsic strategic HR competencies and skills. Business leaders need to examine their ability and skills that enable them to manage talent management programs.

Some talent development programs fail to meet their objectives due to limited expertise in managing talent development programs. Jacobson et al. (2014) examined the

impact of business leaders' internal skills and competencies on talent development programs' success and identified three main areas: the availability of a strategic HR plan that adopts talent management, the engagement of HR function in talent development recognition and skills upgrade, and the appreciation and engagement of executive management. HR managers should realize the capacity they can play in organizations' strategic performance and should have the desire to challenge HR activities to go beyond administrative activities. Samantara and Sharma (2014) noted that leaders need to develop a systematic process to structure and integrate talent development programs within other business areas. Business leaders can design talent development programs if they have the right capacities and skills to identify, nurture, develop, and retain talents, accompanied by a keen appreciation for long-term investment of talent management programs.

Business leaders are increasingly integrating talent development initiatives in their HR planning through various programs to improve their succession planning. Grover and Furnham (2016) noted that executive coaching is becoming a popular talent management activity; however, many business managers struggle to integrate this activity as part of their succession planning. Grayson (2016) explained further the positive impact of coaching on talent engagement and retention in technical and leadership roles is dominant; Grayson also stated that coaching programs should expand to cover different levels beyond middle-level employees and include top executives if organizations intend to cater to leaders' succession planning. Business leaders should treat talent development

programs as one of the tools that develop future leaders' skills and expand succession planning in multiple roles.

### **Talent Development and Succession Planning**

Talent management is developing into a primary factor in organizations' sustainable strategies. Haugh and Talwar (2016) noted that business growth pace dictates that organizations are agile in their HR policies to provide qualified business leaders to fill vacant leadership positions. Maamari and Alameh (2016) and Rossington (2015) observed that talent development supports growth strategies and offers high performers with career advancement prospects. Al Shamsi et al. (2015) stated that talent development constitutes part of talent retention initiatives. Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) added that talent development provides organizations with talents that support succession planning, improve competencies for future growth, and develop sustainable performance. However, the lack of standard talent definition resulted in broad literature research in various areas.

The interest in talent management triggered researchers to explore how business leaders can apply new strategies to improve talent development and how they could make businesses more efficient. Al Ariss, Cascio, and Paauwe (2014) noted three primary applications of talent management: talent management refers to a strategic HRM function rather than talent-related activity; talent management is used interchangeably in place of succession planning; and talent management is the conventional management of talents, including talent identification, management, development to support business processes and links to organizational strategy. The growing demand for talent management spurred



research on talent development programs' impact on future leaders' performance (Al Shamsi et al., 2015), talent retention initiatives (Galpin et al., 2015), and organizational change effect on talent enabling culture (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015). Due to broad application and varying appreciation of talent management initiatives and to avoid misalignment, business leaders need to contextualize and communicate the scope of talent development programs they deploy. As a result of the broad context of talent management research, scholars studied various talent related topics with distinguished focus in three main research areas: talent identification, talent development, and development programs.

### **Talent Identification**

Business leaders should develop proper tools to identify, retain, and develop talented employees. Van Dongen (2014) stated that some organizations in the United States spent more than \$125 billion in 2009 on development programs; however, more than 32% of business managers acknowledged that they do not have proper talent identification programs. Van Dongen added that talent identification programs should include three primary factors: talent identification activity, gaps analysis aligned with organizations' objectives, and customized coaching programs. Organizations need to identify talented employees before deploying effective talent development programs, in particular, the unrecognized talents; otherwise, organizations might end up with unutilized and dysfunctional development programs. Hedayati Mehdiabadi and Li (2016) agreed with Foster (2015) that a significant part of the argument revolved around talent remit; some definitions describe talent as the knowledge and skills an employee has,

while others focus on the capacity and ability an employee has to progress to leadership positions. Leaders should be aware of the implications of wrongly providing talent development programs to the wrong group of employees, or providing the proper development programs to the correct group of employees without opportunities for career advancement or applications within the organization.

### **High Performing and High Potential**

Some business leaders struggle to distinguish between high performing and high potential employees. Karadas and Karatepe (2019) explained that high potential employees are those who can develop new expertise all the time, perform in complex environments, and lead the organization. Downs (2015) added that 71% of high performers are not high potential employees, Downs added that high potential employees are regarded as twice as valuable to organizations when compared to other employees. Some organizations tend to focus on high performing employees due to their knowledge depth in their areas of expertise, whereas other organizations focus their talent development programs around high potential employees due to the possible future skills state they can develop.

One of the proposed talent identification tools was Van Dongen's (2014) eight-factor environment optimization program, which included the following: (a) developmental assignments, (b) increased responsibilities, (c) active talent network, (d) proactive learning activities, (e) talent reward programs, (f) coaching and mentoring functions, (g) regular assessments, and (h) assigning talents to manage talent development programs. Donohue (2016) argued that focus on identifying only talented

employees before enrolling them in talent development programs increases organizations' focus on marginally better performing employees, and the result would be increased skills gap between talented employees and average employees. Business leaders need to invest in developing a talent nurturing environment that encourages employees to pursue and embrace development programs.

Some ambitious employees drive their self-development beyond the prescribed organizations' talent development plans. Batistič, Černe, Kaše, and Zupic (2016) noted that laissez-faire HR leaders accommodate better proactive employees because employees can drive their self-development outside the organizations and at their own pace; however, business leaders need to integrate individuals' self-designed development plans in the organizational talent management program; otherwise, ambitious employees might look for better accommodating culture to sponsor their development needs. Both the organization and talented employees should have similar perceptions of talent management programs and their benefits.

Business leaders need to align talented employees with proposed talent management programs, including targeted deliverables and timelines. Jacksch and Klehe (2016) articulated how assessment tools can deliver unfavorable results if there was misalignment or misapplication in assessment tools. Due to these concerns, organizations and employees should agree on assessment tools, feedback sessions, subjective perceptions, and intended outcomes. Well-defined assessment protocols and agreed on talent development scope help high potential employees integrate their self-designed development initiatives with the organization's talent development programs. As a result,

high potential employees are clear on required performance criteria and are able to align to organizations' desired talent development deliverables.

### **Performance Metrics and Appraisals**

The development of appropriate individual metrics is an essential tool to recognize and assess talents. Lopes, Sarraguça, Lopes, and Duarte (2015) noted that performance appraisal is one of the practical tools to identify talents based on their merits and behaviors. Gallus and Frey (2016) expanded on the required components to have a proper performance appraisal system; they noted that business leaders need to ensure that developed metrics are valid, clear, and measurable. Groen, Wouters, and Wilderom (2017) added that business leaders should use performance metrics to define objectives, actions, owners, deliverables, and performance criteria.

Furthermore, Soucat, Dale, Mathauer, and Kutzin (2017) noted that business leaders need to have the proper operational knowledge to define objectives and development areas; otherwise, talent development programs become obsolete. Lopes et al. (2015) added that increased subjectivity or bias in performance appraisal for whatever reason would affect organizations' capacity to identify and develop talents, ultimately affecting succession planning. Business leaders should integrate within talent development programs the proper definitions on programs' scope, objectives, timeline, required skills, and review protocol and assessment procedures.

### **Performance Assessment Transparency**

Business leaders should develop transparent talent assessment and performance appraisal tools to ensure that talent development programs are reliable and trustworthy.

Groen et al. (2017) noted that besides monetary and nonmonetary rewards, talent development programs, and career progression plans are part of the awards that managers should deploy in talent management. Gözükarar and Hatipoğlu (2016) stated that employees who fail to meet their committed objectives are usually less engaged and become less interested in organizational development programs. M. Y. Kim, Oh, and Park (2018) stated that transparency in assessment tools could help build trust with stakeholders; however, Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) challenged that view and noted that the relationship between trust and transparency is an assumption and that trust develops by other attributes beyond transparency.

Diaz-Carrion, López-Fernández, and Romero-Fernandez (2019) indicated that clarity of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and actionable objectives drives high employee engagement, and promotes their development motives. Regardless of the linkage between transparency, fairness, and trust levels, Jacksch and Klehe (2016) noted that business leaders should use consistent assessment tools and selection criteria to benchmark talents' response against targeted behaviors. In addition to assessment transparency, talented employees need to have the right motivation to engage in talent development programs.

### **Talent Development Motives**

Talent development programs can create career growth motives for talented and ambitious employees. Northouse (2015) noted that organizations sponsoring leadership-development programs motivate talented employees to undertake challenging activities and tasks. Northouse added that a positive development culture helps improve

employees' engagement and loyalty, retain talent, and optimize performance. Ibidunni et al. (2016) articulated that talent development improved job satisfaction and prolonged service time resulting in higher efficiency. Talent-development culture supports leaders to motivate and lead their teams effectively and creates a framework that accommodates and motivates high-potential employees to develop their careers and fill leadership positions faster than average employees. Talent development motives go beyond employees to encourage organizations to pursue growth strategies.

Business leaders pursuing growth strategy are in constant need of future leaders to fill newly created positions. Farndale et al. (2014) noted that MNCs use talent management to identify talents globally to improve their local talent mobility. Business leaders need to recognize talented employees who are interested in filling global positions, develop remote management, and design international assignments. Herd, Alagaraja, and Cumberland (2016) stated that leaders should develop global leadership competencies to understand global markets to support growth strategies. Global talent management (GTM) is developing into a standalone function to support global businesses and assign talented employees between global and local operations. Waite (2014) emphasized that organizations need to assess globalization's impact on their business model even if they were not interested in going global, as global competitors might target their talented employees. Altogether, talent development programs impact talent retention and talented employees' decision to change employers.

Turnover cost is not limited to recruitment costs; employee turnover has many indirect components that affect organizations' competitive edge. Maamari and Alameh

(2016) emphasized that organizations must retain talents through accommodating and matching their talents' development expectations. Bali and Dixit (2016) supported this perception and stated that organizations need to maintain and attract talented employees to survive in today's competitive business environment through upscaling organizations' HR brand. Massingham (2018) emphasized that the cost of turnover should include the value of eroded knowledge, network, and experience. Moreover, new employees require sufficient training to develop similar competencies of old employees, with a higher risk of not advancing to the same efficiency. In addition to higher costs, organizations should consider reputational damage due to high turnover and its impact on the organization's HR branding.

### **Employer Branding**

Business leaders seeking to recruit high-performance individuals focus on improving their HR brand because it helps to attract and retain high-potential employees. Bali and Dixit (2016) stated that Ambler and Barrows's employer branding (EB) concept introduced in 1996 underlined the battle for talents. Bali and Dixit explained that EB is developing and communicating an image that promotes organizations' functional, economic, and psychological benefits to distinguish them from other organizations and employers. Biswas and Suar (2016) articulated that EB helps organizations attract qualified job applicants, improve retention, and reduce recruitment costs through better alignment of candidates' skills, required traits, and successful selection.

Talent development can impact organizations' reputation and branding. Reis and Braga (2016) linked EB to talent development when they stated that EB grows positive

employees' attitudes, increases engagement and motivation, and promotes talent development and talent retention activities. Bali and Dixit (2016) highlighted that EP integrates three main steps: value proposition, value-proposition communication protocol, and commitment to deliver value proposition statements. Strong EB creates intangible attributes and values that appeal to talented employees and high potential candidates. EB develops into a commitment towards developing employees and growing their careers. Consequently, EB creates a substantial differentiator and core competency versus competition. Ultimately, EB is a long-term investment in human capital that impacts turnover and improves performance. Individuals' high association with higher EB has a substantial impact on their performance and behaviors.

Employees with positive behaviors engage beyond their contractual obligations and set a good example for their peers. Gözükara and Hatipoğlu (2016) noted that employees receiving development opportunities grow an organizational citizenship attitude. Organ (as cited in Gözükara & Hatipoğlu, 2016) introduced organizational citizenship behavior to describe the noncontractual discretionary behaviors between the employee and the organization, which positively impacts the work environment and employer brand.

Moreover, Gözükara and Hatipoğlu (2016) explained that organizations' overcommitment and failure to deliver on development objectives erode employers' brand and risk employee retention. Vanderstukken, Van den Broeck, and Proost (2016) classified organizations as either impressive or respectable organizations: impressive organizations are innovative and prestigious and offer high salaries, whereas respectable



organizations are recognized for nurturing friendly environment, delivering social responsibility initiatives, and taking good care of their employees. Organizations with HR branding that promote and adopt employee development programs can attract young employees who are willing to learn and excel to progress.

### **Knowledge Management and Retention**

Business leaders need to develop agile strategies to handle baby boomers' exiting the workforce. Patidar et al. (2016) noted that organizations with available next-level leaders enjoy smooth transitions, avoid disruptive leadership setbacks, and perform in greater stability despite market dynamics. Reis and Braga (2016) explained that some organizations are managing different generations at the same time, which leads to varying perceptions of job satisfaction, engagement, and aspirations due to various life perspectives.

Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, and Oishi (2017) explained that baby boomers generally work hard to seek rewards and status. Newbold and Scott (2017) added that Generation X employees have a strong commitment to their careers, and Generation Y employees are usually more flexible and seek continuous recognition and a positive work environment. Weber (2017) stated that millennials enter the workforce with a typically strong desire to prove themselves by taking initiatives and having high self-esteem. Based on these generational characteristics, the dynamics around a change in employees' demographics pose a challenge to HR sustainability.

Talent development and succession planning are part of organizational sustainability and knowledge management strategies. Appelbaum et al. (2012) and Easa

and Fincham (2012) noted that there is an increasing interest in knowledge management (KM) due to its ability to diffuse and share baby boomers' experience and tacit knowledge with new joiners, yielding a competitive business advantage. The integration of knowledge management and succession planning includes a comprehensive revalidation of current HR models and activities to meet diverse generations' needs, including standard succession models, traditional performance appraisals, conventional training and development programs, and the selection and recruitment process. Business leaders need to support baby boomers' retirement and develop tacit knowledge transfer models to other employees through succession planning. Employees who are voluntarily retiring are often more open to sharing knowledge and support in succession planning.

Business leaders who depend on organizations' knowledge wealth need to promote succession planning as part of knowledge retention strategies. Muñoz, Mosey, and Binks (2015) stated that business leaders recognizing and utilizing their employees' knowledge wealth have a significant competitive advantage since deployed knowledge promoted sustainability and business continuity. Despite that Papa, Dezi, Gregori, Mueller, and Miglietta (2018) articulated that there is limited research that linked knowledge management, HRM, and innovation, but Rice, Heinz, and van Zoonen (2019) argued that organizations' ability to foster knowledge transfer is usually linked to innovation, learning environments, and continuous improvement programs.

Knowledge management strategies can improve organizations' capacity to innovate. Honarpour, Jusoh, and Md Nor (2018) and Manfredi Latilla, Frattini, Messeni Petruzzelli, and Berner (2018) acknowledged that innovation upgrades organizational

capacity and ability to create and manage their knowledge wealth. Leaders need to develop knowledge visions pursuing knowledge maximization, and facilitating activities that grow individuals' and groups' knowledge commitment, such as the introduction of knowledge sharing incentives, mentoring and coaching programs, and linking performance objectives to KM goals. Business leaders need to develop a corporate culture that fosters knowledge sharing and integrates HR strategies to support retirees' replenishment without significant loss in knowledge wealth.

Business leaders have two options when a new or existing position becomes vacant; refill internally as per predetermined succession plan or recruit externally. Despite that internal recruitment has multiple advantages such as business continuity, knowledge retention, and lower recruitment costs when compared to external hire, but external recruitment brings new insights, explores different experiences, and provides less resistance to radical changes. Ford, Lowe, Silvera, Babik, and Huerta (2016) articulated that internal talent development costs should be part of the comparative view between internal and external recruitment costs, further, Abdul-Halim, Che-Ha, Geare, and Ramayah (2016) added that HR managers pursuing cost-effective recruitments consider all associated onboarding costs when they examine internal and external candidates. Talent development programs should include a financial assessment framework and return on investment criteria to enable a comparison between internal and external recruitments' costs.

Business managers need to have transparent processes on internal promotions and external recruitment to avoid selection bias. Jacksch and Klehe (2016) argued that

transparency in recruitment and selection increases fairness among candidates, and employers should use consistent and similar assessment tools and selection criteria to validate how internal and external candidates respond to targeted behaviors for a better appointment. The debate between internal promotion and external recruitment elevates the pressure on business leaders pursuing succession planning based on normal career progression versus performance and meeting position related traits and behaviors. Marie Ryan and Derous (2016) noted that external selection and recruitment process poses inherent tension due to the desire of having two or more contrasts among same traits and the inability to balance them out, such as innovation and efficacy, transparency and effectiveness, broad reach and coherence, customization and consistency, and diversity and standardization. The dispute between internal promotion and external recruitment can impact organizations' succession planning strategies.

### **Succession Planning**

Succession planning benefits are evident in talents' availability to fill new positions and successful onboarding of new leaders. Patidar et al. (2016) articulated that succession planning contributes to improved post-succession performance and financial results. Also, Samantara and Sharma (2014) linked succession planning efficacy to organizations' ability to adopt talent development programs to identify and coach future leaders. Though that talent development programs can support effective succession planning, nevertheless, business leaders need to outline what constitutes a practical talent development framework. Janson (2015) highlighted the role of managers' skills and sense of responsibility to manage succession planning effectively, Janson added that succession

planning is underutilized because of two main reasons: (a) some talent development programs are fragmented and do not link to business strategy, and (b) some HR leaders lack business knowledge that enables them to develop proper talent development programs.

Business managers need to regularly update their selection and recruitment strategies to align with their HR plan with business strategies. Peters-Hawkins, Reed, and Kingsberry (2018) distinguished between effective succession planning as the development of resources to fill positions that are on the critical path of organizations' growth strategies, from the replacement planning as the plan to refill management positions when they become vacant. Business leaders in organizations seeking growth strategies should align their succession plans to desired growth objectives through nurturing new skills and well-defined competencies in targeted talents. Janson (2015) emphasized the need for employees' self-development desire to intersect with long-term organizational goals to improve succession-planning efficacies. Ultimately, succession-planning efficacy would depend at large on adopted and applied talent development approach and design.

### **Coaching and Mentoring**

Business leaders increasingly use mentoring and coaching as part of talent development mechanisms to develop future leaders' skills. Feldman and Lankau (2005) noted that executive coaching emerged in the 1990s as an intervention to the increased failure rate among senior executives. The surge in coaching applications without supporting empirical research created a gap in three main areas: missing tools to measure

coaching effectiveness, inability to identify changes in behaviors as a result of coaching, and the absence of conditions that supported successful coaching.

Schutte and Steyn (2015) agreed that there is a need for additional empirical work in business coaching research; Schutte and Steyn justified the lack of empirical research on business coaching as a newcomer due to the interchangeable applications and definitions of coaching, such as executive coaching, management coaching, life coaching, leadership development, and many other descriptions. Al-Dubai, Alshagga, and Manaf (2013) noted that literature research should distinguish between mentoring, coaching, and other social support programs. Schutte and Steyn agreed that literature should expand on business coaching as a standalone activity towards assessing its efficiency, understanding its business impact on organizational performance, and identifying business coaching success factors. The research on executive coaching should expand to explore coaching efficacy in varying business applications.

Business leaders' perception of business coaching and mentoring varied due to lack of standard application and benchmarking. Grover and Furnham (2016) noted that business mentoring has relatively limited assessment protocols and little empirical evidence of its effectiveness. Lack of assessment frameworks complicated coaching programs' design and increased business leaders' reluctance to develop coaching programs and initiatives. Donohue (2016) stated that business leaders need to design mentoring programs carefully and provide mentors with clear mentoring objectives that can be measured and rewarded.

Jyoti and Sharma (2015) noted that mentoring impacts positively organizations through coaching, counseling, and role-playing, which in turn improves organizational commitment, increases job performance, grows job satisfaction, and lowers turnover. Jyoti and Sharma stressed that leaders need to support mentoring through two enablers: mentoring structure and mentoring culture. The mentoring design and structure support mentoring programs through setting goals, defining responsibilities, and instilling feedback and evaluation, while mentoring culture endorses transparent communication network, training environment, and development spirit. The interaction between mentors and mentees strengthens the relationship between junior and senior staff, which eventually improves organizations' culture, resources sustainability, knowledge management, and business continuity.

Business leaders focusing on resources' sustainability and business continuity should consider business coaching as one of the strategies to achieve this objective. Van Dongen (2014) stated that business leaders need to invest in leadership development programs to ensure organizational survival in an increasingly competitive environment. Grover and Furnham (2016) noted that organizations are increasingly integrating business coaching to improve the sustainability of their resources through enhanced productivity and succession planning.

Resources sustainability is evident in the availability of future leaders, tacit knowledge retention within the organizations, and alignment to organizations' growth strategies. Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) and Van Dongen (2014) agreed that in addition to increasing resource sustainability, successful coaching has a positive impact

on employer brand and reputation, and has a positive effect on employees' career growth plans and robust employment prospects. Business leaders' increased interest in leadership development and business-coaching applications necessitated enhanced communication skills and improved leadership development programs' delivery schemes.

In addition to resources' sustainability, globalization and technology advancement encouraged business leaders to introduce virtual communication formats to offset the need for physical interaction. Chang, Hung, and Hsieh (2014) noted that virtual teams' performance depends on organizations' excellence to interact with varying setups and locations. Haley (2019) added that business leaders would need to have diverse communication skills to lead virtual teams through leveraging and deploying the technology. Kauffmann and Carmi (2014) stated that business leaders should have excellent communication skills to enable virtual trust build-up with subordinates; failing to have proper communication affects the ability to develop collaboration between virtual team members.

Business leaders' roles in virtual teams are different from their roles in typical setups; development programs design should focus on self-discipline, communication skills, usage of technology to communicate and interact, and the ability to deliver remotely on set objectives. Moreover, Filsinger (2014) emphasized that HR activities should focus on developing coaching skills in leaders who manage virtual teams; coaching relationship develops trust, improves managers' technology skills, and provides adjustable interaction with virtual subordinates based on their culture and background. Due to the growing acceptance of various leadership development and coaching



programs, business leaders need to investigate coaching program success factors and invest in providing the accommodating coaching culture.

### **Elements of Successful Coaching**

Business leaders should transparently communicate coaching programs' design, selection, objectives, and processes. Swailes and Blackburn (2016) studied the varying attitudes between nominated employees for talent management programs and the rest of the employees; nominated employees are usually confident about their career progression, accept increased performance targets, show higher commitment, and positively contribute to business strategies. As a result, organizations with leadership development should expect to handle and manage some frustration levels arising from employees who are not part of leadership development programs and might challenge the integrity of the selection and performance of nominated talents.

Grover and Furnham (2016) noted that leadership development programs have relatively limited assessment protocols, which affected leadership development perceptions. Coultas and Salas (2015) stated that there are limited measurement approaches to coaching and leadership development programs' effectiveness. Swailes and Blackburn (2016) stated that talents' selection criterion should be clear, transparent, and well-structured, in particular, entry and exit conditions. Therefore, and to maximize benefits, business leaders should design leadership development programs to include career plans, assessment criteria, recognition, and rewards when talented employees complete coaching programs successfully.

Setting goals with clear and measurable milestones helps business leaders in assessing the effectiveness of the leadership development program. Donohue (2016) stated that business leaders need to design leadership programs vigilantly; they need to provide coaches with clear leadership skills objectives that can be measured and rewarded. Development objectives help coaches and mentors to spend the right time and effort effectively on specific development areas with the ability to assess progress continuously.

Further, setting coaching and leadership development goals help organizations to qualify and evaluate external training providers in contrast to internal trainers. Ibidunni et al. (2016) articulated that well-designed and effective leadership development programs result in prolonged service-time, which has a positive impact on improved performance, experience curve, and core competencies. The benefit of effective leadership programs is not limited to developing talented employees, but expands to creating a sustainable culture of high achievement performance, and provides organizations with evolving leadership models.

### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Leadership theories have been evolving since the great man leadership theory was launched, which in turn has allowed for different leadership styles to overlap concurrently. In addition to trait theories, some leadership theories focused on leaders' qualities and behaviors, while other theories embraced the interaction between leaders and their subordinates and surroundings. Carleton, Barling, and Trivisonno (2018) stated that some leadership theories such as the trait and the transformational leadership theories

focused on leaders' mindfulness impact on their followers and the tasks they are handling.

Burns (1978) introduced the transformational leadership theory as a new leadership concept. Burns stated that transactional leadership provided the foundation for transformational leadership, the integration of both transactional and transformational leadership models in a hierarchical order promoted transformational leaders' ability to act in a transactional mode if needed (Bass & Avolio, 1993). An attribute of transformational leadership underlines motivating followers and employing change management skills to deliver the organizational vision.

The transformational leadership theory framework remained flexible with room for development. Bass (1985) added another dimension to Burns' transformational leadership theory through expanding transformational leaders' characteristics into the following four leadership concepts through attributed and behavioral charisma: individual consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Likewise, Pandey, Davis, Pandey, and Peng (2016) added that transformational leadership concept orbits around identifying and deploying followers' motivation to achieve organizational objectives. Liao, Chen, Hu, Chung, and Liu (2017) noted that followers' high respect and confidence in their leaders motivated followers to stretch beyond average performance, simultaneously, this confidence allowed transformational leaders to create an environment that challenged norms and introduced creative ideas to innovate and progress. I intend to explore how transformational

leadership impacts organizational succession planning through sponsoring and integrating leadership development programs.

Transformational leadership theory received growing interest due to its positive impact on followers. Northouse (2015) defined transformational leadership as the process that transforms people in pursuit of the greater good of the organization while the leader is attentive to followers' needs and motives. Breevaart et al. (2016) noted that transformational leadership satisfied subordinates' needs, catered for their self-development, and contributed to their long-term goals. LePine et al. (2016) added that transformational leaders have the vision, direction, and energy to grow the business continuously through resource development and challenging preset norms and beliefs. Transformational leaders have the abilities and change management skills to assess the resources' skills gap and recognize required development areas that would help the organization to achieve its vision.

Transformational leaders are change agents. Abouraia and Othman (2017) noted that transformational leaders challenge the status quo and embrace change. The attitude of transformational leaders elevates followers' confidence in their leaders and increases their commitment to personal and organizational goals. Liborius (2017) stated that transformational leaders are role models for subordinates who are willing to excel and develop leadership skills. Transformational leaders set high expectations from their subordinates in terms of development and performance (Mittal & Dhar, 2015; Top et al., 2015). Accordingly, transformational leaders provide continuous support and

collaboration to their team members so talents can step up in their careers, take leadership responsibility, and stretch personal growth goals.

### **Learning Organizations Theory**

While learning organizations and sustainability theories were not part of this research's theoretical framework, in this section, I briefly explored the learning organization and the sustainability theories and their relevance to talent development and succession planning. Senge (1990) introduced the learning organizations' notion as one form of contemporary leadership models. Learning Organizations model presented prescriptive disciplines that collectively develop an organizational learning culture (Senge, 1990).

Leaders in learning organizations support nurturing learning culture, and create knowledge sharing momentum, Sprinkle and Urick (2018) explained that to develop a learning culture, leaders need to improve the workplace environment to support exchanging knowledge, experience, and best practices. Self-evolving knowledge creation culture supports business leaders to develop talents, maintain a competitive edge, and improve succession planning. Griffith, Baur, and Buckley (2019) added that leaders in learning organizations need to accommodate and build knowledge environments to nurture individuals' behaviors through talent development programs. Learning Organization culture strengthens the relation between leaders and subordinates, which results in lower employee turnover, higher job satisfaction, and improved succession planning.

## **Sustainability Theory**

Business leaders need to continuously optimize available resources to maintain a competitive edge and sustainable performance. Sustainable development concept was first introduced in the UN-sponsored World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report in 1987 to attract focus to the planet's future (Mebratu, 1998). Osagie, Wesselink, Blok, Lans, and Mulder (2016) defined sustainability as the capacity to address current needs without compromising new generations' ability to meet their needs through striking a balance between the 3Ps: people, planet, and profitability. Likewise, Stankeviciute and Savaneviciene (2014) stated that organizations should design their sustainable strategies around the triple bottom line prescriptive. Increasing numbers of business leaders adopt sustainable models as part of their long-term strategy, where organizations' sustainability depends on how organizations develop their environmental, economic, and HR sustainability strategies (Kim, Williams, Rothwell, & Penaloza, 2014).

Increased awareness of corporates' obligations towards their stakeholders, including their HR, encouraged business leaders to deploy sustainability as a long-term investment in talented employees. Moreover, sustainably merits of qualifying future leaders supported leaders constitute talent development as part of business growth strategies. Despite the growing interest in sustainability, Janson (2015) noted that human resource sustainability efforts are fragmented with limited evidence of structured linkage to leadership development programs. The reconstitution of leadership development as a strategic organizational activity is elevating HR sustainability as a business necessity.

Leadership themes have multiple associations with talent development. Franco and Matos (2015) noted that three leadership themes influence followers' performance; leaders' characteristics, leaders' aspirations, and leaders' roles. Franco and Matos added that there is no prevailing leadership style linked to sustainability. Still, transformational leaders have a high impact on organizations' HR sustainability by identifying the skills gap to build appropriate development programs. Stankeviciute and Savaneviciene (2014) argued that sustainability literature concentrated on three main themes; sustainable work systems, sustainable resources management, and sustainable HRM. Sustainable HRM is evident in stakeholders' long-term economic sustainability through HR development.

Barbara (2015) supported the view of limited literature that examined human resource sustainability and that it revolved around four main themes; belief in HR as a sustainable competitive edge, societal achievement, sustainable management of HR sources, and green HRM. Wang, Van Wart, and Lebrede (2014) added that organizations pursuing sustainability should assign the right transformational leaders who can drive a proper change management program that includes talent development initiatives. The reciprocity trust among leaders and followers and the motivational behavior advance employees' engagement and their growth prospects. As a result, transformational leaders relate to talent management initiatives and future leaders' development.

### **Transition**

I presented in this section the research problem and purpose statements, research methodology and design, and data collection techniques, moreover, I addressed the research ethical framework, the significance of the study, and population and sampling. I

explored the existing literature on talent management, succession planning, knowledge management, learning organizations, and organizational sustainability. The transformational leadership theory provided a relevant conceptual framework for this research since business leaders are pivotal in driving the necessary changes to promote and sponsor succession planning strategies. In Section 2, I elaborate further on research methodology, participants selection criterion, the role of the researcher, data collection instruments, data analysis, and data organizing tools, finally, I address the tools I deployed to promote research's validity and reliability.



## Section 2: The Project

In this section, I outline the process I followed to explore talent management strategies business leaders use to improve succession planning through deploying qualitative research design. I discuss (a) the purpose statement, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the participants, (d) the research method, (e) the population and sampling, (f) ethical research, (g) data collection, (h) the data collection instruments, (i) the data organization technique, (j) data analysis, and (k) the reliability and validity of the study. I demonstrate the importance of the informed consent and the interview protocol to enhance the study's reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore talent development strategies MNC business leaders use to improve succession planning. The target population included business leaders who engaged in effective succession planning in four to six MNCs in the Southeast Asia region. The implications for social change include career growth opportunities and organizations' improved sustainability for supporting communities' citizens. Consequently, an increased focus on effective talent development can grow interest in succession planning and coaching, and create new jobs for qualified coaches, regulators, and certification bodies.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in qualitative research consists of key activities: identifying the research business problem, selecting the appropriate research method and design based on the research problem statement, finding potential research participants,

fulfilling thorough literature review and data collection, conducting data analysis, and interpreting and ensuring that all aforementioned steps adhere to research ethics (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Yin, 2014). In this case study, and after collecting Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the research, I performed the principal research instrument through selecting case studies, interviewing participants, reviewing documentation and procedures, interpreting data, and articulating results. Cleary, Horsfall, and Hayter (2014) noted that researchers should qualify case studies after validating their relevance to the research question. All qualified and selected cases in MNCs had experienced managers in talent management. Although I did not have any prior working relationship with any of the participants who represented the research case studies, but some cases were from my professional network; this prior knowledge helped me identify the appropriate participants for this research.

*The Belmont Report* sets guidelines to protect human subjects from any harm when conducting any research through focusing on three areas: (a) beneficence through increasing benefits while minimizing risks, (b) respect of participants through ensuring voluntary involvement in the study, and (c) justice through fair treatment and disclosure of all risks and benefits of the research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Therefore, to ensure full compliance with *The Belmont Report*, and before performing the interviews, I released research invitation letters to all participants to introduce the research topic (see Appendix A). I explained in the invitation letter how interviews would be conducted and disclosed all relevant information, including the risks and benefits of the research.

Further, I encouraged all participants to disclose any concerns, questions, or inability to participate. Moreover, I stated in the invitation letter that participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that participants could quit at any time without any consequences (see Appendix A). Finally, I asked participants to sign a consent letter that duly explained participants' rights in the data the researcher would collect, and how I intended to protect participants' rights, dignity, well-being, and their disclosed information.

Researchers choose their topics based on need, passion, experience, or interest. Occasionally, researchers might have a particular perception about the research topic before they start the research; they reinforce, challenge or demote their perceptions throughout the research process (Malone, Nicholl, & Coyne, 2016; Roberts & Povee, 2014). Leichsenring et al. (2017) explained that bias is the combination of incorrect data and design presentations, which eventually produces inaccurate findings and suppresses the ability to replicate the research. Therefore, researchers should state their relationship to the research topic, participants, and study area. For instance, I experienced talent management initiatives as a coachee at one stage during my career; I believe that this exposure provided me with a clear distinction of how coaching can affect talent management programs. Accordingly, I think that my earlier perceptions are neutralized. Moreover, I managed to counterbalance my previous impressions by defusing and isolating my personal views and openly accepting participants' views and inputs through adhering to interview protocol (see Appendix B), maintaining interview records, and collecting confirmations from participants on their contributions.

## Participants

Researchers need to establish participants' eligibility criteria to ensure that their inputs, findings, and experiences apply to the study. He, Carini, Sim, and Weng (2015) noted that eligibility criteria should be clear, structured, accurate, and scalable. Bettis, Gambardella, Helfat, and Mitchell (2015) added that participants should have relevant knowledge and experience of the research topic to qualify them to take part in the research. The participants for this research were business leaders who participated in successful talent development programs; they formed experience-rich case studies with successful succession assignments in MNCs.

Each individual participant in this study was treated as a case since each participant provided unique input. I developed participants' eligibility criteria around four areas: the nature of the role, corporate experience, organization size, and location of the organization. Business leaders and HR managers were part of middle to senior management and had a minimum of 5 years of experience in MNCs. Moreover, participants were part of mid-size organizations with 50 employees or above in the Southeast Asia region. Finally, participants had to have taken part in developing and successfully assigning three managers in the last 5 years.

I identified initial participants through a specialized network in the Southeast Asia region with a strong emphasis on experience, a record of accomplishment, and previous engagement in succession planning. Heckathorn and Cameron (2017) noted that the snowball approach can help researchers identify participants, known as seeds, through obtaining referrals to build participants pool. Dusek, Yurova, and Ruppel (2015)

explained that the snowball approach supports identifying hidden and hard to reach participants who are not visible to the researcher. Since some business leaders might refrain from discussing succession planning publicly, the snowball approach was appropriate for this study as it helps in locating participants who managed to deploy effective succession strategies and are willing to share their experiences.

Researchers using the qualitative case study approach need to decide on the number of participants in the study. Malone et al. (2016) explained that too small samples would not have enough material to detect actual differences, and too large samples are a waste of energy and resources and do not add any value to the research. Equally important, Cleary et al. (2014) and Fusch and Ness (2015) acknowledged that the interactive data collection process provides in-depth data. Therefore, the sample size in qualitative research depends on the quality of the collected data rather than the number of participants. Accordingly, the data collection process stops when data saturation is reached, which is when additional data collection does not produce new information. In this research, I started the snowball sampling by inviting four business leaders to participate in the study; the primary focus remained on selecting the proper participant pool that enriched the data collection process and qualified additional participants to achieve data saturation.

Researchers need to develop a working relationship with the participants to ensure interviewees' engagement and active participation. Gaining access is one of the challenges researchers face during research induction (Cronin, 2014; Wolgemuth et al., 2015). I established face-to-face interaction with the participants to build rapport, grow

confidence, and drive engagement. I introduced the research through a detailed invitation letter that explicitly stated the research topic, objectives, and participants' role in the research (see Appendix A); the induction pack included Walden IRB approval and my complete contact details.

Moreover, I explained to participants that their participation was voluntary and anonymous to facilitate genuine, sincere, and reliable inputs. To ensure open participation and full engagement, participants signed a consent letter that duly explained confidentiality clauses, participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, and how I planned to protect their sensitive information. All collected data, transcripts, audio files will be secured for 5 years after research completion; after that, all materials will be destroyed using proper disposal methods.

### **Research Method and Design**

Researchers use research methodologies to investigate a research topic in a structured framework to enhance research validity. The appropriate research methodology and design should align with the nature and purpose of the research question (Levitt et al., 2017). Since I planned to explore talent development strategies that business leaders use to improve succession planning, I opted for the qualitative research method and multiple case study design in this study.

### **Research Method**

Scholars use one of three primary research methods to examine a research topic: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The qualitative research method is an appropriate research methodology to investigate complex nonnumeric inquires such as

observations and narratives. Turner and Crane (2016) supported Lerner and Tolan's (2016) conclusions that researchers deploy a qualitative research method when they explore in-depth social phenomena and human practices in their natural environment as opposed by validating experimental variables through the deduction process.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) added that qualitative research methods entail collecting data through semistructured interviews, focus groups, documents review, and observation. The nature of this research required exploring successful talent management strategies that business leaders use to improve succession planning. Accordingly, this study required an in-depth inquiry of personal experiences, HR policies, and talent management applications; as a result, the qualitative research method applied to this study.

Quantitative research methods are appropriate to examine research variables and determine cause-and-effect and relationships among different parameters. Hesse-Biber (2016) stated that researchers use quantitative methods to study numeric data collected from close-ended questioning to nullify or void a posed hypotheses. Vaughn and Turner (2016) added that the quantitative research method entails collecting large samples to enable researchers to derive conclusions and generalize findings. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) supported Vaughn and Turner's statement that quantitative research enables researchers to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short time and yield results that may be applied to other sceneries. The quantitative research method was not appropriate for my study since I neither intended to test a hypothesis nor examine relationships among preset variables.

The mixed research method comprises both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Janssen, Meier, and Trace (2015) stated that researchers deploying mixed research methods exploit the strength of both the quantitative and qualitative research methods and offset probable weakness in some research aspects. Maxwell (2016) added that researchers use mixed methods when either one of the quantitative or the qualitative research methods is sufficient on its own to produce research validity. Since the nature of the study was to explore personal experiences and not to test a hypothesis, both of the quantitative research and mixed methods were not appropriate for this research.

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research designs include phenomenological, ethnography, narrative, and case study. The research design for this qualitative study was a multiple case study. Bell and Bryman (2007) noted that researchers use the case study design when they need to explore a phenomenon in its natural context. The case study design using in-depth data collection tools enables participants to transparently share their personal experiences, beliefs, and values (Harvey, 2015). Further, Grossoehme (2014) explained that researchers using a case study design collect data from conversations through semistructured interviews and focus groups, analyze written materials as in journals, policies, processes, and visual formats as in drawings and charts. I selected a qualitative multiple case study design that includes a sample size of a minimum of four business leaders to enable the exploration of talent management to improve succession planning phenomena in some organizations; I collected data through semistructured interviews and



review of organizational documents and archives to enhance research validity and reliability.

The qualitative narrative research method is suitable to explore the experience of an individual in the context of a specific phenomenon. Wolgemuth et al. (2015) explained that narrative research reflects the personal life story of a participant, which restrains the voice for the researcher. The need to retell participants' perspectives disqualified the narrative design for this explanatory research. Researchers using the phenomenological design examine participants' lived experiences influenced by the social phenomenon at a specific time and place (Koch, Niesz, & McCarthy, 2014); Sousa (2014) added that researchers utilizing a phenomenological design need to conduct a number of interviews to achieve data saturation. Accordingly, I opted not to use phenomenological design due to the sensitive nature of my research. I wanted to explore specific HR strategies beyond a specific time; further, I sought to mitigate any potential risk of not reaching data saturation due to the number of required interviews. The ethnographic design is appropriate when researchers investigate groups' cultures and interpret the cultural setting impact on the particular phenomenon (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Accordingly, both the phenomenological and ethnographic research designs were not appropriate for exploring talent management strategies that could support succession planning.

### **Population and Sampling**

Identifying the appropriate population and selecting the right subnet samples are integral to conducting successful qualitative research. Researchers need to identify the

specific population that relates to the nature of the study to collect relevant data (Stuart, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2015). Based on the nature of the phenomenon under study, the population for this research was MNCs business leaders engaged in talent management programs and succession planning in the Southeast Asia region.

Topkaya (2015) noted that qualitative research methods are not directive about sample size, and researchers should pursue a sample size that can provide adequate information about the phenomenon to achieve credibility. Johnson (2015) emphasized that researchers need to propose a sample size that can produce data saturation, a state where a researcher cannot obtain new information from recruiting more participants. I targeted to qualify six participants as the initial sample size to form this study's population and establish the snowball sampling; two out of the six cases were backup participants in case I had to replace any of the four primary participants due to inability to collect in-depth data or referrals for qualified participants, I had to invite two additional participants to achieve data saturation.

The sampling protocol is practical tool researchers use to select samples with the objective of improving the research findings. I deployed purposeful sampling to qualify participants for this research. Kumar (2019) explained that purposeful sampling provides researchers with space and liberty to adjust participants' selection process to provide the appropriate sample. Qualified participants should have a successful experience in talent management programs within their respective functional roles (Twining, Heller, Nussbaum, & Tsai, 2017).

Qualifying the proper sample can provide the researcher with profound insights and help in a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. HR managers and business leaders constituted this study's population; HR managers work as agents for the organizations to facilitate talent development programs and influence HRM processes through introducing and upgrading organizations' HR policies. Business leaders were part of the population of this study as well; they approve HRM initiatives that cater to training plans and adopt new strategies and revised HR policies that enable talent development programs.

The interview setting is a primary component of successful interviews. Phone interviews are one of the tools to conduct interviews, in particular, when the geographical location does not support personal interviews. However, face-to-face interviews can support building rapport with participants and provide researchers with observations during the interview session. Mahfoud, Ghandour, Ghandour, Mokdad, and Sibai (2015) emphasized that the interview location should allow participants and researchers to have a quiet and comfortable discussion.

I offered participants the opportunity to have the interview at a preferred location of their choice, or to book a private business center in a local hotel; the interview room should be comfortable, accessible, and private. I requested participants to choose a time slot that was convenient to avoid disruptions, interruptions, and business engagement; participants might provide more in-depth insights if they were comfortable and relaxed.

## Ethical Research

Researchers should commit to conducting their studies in an ethical approach. Friesen, Kearns, Redman, and Caplan (2017) stated that *The Belmont Report* provides researchers with ethical principles to establish respect, beneficence, and justice through the research process (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Beneficence directs researchers to manage participants' associated risks while maximizing participants achieved benefits. The justice principle guides researchers to offset researcher benefits and burden among participants, and the respect demonstrates the need to provide participants with the required information to help them decide if they are interested in participating in the research. Yin (2014) highlighted that researchers should collect informed consent from participants before engaging in any form of data collection. Researchers use the informed consent letter as an introduction letter to demonstrate research objectives and probable outcomes.

The informed consent letter serves as an appropriate communication tool to explain to participants their rights, safeguards, privacy, confidentiality, and potential harm that might affect them due to their engagement in the research. Further, the informed consent letter should explain to participants that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences (Hardicre, 2014). To ensure that all participants read the consent form thoroughly, participants had to acknowledge that they have received and have read the informed consent (see Appendix B).

I collected a clearance from Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before starting the data collection activity; moreover, I committed to complying with the set guidelines and procedures fully. I used codes to refer to different participants rather than disclosing their identities. I provided participants with a transcript of their interviews and collected their consent on the transcription before processing their inputs. The collected data, forms, organizational documents, and transcribed interviews are stored electronically on a password-protected hard drive; moreover, I will retain hard copies in a locked cabinet until it is due to dispose all collected data, typically after 5 years, after which, I shall destroy hard copies and hard drive in a proper way. There was no financial incentive for participating in the study; instead, I shall provide each participant with a copy of the published research with general one-to-one feedback on research findings, which might help them in their talent management and succession planning programs.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Researchers in qualitative case studies serve as the primary data collection instrument. Yazan (2015) demonstrated that researchers in case studies are instrumental in collecting, organizing, and interpreting the research data. Hernández-Hernández and Sancho-Gil (2015) explained that qualitative data collection constructs several data generation points: observation, interviews, and document review. I served as a primary data collection instrument for this research. Accordingly, I collected research's primary data through face-to-face interviews, review of organizational documents, and visual observations and behaviors that pertained to talent management and succession planning.

Personal interviews in qualitative research are effective research data collection instruments; thus, I collected data using in-depth interviews with six open-ended interview questions (see Appendix C). Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, and Kangasniemi (2016) demonstrated that semistructured open-ended interviews are the most frequent data collection instrument used in qualitative research. However, Kallio et al. highlighted that inadequate interview designs might restrain data exploitation. Roulston (2014) added that researchers' interview skills and experience have a direct impact on the data quality exploited from interviews. After collecting IRB approval, I administered one pilot interview session to ensure that interview questions and protocol were clear, and that allocated time for the interview session was ample to attend to all questions adequately (see Appendix C), the pilot study was a comprehensive interview session that covers the interview protocol, the interview session, data collection, and transcript review. I abided by the interview protocol to ensure that all interviews were similar in structure and approach (see Appendix B).

Researchers shall be aware of the semistructured interviews' advantages and disadvantages and how these can impact the data collection. Yin (2014) noted that semistructured interviews have the advantage of maintaining focus on research study topic, Yin added that interviews substantiate records of personal views, perceptions, and views about the research topic. Wolgemuth et al. (2015) added that semistructured interviews provide researchers with the advantage to design the sequence of questioning to help participants provide in-depth insights. Goodell, Stage, and Cooke (2016) added that researchers conducting semistructured interviews should be conscious that the

derived data quality from interviews depends to a great extent on the interviewers' skills, interview design and sequences, note-taking skills, observation skills, and the ability to eradicate any personal biases which might indirectly influence the interviewees' perception and feedback.

I shared interview transcripts with the participants to collect their consent and validate the interviews before I analyzed the collected data. In addition to transcripts' validation, I used member checking to ensure I interpreted data accurately. Researchers use member checking to enhance their studies' validity and accuracy (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Moreover, triangulation is the mechanism researchers use to improve research reliability and validity through collecting and comparing data using multiple data sources or methods (Wijnhoven and Brinkhuis, 2015). I collected and interpreted data using multiple methods to improve research validity. To complement collected data from interviews, I checked available organizations' documents, reports, social media, websites, policies, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports as part of the study's secondary data sources.

### **Data Collection Technique**

Researchers need to decide the most appropriate data collection techniques for their studies; the deployed data collection technique should provide relevant and useful data to help in inferring conclusions. Wijnhoven and Brinkhuis (2015) stated that researchers conducting case study research examine multiple sources or methods to enrich the depth of collected data. After reviewing several qualitative research data collection techniques, I focused on two main data collection methods to meet the

methodological triangulation elements: semistructured interviews, company archives, and document review.

### **Semistructured Interviews**

I used semistructured interviews to get access to research participants and explore the successful talent management strategies that improved succession planning.

Researchers using the qualitative research method can use different interview designs: structured, semistructured, and unstructured interviews. Opie and Brown (2019) noted that researchers use the semistructured design to develop a balance between predefined research areas and the provision of some flexibility to expand the discussion on some areas based on participants' experiences. Moreover, semistructured interviews have the advantage of providing the researchers with the flexibility to probe further through supportive and secondary questions on specific areas.

The flexibility in semistructured interview design provides researchers space and time to probe in specific areas based on interview momentum and participants' engagement. An interview protocol enables researchers to comfort participants and allow them to engage openly and transparently in the interview process. I designed semistructured interviews with an open-ended questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument, individual face to face interviews were in 40 to 60 minutes' separate sessions. I audio recorded the interviews to capture data exchange during interviews, maintain a smooth flow of information, and to avoid distracting or interrupting participants due to data log and note-taking; further, I registered a log on behaviors concerning discussed topics.



The interview design can impact respondents' feedback. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that semistructured interviews allow researchers to adapt and adjust for unexpected setbacks during the interview yielding rich and meaningful data. Though researchers conducting semistructured interviews enjoy additional space and ability to expand the scope during the interview session, the process is well-defined and designed to enable participants to recognize research focus areas and prepare accordingly. The informed consent in semistructured interviews is a vital document that sets the interview guidelines and provides participants with enough space and time to raise any concerns before attending the interview.

Interview protocols reinforce the consent letter guidelines around participants' rights, interview process, interview timeline, and interview flow. Castillo-Montoya (2016) emphasized that the interview protocol helps researchers to maintain consistency and adhere to a standard approach with all participants. Castillo-Montoya added that developing a proper interview protocol is arduous, but it is a necessity to improve interview quality and its output. I organized a coordination call with participants before the interview sessions to reiterate participants' rights and confirm interview time and venue preferences to ensure minimal distraction during the interview process, and to confirm that participants afford the time for the full interview session. Moreover, I shared with participants the interview protocol to standardize the interview process and strengthen research reliability and validity (see Appendix B).

A proper interview environment is essential to collect rich data. The clarity of the informed consent document helps participants to establish a basic understanding of their

role in the research. Also, informed consent demonstrates to participants their rights and what to expect during the interview (see Appendix B). I explained to participants the note-taking process, in addition to writing down some notes, I audio recorded the interview, and I shared with the interviewees their answers' transcripts to ensure that I have captured their answers correctly. Moreover, I provided participants with a copy of my conclusions to check for consistency against their contributions and inputs as part of the member checking process.

### **Document Review**

The document review included examining organizations' reports, policies, and public documents to extract relevant data. I requested access to organizations' succession planning databases, including HR policies, training programs, and employees' assessment documents. The retrieved data from document review helped support the collected data through interviews, further, the contrast between data collected from interviews and document reviews was inspected to validate the need for further data collection in case there were obvious gaps. Yin (2014) stated that accessing sensitive information might be challenging. In this research, the nature of the research drills into HR information, which contained confidential information; therefore, documents' accessibility depends considerably on the researcher's ability to convince business leaders that the research will protect coded data and will destroy collected data after a stipulated time.

Researchers should be aware of potential challenges and shortfalls in document reviews as a data collection technique in addition to challenges in securing access to confidential documents (Yin, 2014). Toews et al. (2017) highlighted business leaders'

bias as a challenge; in particular, when researchers inquire about some documents' backgrounds, some business leaders might reflect limited perspectives to justify the need for irrelevant documents to support specific activities or decisions. Notwithstanding accessibility challenges, many organizations nowadays share policies openly, procedures, and successful deployment of internal leaders on their websites and published newsletters as part of their branding and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, other documents might be available in public and statistical reports. I treated all types of organizations' documents with the utmost confidentiality in an attempt to encourage business leaders to share research-relevant materials openly.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Data organization techniques are fundamental to integrate systematically collected data and maintain research integrity. Castleberry and Nolen (2018) stated that organizing data is essential for the research process. Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, and Gonzalez (2018) stated that data organization supports researchers to maintain focus on research questions. Furthermore, Abdalla et al. added that deploying proper data organization methods support researchers in managing diversified and large amounts of data that yield improved research precision and quality. I used Livescribe smart pen technology to record interviews and take notes simultaneously; the smart pen synchronizes the events' timeline between audio files and notes, which helped me to correlate specific observations and notes to relevant audio statements.

Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, and de Eyto (2018) stated that traditional data analysis tools combined with computer programs improve research rigor and support

building timelines, integrating notes and observations, and deriving research actions. I applied manual tools like sticky notes, color-coded paper notes, and research journals besides computer software to maintain a full research log. As a result, this combination helped me devise nodes, themes, timelines, and reference points. I utilized two main computer programs: Xmind and Qiqqa. Xmind program helped me establish research roadmap, links, connections, and derive research action plans, whereas the Qiqqa program served as the research organizer for articles. Utilizing Qiqqa software, I was able to organize the literature review in various orders and formats, which helped me in quick retrieval of specific references and articles. I ensured that deployed data organization tools are associated with data protection protocols.

Researchers shall deploy the proper tools to maintain participants' confidentiality. I planned to protect participants' identities by using an alphanumeric code; each participant had a unique code (i.e., P1, P2, P3, P4, etc.), while each document had a unique code to refer to the case and the document without identifying the case or document type (i.e., C1 D1, C1 D2, C2 D1, C3 D1, etc.). Moreover, I ensured that deployed research software-supported data confidentiality by having the functionality of storing material on external hard drive with secured-password access. Audio-recorded interviews help researchers capture the full interview while taking notes on remarks and observations; I stored all collected data on a password-protected external hard drive to protect participants from any harm. Moreover, I stored all hard-copy documents in a locked file cabinet in my house; I will destroy both soft and hard copy materials after a data retention period of 5 years in line with Walden University requirements.

## Data Analysis

The integration of numerous data sources is a distinguishing feature of qualitative case study research. Vaughn and Turner (2016) noted that data analysis in qualitative research establishes the research credibility and validity. Denzin (2012) explained that researchers deploy triangulation to enhance an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. Fusch, Fusch, and Ness (2018) noted four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) methodological triangulation. Fusch, Fusch, and Ness added that some researchers confuse data triangulation and methodological triangulation. Fusch and Ness (2015) and Wijnhoven and Brinkhuis (2015) noted that researchers apply methodological triangulation when they correlate data from several data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires, observations, documents, and archives to upgrade credibility. Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated that data triangulation occurs when researchers study the same event from three different points: people, time, and space, in an attempt to find similarities about the same event in various setups. Patton (1999) explained that theoretical triangulation is when researchers use multiple theories to interpret data, and investigator triangulation is when researchers use multiple investigators and analysts to interpret collected data. I used method triangulation to analyze semistructured interviews and organizations' documents and archives.

Data analysis includes identifying and classifying research relevant data. Proper data categorization helps researchers develop key themes, assemble and interpret data, and derive conclusions on the phenomenon under study. Morse (1994) identified four

cognitive stages for data analysis process: (a) comprehending, (b) synthesizing, (c) theorizing, and (d) recontextualizing, likewise, Yin (2014) identified five steps in data analysis: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpretation, and (e) conclusion. I managed to identify talent management and succession planning relevant material through extensive literature review, I color-coded relevant context, which helped me identify emerging themes, and recategorize articles accordingly. The final thematic analysis changed slightly after collecting my primary data. I uploaded collected data from interview transcripts, notes, and document reviews into NVivo software. NVivo software is one of the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software programs (CAQDAS) that helps researchers recognize patterns in codes and support producing thematic categories (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Vaughn & Turner, 2016). I utilized NVivo to categorize data based on preliminarily identified themes.

Moreover, I developed new themes using keywords searches and various text-search queries; this robust process produced a new thematic framework. I reprioritized themes, interpreted, and conceptualized data to derive conclusions on talent management strategies. I correlated emerging themes with the literature and conceptual framework to conclude alignment and contrast areas, moreover, and to ensure that my research is relevant to new articles, I revisited regularly literature review to correlate to newly published articles that correspond to identified themes.

## Reliability and Validity

### Reliability

Researchers should uphold research integrity by incorporating consistent research procedures. Yin (2014) noted that reliability, confirmability, internal validity, and validity constitute qualitative case study research integrity. Noble and Smith (2015) elaborated that research reliability assesses the consistency of data collection methods in varying settings and conditions which promotes credibility and trust in research findings, further, Leung (2015) added that research reliability is the ability to replicate the same research in a different setting.

To improve reliability, I deployed methodological triangulation by collecting data from semistructured interviews, archives, and document reviews (Wijnhoven & Brinkhuis, 2015). Moreover, Yin (2014) added that in order to improve research reliability, researchers should not have a preference for one or more data collection techniques. In an attempt to promote research reliability, I took note of all produced data before deciding their relevance to the research question.

Researchers must declare and isolate their bias on collected and interpreted data. Member checking assists researchers avoid any personal bias in interview data collection through altering responses or adding personal perspectives (Birt et al., 2016). To address consistency, I deployed member checking to address data dependability through providing participants with a draft of my conclusions and requesting for participants' feedback on consistency in line with their contributions; also, I ensured that the interview protocol (see Appendix B) demonstrated the exact steps that I followed in all interviews

(Castillo-Montoya, 2016). As a result, I ensured that the interview steps were clear for all participants to ensure a consistent interview process in all interview sessions. Further, I did not introduce any additional and different questions in the interview (see Appendix C).

### **Validity**

Researchers deploying qualitative research studies should integrate a research validation structure in their research design. Hadi and José Closs (2015) stated that research validity is present in research credibility, transferability, and confirmability. Hadi and José Closs referred to research credibility as research's internal validity. Further, Bergh, Sharp, Aguinis, and Li (2017) noted that research credibility is the researchers' ability to record participants' perspectives on research phenomenon without researchers' judgment on data collection and interpretation. I aimed to improve research credibility by establishing a clear interview protocol. Furthermore, I shared transcribed data with respective participants to ensure I have captured their contributions without any impairment.

Confirmability is a research design criterion to ensure researchers do not compromise data collection (Amankwaa, 2016). To improve conformability, researchers should have the ability to retain and interpret data without any personal biases. The study question explored sensitive information about organizations and employees, which requires comforting participants that their identifications were protected to encourage participation and improve reliability. I targeted to document data findings using manual and automated tools; also, I ensured storing data records in a safe cabinet for 5 years.



Transferability is the ability to replicate the research and conclude similar findings in a different setting. Hales (2016) referred to transferability as research's external validity, Bergh et al. (2017) added that external validity is the ability to induce study findings in other locations, times, and groups. I intend to retain records of data analysis, themes, nodes, notes, details, and patterns to exhibit research transferability. Detailed data logs can provide scholars with proper tools to apply research findings to test research validity in a different context.

### **Transition and Summary**

The purpose of this research was to explore talent management strategies that business leaders use to improve succession planning. The data collection instruments for this multiple case study were semistructured interviews, document review, and organization archives in six MNCs in the Southeast Asia region. The interview protocol document explained to participants their rights due to engaging in this research. Furthermore, Section 2 provided some details on activities I deployed to enhance research validity and reliability, including a structured procedure for data collection and data organization, full adherence to IRB approval, member checking, methodological triangulation, data storage protocol, and data disposal mechanisms. I present in Section 3 my findings, including relevance to practical application and conceptual framework; moreover, I address the implication for social change and explain recommendations for future research based on research conclusion.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In this study, I addressed talent development strategies MNCs business leaders use to improve succession planning in the Southeast Asia region. I present in this section an overview of the study findings. This section also includes the applications of this research to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, further study, and research reflections, followed by the research conclusion.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore talent development strategies MNCs business leaders use to improve succession planning in the Southeast Asia region. Conducting thematic data analysis for six semistructured interviews and deploying methodological triangulation through reviewing organizational documents and archives resulted in three emergent themes that facilitated studying talent development strategies MNC business leaders use to improve succession planning: (a) organizational culture is pivotal for talent development, (b) talent identification and development strategies, and (c) Strategic HRM is fundamental for succession planning.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

One central research question guided this study: What talent development strategies do successful business leaders of MNCs use to improve succession planning? The participants in this study were six MNC business leaders in the Southeast Asia region with more than 10 years of professional experience in organizational talent management or succession planning activities. Four male and two female business leaders in two main age groups participated in the study: two participants were 40–50 years old, and four

participants were above 50 years old. Among the job titles and positions the participants were holding were managing directors, learning and development managers, HR director, and business leaders. Other sources of data included organizational documents and archives. The participants identified the organizational culture and its impact on talent management as the predominant theme, followed by talent identification and development strategies. The ability to identify and develop talents linked to the third theme, strategic HRM. The themes related to the conceptual framework and literature reviewed in this research, the three emerging themes from the analysis of the collected data emerged: (a) organizational culture is pivotal for talent development, (b) talent identification and development strategies, and (c) Strategic HRM is fundamental for succession planning.

### **Theme 1: Organizational Culture is Pivotal for Talent Development**

The first theme was the organizational culture and how it can accommodate talent management strategies. All participants linked an accommodating organizational culture theme to three subthemes: (a) effective succession planning, (b) organizational structure and maturity, and (c) employees' empowerment and engagement (see Table 1). All participants indicated that succession plans helped in retaining organizational values and culture through developing and promoting internal talent and minimizing external recruitment which might resist some of the existing organizational values, P5 stated, "It is easier to maintain the organization's culture and values with succession planning instead of recruiting from outside."

Table 1

*Theme 1: Organizational Culture is Pivotal for Talent Development*

| Subthemes                             | Participants | Documents | References |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Succession planning strategies        | 6            | 3         | 118        |
| Organizational structure and maturity | 6            | 4         | 73         |
| Employees' empowerment and engagement | 4            | 3         | 21         |

**Succession planning strategies.** The participants indicated that succession plans are required to address changes in employee demographics and knowledge retention; moreover, succession planning can help address organizations' sustainability through providing future leaders to refill vacant positions and support organizations' growth plans. P2 stated, "Business leaders are deploying succession planning to develop novel skills in future leaders such as artificial intelligence and manufacturing 4.0." All participants highlighted that growth strategies without reliable succession plan would entail high reliance on external recruitment which might be associated with high recruitment and training costs; moreover, one participant explained that they tracked succession planning financial impact profits, P6 stated, "The longer you retain and grow your staff, the better the profit you have in the bank." To maximize succession planning benefits, business leaders need to incorporate succession planning in organizations' cultures.

Business leaders need to ensure developing organizational culture to support talent management strategies is mandatory to embed succession planning as a desired process and a sustainability objective. P5 stated,

Our culture is built on the strong belief to develop internal candidates; it is seen as a sign of failure if the organization had to look outside to refill new or existing positions; it simply reflects how successful or not is our succession planning.

Business leaders need to appreciate that proper succession planning strategies are not enough on their own; business leaders need to integrate succession planning in the organizations' culture and values to ensure these strategies deliver the anticipated results.

**Correlation to the literature.** The subtheme of having a supportive organizational culture to deliver on succession planning confirmed the findings in the existing literature on succession planning. Organizational culture strategies include talent training and development, career progression opportunities, in-house coaching, and mentoring programs, and compensation (Jones, 2019; Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019). The strength of organizational culture and its design can determine organizations' ability to develop reliable succession planning that supports organizations to grow during leadership transitions. Loomes et al. (2019) added that succession planning benefits go beyond having access to a pipeline of talents, succession planning helps business leaders to retain knowledge, preserve culture, and save on recruitment costs. Business leaders need to deploy effective succession planning strategies as part of an overall organization's culture of supporting and developing talents.

**Organizational structure and maturity.** The participants revealed that organizational structure, size, and maturity of the organization have an impact on talent development strategies. All participants noted that they have varying succession planning pipelines in different countries due to the stability and maturity of local managements

despite that all business units use the same tools and strategies. P4 stated, “We have more talent in Malaysia because we are an old company, but in other countries where we are relatively new, we do not have as many.” While organizational structure might refer to the conventional and standard hierarchical structure, a review of the employee handbook of P4’s organization revealed that new employees could elect to follow a managerial or a technical structure after spending 3 years in the organization. P4 explained that catering to employees' growth in technical fields using a technical ladder helped the organization foster talent in technical fields without the need for them to manage teams and have reporting lines; as a result, the organization was able to retain and nurture technical talent. P3 and P5 emphasized that some high potential employees might still leave their organizations despite having effective talent development programs due to the lack of technical organizational structures.

Some business leaders and managers have addressed high talent employees’ preferences by developing two different hierarchal ladders, the technical and managerial career ladders, where employees and based on their aspirations can grow their careers and remuneration on different aspects. I reviewed an organizational document at P4’s organization titled *Developing Employee Career Paths and Ladders* and gained an understanding of the traditional and nontraditional career progression employees can choose from including tractional vertical ladder, horizontal ladders, and dual-career ladders. Furthermore, I noted that the document titled *Developing Employee Career Paths and Ladders* demonstrated the different roles that employees, managers, business leaders, and HR managers play in developing talent in multiple ladders organizations.

Multinational corporations with a wide geographical footprint have a compelling advantage for employees seeking international assignments. P4 noted that global succession planning is incentivizing many employees to engage in global talent development programs to grow their skills and qualify for international assignments, P4 said,

China has been open for international trade for many years; we have five factories in China where we have a Malaysian as the General Manager in one of them; also, the Vice President who is managing the five plants is a Malaysian, the other factories are managed by local management.

Employees' increased mobility is becoming integral to the main criteria in succession planning prerequisites with a growing acceptance from ambitious employees. P6 noted that cross-border internal talent development plans depend on established synergies between ambitious employees and the opportunity nature even if that required relocating, P6 stated as an example, "We have a Singaporean country manager in Hong Kong, he started as a sales consultant in Singapore, but was among the high potential staff, he has been running the Hong Kong business successfully for the last 5 years." MNC business leaders need to ensure that they communicate their global succession plans adequately to encourage talented employees to take part in various global career prospects.

Some organizations have well-structured and robust succession plan strategies that are aligned to proper talent management strategies; however, business leaders have competing thoughts on the appropriateness of communicating these strategies openly and

with full transparency to all employees. P3 stated, “In my communication, I tell all employees where they sit from the succession plan, but there's no guarantee, and it depends on available job positions.” P5 added, “We have a worldwide talent pool, it is global... you can pull up this data on individuals, and you can see everything, it is very transparent.” On the other end, P6 highlighted the risk of full transparency of succession planning since some employees might be overwhelmed with full disclosure and may decide to leave due to emotional stress. Business leaders need to weigh their options when they assess what and how to share succession plans.

Some business leaders believe that all employees should be aware of all talent management programs and the outcome of succession planning; this would help managing expectations and incentivizing ambitious employees to take part in these strategies. By contrast, some business leaders have a tendency not to disclose all details on succession plans, the employees taking part in it, and when the identified employees will be ready to take on the new appointments. P3 and P5 justified that raising expectations on succession planning readiness becomes an unwritten contract that promotions are due by specific dates. The risk increases when failing to promote on promised time evolves to a credibility issue between nominated employees and the management, eventually impacting the succession planning credibility and jeopardizing its presence and value.

**Correlation to the literature.** The subtheme of organizational structure and maturity connected to existing literature. Whysall et al. (2019) highlighted how talent pipelines are becoming stretched thin in new industries or technologies; moreover,



Harsch and Festing (2020) added that large and stable multinational organizations have far more advanced and sophisticated talent management strategies when compared to SMEs and family businesses. The organizational structure has a direct impact on talent management strategies and succession planning. From their end, Harsch and Festing (2020) noted how organization structure affects organizations' agility and ability to manage talent pipelines. Harsch and Festing noted that flat and simple structures help business leaders manage individualized talent development programs. Conversely, large organizations with clearly defined processes provide business leaders the ability to manage sophisticated talent management programs. Finally, Tucker (2020) highlighted the positive impact of transparency on succession planning through providing access to succession planning information, tools, and measures; however, Tucker warned that business leaders need to decide the level of transparency on final plans and confidential information to maintain leadership credibility without impacting succession plan effectiveness.

**Employees' empowerment and engagement.** All participants revealed that business leaders need to empower and engage their employees in additional assignments to support talent management programs and help develop a succession planning pipeline. P1 noted that the engaging employees in new assignments help identify their potential and sharpen their skills beyond standard activities, P1 stated, "You have to give people a chance to open up, and you have to give people a chance to participate." P5 supported this view by expressing that additional assignments could enrich a learning culture among employees, which exposes talented employees to demonstrate new skills that qualify

them to take part in succession planning. Moreover, employees who are passionate about their development and transformation are usually more engaged with their development programs, and they take full ownership of presented opportunities in succession planning. P1 noted, “You will note that your team is fully engaged in your succession plan when you find them concerned about the company’s well-being and the availability of the proper leaders.” While employee empowerment and engagement could be a generic attribute of organizational cultures and practiced at different levels and in various applications, the review of an administrative document at P5’s organization, *Rotational Development Program*, confirmed that business leaders could develop programs that trigger employees engagement by providing a platform that enabled employees to embark on different functions, activities, and responsibilities in an attempt to discover their career passion and where they would eventually excel.

## **Theme 2: Talent Identification and Development Strategies**

The second theme was talent identification and talent development strategies. Participants identified various roles business leaders play in driving talent management strategies; business leaders need to introduce and manage the proper tools to identify talents; also, they have to design and drive the appropriate talent development strategies to support succession planning to prepare talents to fill future leadership positions. All participants embarked on coaching as an emerging and effective talent development tool (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Theme 2: Talent Identification and Development Strategies*

| Subthemes                     | Participants | Documents | References |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Talent identification tools   | 6            | 6         | 93         |
| Coaching                      | 5            | 4         | 57         |
| Talent development strategies | 5            | 3         | 43         |

The participants indicated that they use different tools to help group talents based on the required skills and talents to move up in the hierarchy. It was evident that P3 and P5 were not clear on how these tools are designed, and if these tools need to be recalibrated. P2 stated, “I am satisfied with the talent development programs we have, but also reflective in a way if I had to go back 3 years, and do it all over again, then I would do it differently. So much good came out of it, but I not yet 100% satisfied, there is room to improve.” On the other end, both P4 and P6 were confident that corporate libraries contained the appropriate tools to support in talent development programs, both participants justified their high confidence in MNCs’ tools based on the variety of the available tools, and the achieved satisfactory results with completed talent development programs. I reviewed an organizational document at P3’s organization titled *Our Talent Programs*, which demonstrated the various assessment tools that business leaders can use at the workplace to cater for different types of talents, these assessment programs can help validate the talented employees’ potential and where they fit in the organization before further investments on additional and customized training.

**Talent identification tools.** Participants considered that proper talent identification tools are paramount for any succession plan. Among other tools, all

participants demonstrated that they predominately deploy the nine-box matrix to map employees' performance and their potential (see Figure 1). P3 stated, "We identify talents using the nine-box grid. We focus on high performance and high potential as the main tool, mainly the top three corner boxes focus on key positions." Though all participants agreed that the nine-box matrix is a simple and practical tool to map talents, not all business leaders applied the tool the same way; some business leaders applied the model only on employees holding key positions.

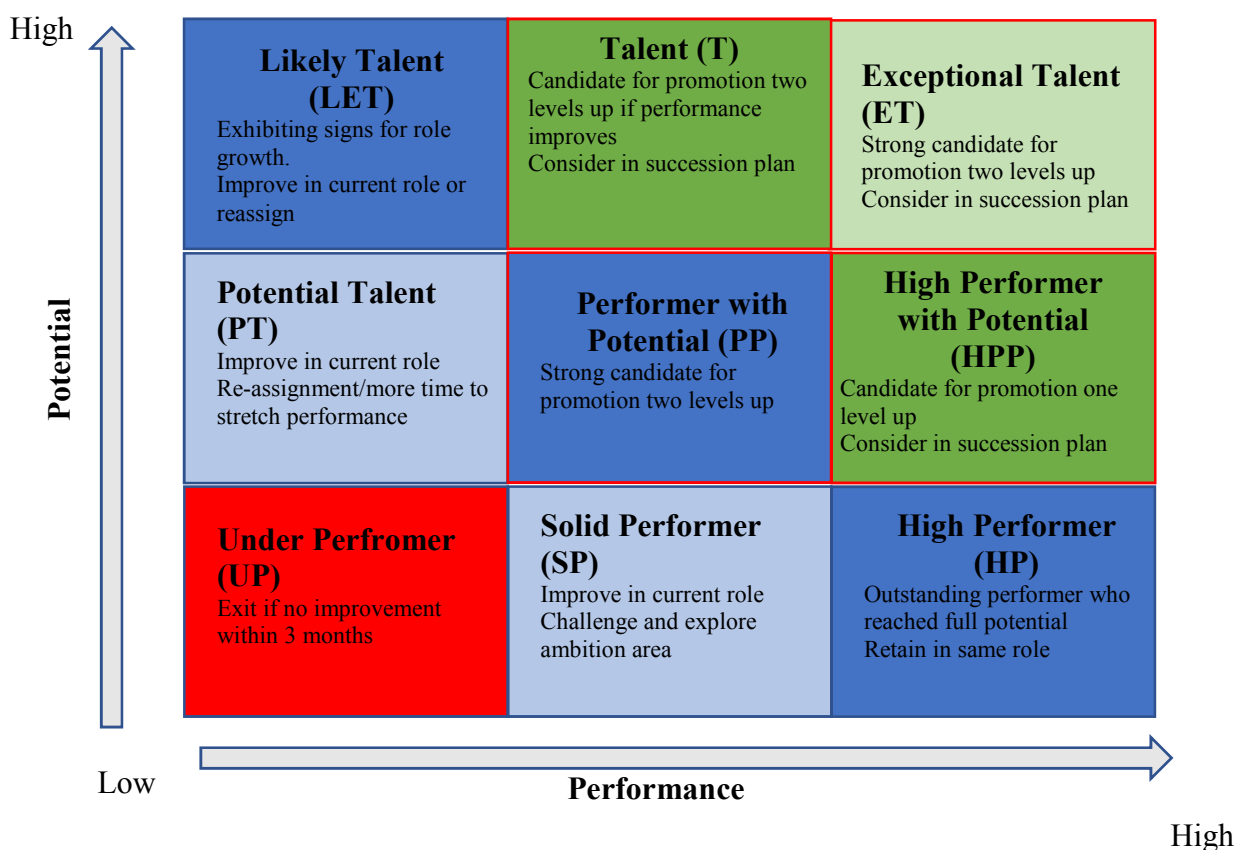


Figure 1. Reprinted nine-box matrix C4D1 with permission from P4.

Conversely, other business leaders applied it to all employees. Some participants explained how they map all positions and the required skills on the nine-box matrix.

Mapping job holders and required skill set on the nine-box matrix can map and produce gap assessment between talents and the different positions. P4 noted that they had modified the standard nine-box matrix to measure talent's 'Uniqueness' instead of 'Potential' and 'Value' instead of 'Performance' to align with organizational objectives and vision (see Figure 2).

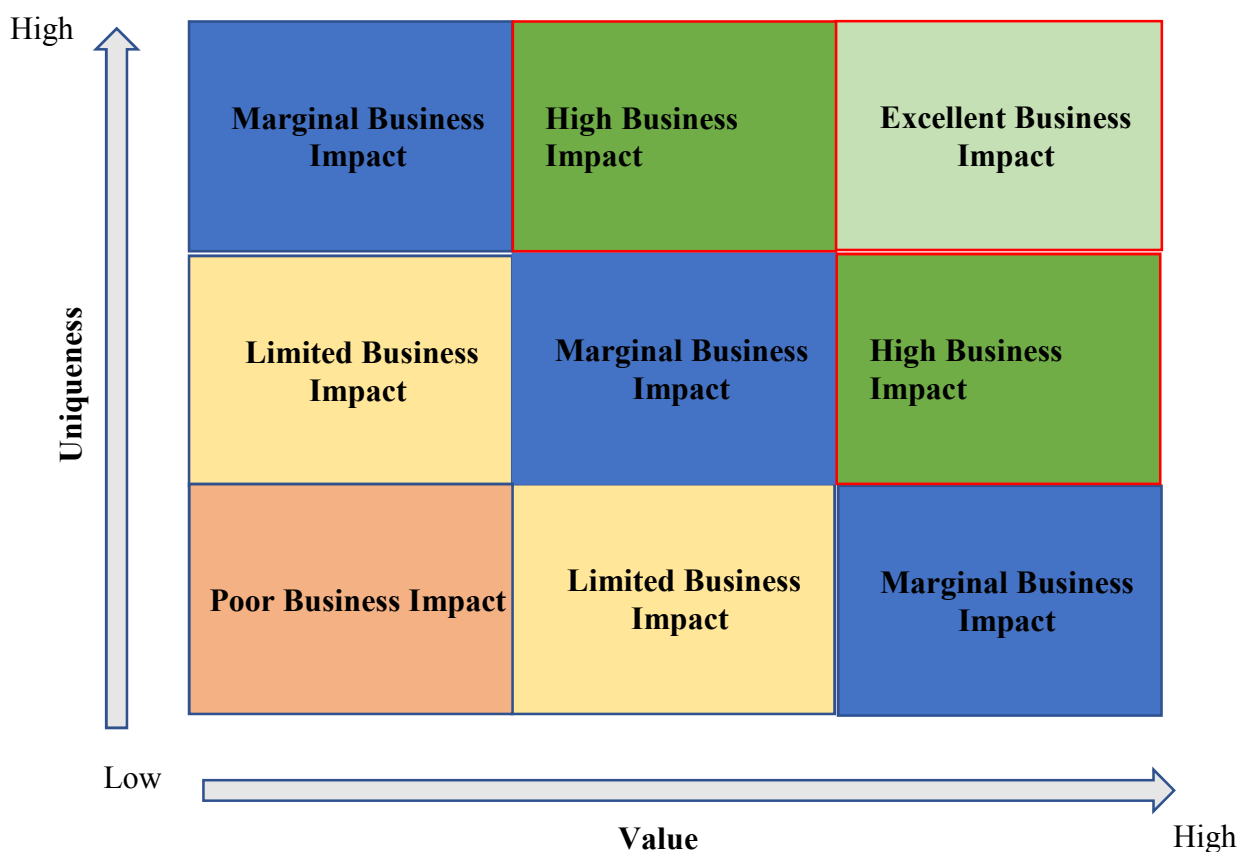


Figure 2. Reprinted nine-box matrix C3D1 with permission from P3.

Another interesting application was setting a targeted percentage of total employees in the different boxes in the nine-box matrix, P5 explained that this application helps business leaders to maintain the right balance between the required development for the key positions and to replace poor performers. P4 demonstrated how

to integrate the nine-box matrix with a bell curve analysis to categorize employees in three levels: future leaders, average employees entitled for development plans, and employees to replace. P4 shared the *2019 talent assessment document*; the results of the assessment, using bell curve analysis, indicated that out of the total 135 assessed employees, 26 employees were high potential and labeled as future leaders (around 19%), 23 employees (17%) were poor performers and labeled as employees to replace, and the remaining 81 employees were average employees and tagged as employees entitled for development plans.

Business leaders use the bell curve to produce a distribution curve with a meaningful comparative view for the same group of employees as a means of benchmarking individual results to the group's performance. P4 noted that they targeted 20% of the employees to form their next senior leadership succession planning, and the remaining 80% of the employees are either on performance development plans or identified for replacement (see Figure 3). P4 stated, "We have the bell curve, the top 20, the bottom 20, and the middle 60, So normally [*sic*] who goes into the succession planning is the top 20."

Performance assessment and mapping are widely-used tools to assess talents beyond their core activities and align with targeted succession planning strategy. P2 noted that external evaluations are usually more independent, unbiased, and sophisticated. Business leaders prefer external assessments when the HR team and internal assessors are limited in time and resources; however, external assessments can be overwhelming and might not be able to address all business needs due to their standard

designs. P6 stated, “They first went on an external assessment journey, and that in itself was apprehensive, there was a bit of tension, and then the next part of the journey is that they all go through the customized development plan.”

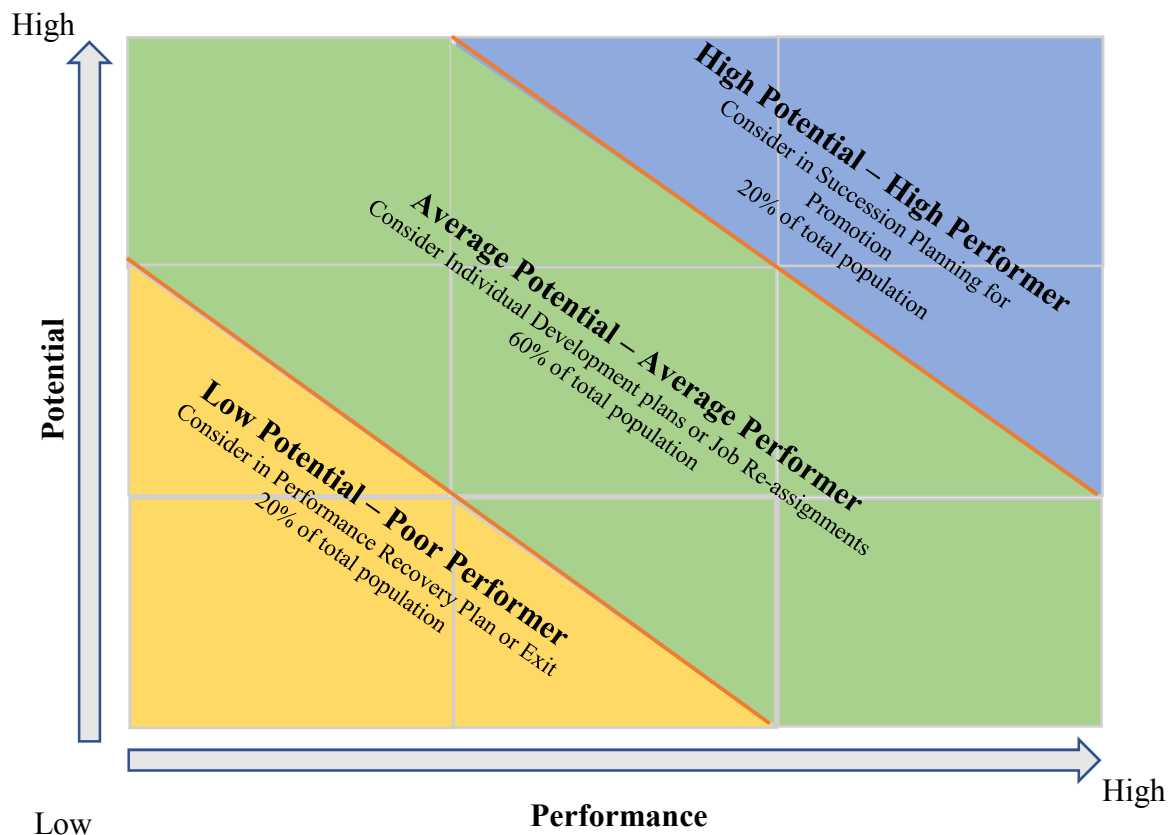


Figure 3. Reprinted nine-box with Bell curve targets C2D1 with permission from P2.

To achieve better alignment, and in particular, for senior positions, some business leaders demand customized assessments to ensure full alignment to succession plan requirements; moreover, business leaders can demand customized development plans in response to gap assessment output and fill specific roles. P6 stated, “We have done a customized assessment, and then customized development plans [*sic*] they will still be some customization based on our needs.”

**Correlation to the literature.** The adoption of the nine-box matrix to identify talent links to previous studies. Stephanie and Sarno (2019) noted that there are various identification tools such as the talent identification matrices, the K-nearest neighbors method, the C4.5 algorithm method, and the Support Vector Machine (SVM) classification method. However, Stephanie and Sarno noted that the nine-box matrix and its various versions, which was adopted by General Electric in the 1970s, remain the most practiced employee assessment tool. Tyskbo (2019) noted that the nine-box matrix has the limitation of identifying the potential and the performance of only those who are listed in the matrix and not all employees. Unless business leaders include all employees in the nine-box matrix, there is a probability of missing some talents because business leaders did not include them in the matrix in the first place.

Business leaders need to adopt the most appropriate talent assessment tool to ensure proper talent identification and assessment. Talent assessment tools vary from simple internal workplace tools like written or oral exercises, assignments, and additional responsibilities, to more sophisticated tools like personality profiling and psychometric testing like Personal Profile Analysis (PPA), Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Emotional Intelligence (EI) tests, Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) and Emotional and Social Intelligence (ESI) assessment models (Naib, 2019). The argument on internal versus external assessment is linked to existing literature. Robledo-Ardila and Roman-Calderon (2020) warned that many internal and in-house developed assessment tools might lack validity and reliability and may result in improper assessments.



The technological and IT advancement are impacting various business aspects, including HR tools. Business leaders and HR managers need to deploy artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing talent assessment tools their efficiencies through analyzing multiple factors on employee's performance and over extended periods. Altemeyer (2019) highlighted that employers could deploy (AI) talent assessment that can efficiently pinpoint skills set gap against specific attributes of certain jobs. Stephanie and Sarno (2019) highlighted that the manual management of talent assessment matrices and tools were highly subjective, which could impact the accuracy and reliability of the talent identification tools. On the other hand, Zhang et al. (2020) stated that business leaders integrating artificial intelligence in analyzing employees' large-scale data, known as Time Intelligence Management Systems (TIMS) could grow business leaders' trust levels in talent assessment and identification tools benefit due to unbiased talent assessment findings.

**Coaching.** All participants highlighted that coaching is evolving in the business arena and becoming an effective talent management strategy. Though all participants indicated that they had deployed some kind of coaching as part of talent development, it is noteworthy that the participants had inconsistent perceptions of coaching and its applicability. P2 noted that coaching is evolving to a core organizational competency; P2 stated, "We have worked in a very strategic and structured way to develop coaching as one of our core competencies within our teams and leaders." Some business leaders embrace coaching as the preferred management style, P4 explained how coaching is developing to become a leadership style, "Coaching is not a talent development tool

anymore; if you master coaching, it will never appear as a tool, but it becomes your leadership style.” In addition to various coaching application techniques, business leaders adopt numerous coaching delivery mechanisms.

Some organizations work with external certified coaching consultants to devise an organizational coaching material and qualify internal coaches. P5 demonstrated how they had developed proper coaching protocols, including a pool of certified internal coaches, a pipeline of coachees, coaching contracts, and coaching KPIs. On the other end, other organizations believe that external coaching is more effective. P4 highlighted that they had tried both internal and external coaching; eventually, they qualified external coaching to be more effective due to its formal setup and structured protocol. P6 praised internal coaching and how it can address local business needs, P6 stated,

About 28 of our leaders are certified coaches that we want to deploy in talent development programs; also, we had recently curated an internal coaching program to align with our objectives.

The advantage of external coaching is that it is a standalone and unbiased process that can bring fresh business perspective and challenge status quo, on the other end, internal coaching exhibits a better understanding of coaching areas due to coaches' better understanding of the coachees and their organizations' objectives. Despite the advantages of internal coaching, but internal coaches are usually less experienced and not as specialized as external coaches; also, internal coaches have a higher tendency to be biased, while internal coachees might not be as open and transparent as they are with external coaches.

All participants acknowledged coaching to be an effective tool for talented employees to challenge norms, adopt new behaviors, and grow their skills; however, P6 warned that coaching is not appropriate for all situations and that other tools might be more appropriate in some situations. Moreover, P6 added that coaching might not be suitable for all employees, “When we first embraced coaching, we erroneously put all our staff just on coaching, horrific, terrible. Not everybody can be coached, sometimes people want to be coached, and some don't.” P2 explained that they embarked on an assignment to deploy coaching as a business management protocol where business leaders use coaching in their day-to-day operations, P2 shared an organizational document on coaching titled, *Coaching Certification Program*. The document illustrated the process for nominated employees to become certified coaches, including approved training houses, required coaching hours, and how internal coaches can take part in internal coaching training programs.

Coaching requires a high level of trust and openness between coaches and coachees. P5 highlighted that it is not enough to have qualified coaches to run talent development programs. P2 emphasized that it is not enough for business leaders to introduce coaching as a talent development strategy. To deploy successful talent development coaching, business leaders need to follow up on execution, review results, and, if required, introduce changes to enhance coaching delivery.

**Correlation to the literature.** The findings on talent development strategies are linked to the existing literature in that business leaders need to distinguish between high performers and high potential employees to enable devising proper talent development

strategies. Downs (2015) noted that business leaders need to distinguish between high performers and high potential employees to ensure that the deployed talent development strategies are effective. Karadas and Karatepe (2019) added that high potential employees are capable of developing new skills and take leadership positions. Tomcikova and Coculova (2020) linked talent management to succession planning when they defined talent as the high-performance employee who has the potential to grow in the future and take part in the succession plan.

Furthermore, the existing literature addressed coaching as one of the effective talent development tools. Hanley Business School (as cited in Gan et al., 2020) highlighted that business leaders consider coaching on top of leadership development tools and that 83% of business leaders are interested in deploying coaching for senior managers' development. Taconis (2018) noted that coaching helped high potential to improve their self-image, grow their skills, and enable them to fill leadership positions successfully. Business leaders can deploy various types of coaching based on organizations' needs. Kowalski (2020) stated that external coaching could become cost prohibiting while internal coaching might be ineffective due to the risk of compromised confidentiality, Kowalski noted that business leaders could opt to develop internal certified coaches or equip leaders with basic coaching tools and skills to grow their staff. Finally, Gan et al. (2020) noted that engaged coachees who strongly believe in coaching as a personal growth tool will benefit most from executive coaching and can grow their skills. Business leaders have the responsibility to decide on the appropriateness of coaching delivery to maximize its benefits.

**Talent development strategies.** All participants noted that their talent development plans should align with the succession plan to ensure full deployment of talent management strategies. Though all interviewed participants adopted some talent development tools, however, except for coaching, there was no outstanding tool that was prevailing in all organizations; this justifies that talent development tools should align to business nature and other factors such as the number of trainees, training budgets, and the maturity of the HRM strategies. Among these tools, participants highlighted that apprenticeship, mentoring, and performance scorecards are among the top tools they have used to develop talents to meet succession plan requirements. P2 and P3 noted that apprenticeship programs worked best when fresh graduates joined for upskilling programs, which helped talented graduates to test their abilities and demonstrate their potential without full contractual obligations. P5 referred to the online published apprenticed program titled *Find your Place*; the program focuses on tailor-made and customized programs to attract talents at varying age groups to join the apprenticeship program with a chance to collect a full-time job offer. Apprenticeship programs can be a low cost, real-world assessment tool for future employees.

Mentoring is one of the tools that is focused on a specific skill and is usually delivered by internal business experts and knowledgeable leaders. Some business leaders deploy mentoring to upskill talents and to share knowledge between different generations, in particular, decoding and transferring tacit knowledge from business experts as part of a knowledge management program. P5 praised mentoring to bridge the gap between different generations at the workplace, P5 stated, “Mentoring is more of

guidance and experience sharing, normally, it is the top-level leadership where you ask for advice.”

In addition to apprenticeship and mentoring, some participants mentioned that the performance scorecard that is derived from organizational values and objectives is one of the tools that business leaders use to measure and assess performance and identify talents. Business leaders implementing performance scorecards can align employees with their collective organizational goals and individual KPIs. P6 stated, “We curated our own performance map and our own scorecards that have provided alignment in behavior from the senior leadership right down to the corporate staff.”

**Correlation to the literature.** The acknowledgment of talent development strategies was identified in the existing literature. Li et al. (2019) noted that talent management strategies should align to organizational objectives through best-fit approach rather than standard applications; moreover, Li et al. indicated that talent management strategies are evident in five application areas: (a) Talent management R&D through validating existing talent strategies, and developing new approaches and strategies, (b) Practicing talent management through selection and hiring, (c) Training and development strategies, (e) Performance management, and (d) Talent retention. Further, Malik and Lenka (2019) acknowledged that mentoring supports talent development in three areas: (a) personal and professional growth, (b) psychological support, and (c) interaction and emulation of a role model. Similar to the study findings, existing literature did not promote any talent development tool to be the prevailing talent development tool that business leaders should use.

### **Theme 3: Strategic HRM is Fundamental for Succession Planning**

The third theme was that strategic HRM is fundamental for succession planning. All participants qualified strategic HRM as a necessity in sponsoring talent management and succession planning. Strategic HRM included three main subthemes: (a) training eagerness, (b) recruitment and retention strategies, and (c) employer branding and its impact on external talent (see Table 3). The participants suggested that HRM strategies can determine if talent management strategies are efficient in delivering targeted results.

Table 3

#### *Theme 3: Strategic HRM is Fundamental for Succession Planning*

| Subthemes                                       | Participants | Documents | References |
|---|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Training eagerness                              | 6            | 6         | 51         |
| External recruitment versus internal promotions | 5            | 4         | 35         |
| Employer branding                               | 4            | 3         | 10         |

The theme of strategic HRM confirmed the findings in existing literature in that a well-established HR strategy is vital to developing successful talent management strategies and link to succession planning. Tomcikova and Coculova (2020) noted that talent management and development are evolving to become the fastest-growing streams in HRM. Incorporating proper HR strategies can have a direct impact on organizations' succession planning tools to identify, retain, attract, and develop talents. Tomcikova and Coculova (2020) stated that talent identification and development are becoming demanding and challenging human resource management activities. Proper HRM strategies are the building blocks on which succession planning and talent management

strategies can function; without a strong HR foundation, it will be difficult for business leaders to focus on talented employees' development.

**Training eagerness.** All participants highlighted that business leaders' willingness and eagerness to design and implement a training agenda contribute to succession planning effectiveness. P2 established a direct link between effective training and succession planning and learning and development activities linked to qualifying future internal leaders, P2 stated, "Nine times out of 10, and because of training and upskilling, we are finding future leaders within our own people."

Some business leaders mandate to have a dedicated learning and development team (L&D) to design, develop, lead, and deliver on training plans. P3 and P2 referred to the importance of having (L&D) functions if business leaders are sincere about training. P2 stated, "We have developed the training unit to build internal capacity." However, (L&D) staff would need to collect alignment, empowerment, and authority from business leaders to deliver successfully on their development programs. P3 highlighted that regardless of how developed organizations' training programs, the success of these initiatives would depend to a large extent on business leaders' desire to pursue a training plan in their organizations genuinely.

Business leaders need to pursue long term talent development programs as part of organizations' sustainability and business continuity strategies; otherwise, business leaders might cut off or reduce training budgets during financial distress or budget cuts. P6 added that business leaders who compromise on training budgets are usually short-sighted. Business leaders should treat training budgets as cost centers and not as financial



investments; otherwise, investments are linked to payback analysis, which might confuse some business leaders on the return in investment analysis. P6 implied that there is an indirect link between training and profits, and best represented in cause and effect relationship. P4 noted that some business leaders establish minimum training hours for their staff to elevate training importance. P3 added, “We value training, we will send you overseas for training without many conditions, we have a budget for training every year, this makes us an attractive brand for talent and an excellent retention tool.”

However, P1 highlighted that linking training to retention strategies might get some business leaders to limit training budgets or beneficiaries, P1 explained that stretching training on multiple phases could address the risk of employees leaving after collecting training, P2 emphasized on the train the trainer programs where an organization can still deliver continuous training on a broad scale and extend timeframe within controlled budgets. I reviewed an organizational document shared by P4 titled, *Organization Learning Model*, the document embraced the 70-20-10 learning model, where 70% of the training is on the job learning, 20% is based on one-on-one coaching and feedback, and the remaining 10% constituted the external and formal training. Also, P5 referred to his/her leadership team’s commitment to training through the organization’s published program called *The Junior Managers Program*, where the business leaders focused on developing managerial skills for junior staff, enabling them to assume bigger responsibilities as part of employees’ development plans.

**Correlation to the literature.** The findings on business leaders’ eagerness on training and talent development are linked to existing literature. Urbancová et al. (2020)

noted that business leaders and human resource managers have to grow learning and development function as a critical priority and a significant part of organizations' sustainability strategies. Moreover, Self et al. (2019) argued that business leaders treat training as a long-term investment, which might limit its assessment on financial payback. Business leaders need to expand training effectiveness criteria to include nonfinancial matrices.

**External recruitment versus internal promotions.** All participants noted that successful recruitment strategies associate with succession planning. P4 stated that talent identification starts during recruitment, and that poor selection will not contribute to promoting future leaders and can jeopardize succession planning pipelines. Future leaders readiness is one of the challenging areas to maintain active succession plan; if many potential future leaders are ready with limited open opportunities, then this might create frustration and pressure due to slowing down succession planning deliverables, P4 explained the need to timeline synchronize between external recruitment plans and succession planning readiness. Moreover, P4 highlighted that succession plans should indicate when talent development programs will be over, and when the identified talented employees will be ready to take up new roles.

Conversely, if business leaders did not prepare enough future leaders ready to take up new openings, then organizations would have to rely on external recruitment to fill leadership positions. P3 stated, "We have to consider our internal recruits before we open up the search for external people." P3 supported this view and stated, "Ready later can be 2 years and can be as long as 5 years. Ready now means that they can immediately

take up the positions.” Regardless of talented employees’ readiness to take leadership positions, P3 emphasized the importance of setting targets for external recruitment versus internal refills. P3 stated, “The percentage of people that I fill up inhouse through an internal succession plan against external recruitment should be 70% to 30%.” P6 highlighted the need for the appropriate balance between the internal development of talent and external recruitment. Moreover, P2 and P3 noted that having a constant influx of external talent helps in importing new skills, diversified knowledge, and build up an effective succession planning pipeline. P3 stated, “If I have huge retention, then that will not be good for me either, because I will not be able to inject fresh blood.”

**Employer branding.** The participants identified that talent development strategies could impact organizations’ employer branding. P3 noted how talented employees value training, and how strong talent development programs with strong succession planning attracts the right caliber to join. Moreover, improved employer branding can attract new talents to join and encourage internal talents to participate in organizations’ succession planning actively. P3 expressed that talent focus is becoming a valuable tool to attract and retain talents. New workforce generations appreciate the growing attention and focus on talent development strategies when they are assessing job opportunities, P3 supported his/her statement on employer branding with a newsletter titled *2016 Attracting the Best and the Brightest*, the newsletter demonstrated through a questionnaire design the reasons that P3’s organization is attractive for job seekers, the newsletter reflected that more than 60% of the hires are direct recruits which exhibited job seekers’ high demand to join this organization and how the organizational culture is

appropriate for millennials. Moreover, P5 noted, “Talent development programs are more valuable than money [*sic*] some organizations can always pay more, but not all can compete in talent development easily.”

**Correlation to the literature.** The findings on external recruitment versus internal promotions and employer branding subthemes relate to existing literature, Marinakou (2019) noted that business leaders need to develop their recruitment strategies to identify and attract new talents to enrich their succession planning pipeline. Also, Nayak et al. (2018) stated that talent management strategies, including talent development, retention, and acquisition, form an integral part of organizations' employer branding strategies. Moreover, Ibrahim and AlOmari (2020) noted that the organization's reputation as a competitive employer attracts talent to join and take advantage of talent development programs.

### **Findings Related to the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Burns (1978) transformational leadership theory. Burns (1978) noted that transactional leadership provided the foundation for transformational leadership theory. Bass and Avolio (1993) highlighted that the integration of transactional and transformational leadership models promoted transformational leaders' ability to act in a transactional mode if needed. Bass (1985) exploited Burns's leadership model through differentiating transformational leaders' characteristics into the following four leadership concepts: (a) individual consideration, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Northouse (2015) defined transformational leadership as attending to

followers' needs and motives in pursuit of organizational growth. The relevance of the transformational leadership to understand talent management strategies and support succession planning embodies the findings of this study. Transformational leaders sponsor followers' development and growth to achieve organizational goals (Pandey, Davis, Pandey, & Peng, 2016). I applied the lens of transformational leadership theory to explore talent management strategies that business leaders use to deliver succession planning.

The findings from this study supported the application of transformational leadership theory to talent management research. P5 stated, "Transformational leaders are known for their change management skills and ability to invest and focus on people, so talent management is more inclined to transformational leadership." Employees' high respect and confidence in their leaders allow transformational leaders to develop a workplace environment that supports employees' growth through a talent identification and development and cater for internal promotions (Liao, Chen, Hu, Chung, & Liu, 2017). The current study participants indicated that for talent management programs to function and deliver successful results, then business leaders need to sponsor talent development initiatives, and have faith in talent growth and the ability to nurture internal successors, P6 said, "I see transformational leadership as a necessity for talent development."

Moreover, all participants pointed out that transformational leaders are best suited to drive talent development strategies since they are firm believers in the ability of employees' to transform and change. Transformational leaders have a strong desire and

the required energy to develop resources in pursuit of growing the business (LePine et al., 2016). Transformational leaders challenge the status quo and embrace change (Abouriaia & Othman, 2017). All participants added that transformational leaders are passionate about integrating leadership development programs to impact organizational succession planning; therefore, transformational leaders provide continuous support to their team members so talents can grow their skills and take leadership responsibility.

### **Findings Related to Existing Literature**

The findings from this study complement the existing body of literature on talent management strategies that support succession planning. Researchers highlight the importance of successful talent management strategies that business leaders use to improve their succession planning (Makarius & Srinivasan, 2017). Some of the mentioned strategies in this study corresponded with the exiting literature on successful talent management strategies. The importance of having a talent development accommodating and supportive organizational culture may contribute to the existing literature on talent management. The participants identified that even if business leaders deployed effective business talent management strategies, they will still not be able to deliver successful results if they did not build the appropriate organizational culture.

Moreover, some participants concluded that coaching is evolving as a practical and effective talent development strategy. Researchers examining talent management strategies identified business coaching as a relevant talent management strategy but did not recognize the impact of the different coaching methods, including the growing shift from external to internal coaching as a customized talent development tool. Longenecker

and McCartney (2020) noted that there is growing empirical evidence that executive coaching is helping senior leaders to develop tailor-made development plans with an attractive return on investment when compared to other talent development tools. Finally, participants highlighted another critical finding related to the required balance between internal promotions and the external recruits regardless of how effective talent management strategies are; researchers need to identify the criterion that helps business leaders to set the respective objectives to balance between succession plan pipeline and external recruits.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The purpose of this study was to explore successful talent management strategies MNCs business leaders use to improve succession planning. Business leaders need to deploy effective and successful talent management strategies to retain high potential employees, enable future business leaders to grow their careers, respond to challenges regarding changes in employee demographics, address knowledge erosion risks, and attend to market growth needs. By using the results and recommendations of this study, business leaders may better understand why some talent management programs fail and implement strategies to improve the effectiveness of future talent development strategies. The results are relevant to professional practice since the findings of the study comprised applied strategies by business leaders who successfully designed and implemented effective talent management strategies.

The results of this study offer incremental insights into the successful execution of talent management strategies. Business leaders continue to strive with the implementation

of talent management strategies as some of these strategies are fragmented and do not link to organizations' distinctive cultures. Liu et al. (2020) noted that talent management definition and its applications require empirical and theoretical refinement defining the role of strategic HR to devise and deploy the appropriate talent development tools. The results could steer struggling business leaders to improve the relevance of their talent management strategies and upgrade the effectiveness of their succession planning. Current and future business leaders could utilize the findings from this study as a pragmatic compendium to improve and build on existing business tools related to talent management strategies.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings from this study may support positive social change by sponsoring talent growth and enhance local communities' standard of living by creating robust employment prospects and job stability. Business leaders investing in talent management strategies generate alignment between improved organizations performance and talented employees' growth, as a result of the increased synergies, business leaders help in transforming the organization to become more talent-centric to develop high potential employees to fill future leadership positions. Effective and relevant succession planning help organizations to respond to market challenges including (a) changes in employees demographics, (b) providing future leaders to accommodate organizational growth strategies, (c) retain knowledge and cultural values, (e) improve employer branding, and (f) increase of business efficiency and financial profits (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016).



Local communities and families may also benefit from improved talent management strategies that business leaders adopt to support succession planning. The deployment of successful talent management strategies drives higher focus on high potential employees; moreover, succession planning help individuals have longer employment service time in their organizations and provide them with clarity on their career progression and increase retention (Letchmiah & Thomas, 2017), which ultimately help individuals have long terms personal plans for themselves and their families. The growing focus on talent development skills can support creating new employment opportunities in the training industry; additionally, dedicated talent training budgets and increased focus on coaching can help develop the coaching industry where more coaches and certification buddies can support the increasing adoption of coaching as an effective talent development tool. The impact of effective talent development strategies can improve the (a) individuals focus on their self-development and ability to grow their careers and income, which in turn increases spending, upgrades living standards, and enhances individuals' ability to invest on their wellbeing, (b) stimulate the training industry due to increased needs for training programs and providers, which has a direct impact on creating new jobs (c) help business leaders to contribute to the wellbeing of individuals and communities by providing proper channels to develop and grow the human capital.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The finding of this study may support business leaders to deploy the appropriate talent management strategies that might help their organizations manage succession

planning efficiently. Based on the research results, I recommend current and future business leaders to

- Introduce the appropriate talent assessment tools and their transparency levels, and ensure these tools align with organizational culture;
- Develop practical talent development tools that align with HR strategies and policies. Talent development material and focus need to integrate with organizations' core competencies;
- Ensure that talent management strategies and succession planning align with organizations' growth strategies and human capital future needs;
- Devise KPIs on talent retention, turnover, internal promotions, and external talent influx. Moreover, HR managers need to revise organizations' recruitment strategies to support the knowledge transition between various workforce demographics;
- Consider coaching as a practical talent management tool. Coaching can support new leaders to grow their responsibilities and impact their onboarding process positively successfully; and
- Localize and integrate talent management strategies to align with organizations' visions of talent management. Otherwise, misalignment can grow potential resistance and undermine organizations' performance in succession planning.

The results of this research are significant to HR managers and business leaders and to a lower extent, talented employees. I intend to share the research findings through

journal articles, professional literature, professional HR associations, and respective seminars and associated conferences.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore talent management strategies MNC business leaders use to improve succession planning. For this study, I identified two limitations, the population of the case study consisted of six MNC business leaders in Southeast Asia region; therefore, the study was grounded on the feedback of six business leaders who shared their real-life experiences in implementing talent management strategies to qualify future leaders through well-structured succession planning. A common attribute of qualitative case study researches using semistructured interviews is the high reliance on participants' subjective views of their experiences and their ability to disclose significant data over 1-hour interviews and share openly organizational documents. Future researchers should expand the sample size and the geographical region of potential participants to signify further the findings. Moreover, researchers could use other research methods and designs to offset any potential biases and subjectivity of participants.

In addition to research that can offset this study's limitations, I identified three main areas that future researchers could consider in the field of talent management and succession planning:

- Utilizing qualitative analysis design, future researchers can identify artificial intelligence (AI) strategies that integrate into talent management strategies, and to

what extent business leaders can invest in (AI) tools to identify, nurture, and adequately deploy talents;

- Assess the relationship between talent development strategies and retention. Applying mixed method research can support researchers detect and analyze employees' specific data that can proactively identify talented employees who are planning to exit or resign for diverse reasons, and how these predictive models can help stabilize organizations' talent capital during market turbulence; and
- Conduct in-depth research on succession planning programs applicability to help assess and evaluate succession planning pipelines' agility to accommodate and resemble market dynamics.

### **Reflections**

The doctoral journey has challenged my professional outlook on individuals' intellectual capacities and their abilities to grow their life perspectives. I have been in senior management positions and residing in different geographical regions for the last 20 years, yet I am still amused by the cultural impact on social sciences and how management applications can vary between different countries, in particular, human resource strategies. This appreciation for diversified cultures led me to realize that management theories and their applications will never become depleted and will have varying outcomes based on their application context and market dynamics. As a result, this DBA study fulfilled a personal motive to explore some existing management theories that are still full of potential and require regular studying and re-assessments.

Before embarking on this research, and despite my understanding of how demanding this journey will be, yet, I underestimated the amount of time, energy, and coordination that was required to complete my research. The journey helped me to mature academically and professionally. In terms of resources, I tapped on any possible support I had access to, including my colleagues, chair, professional network, and family. I confidently believe that I will use the gained knowledge and experience to contribute back through sharing and helping others how to find their passion. I intend to explore executive coaching to satisfy my aspiration of leaving a legacy and supporting future leaders to have better contributions through talent growth and personal mastery.

One of the biggest challenges I encountered was recruiting research partners and collecting approvals from organizations to share their HRM data. I was fortunate that I had a strong pipeline of potential participants who qualified to take part in the research. As a result, this challenge pushed me to appreciate researchers due to the amount of the invisible activities and efforts that are required to generate data and conduct the analysis, another reflection is the amount of entailed self-discipline and high ethics researchers need to have to ensure their studies are ethical and comply with *The Belmont Report* guidelines.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore talent management strategies MNC business leaders use to improve succession planning. Succession planning can support organizations to retain talent, develop future leaders, and promote growth strategies (Haugh and Talwar, 2016). Six business leaders from

different MNCs in the Southeast Asia region participated in interviews to share their experiences and answer the research question. The three emerged themes from this multiple case study aligned with the transformational leadership theory; the emerged themes included: (a) Organizational culture is pivotal for talent development, (b) Talent identification and development strategies, and (c) Strategic HRM is critical for succession planning. Aligning talent development tool to organizations' succession planning can help business leaders develop and prepare talents to fill future leadership positions; moreover, succession planning can support organizations to preserve organizational culture and values, maintain and deploy knowledge management tools, prepare for foreseeable changes in workforce demographics, and grow competitive employer branding and compelling reasons to retain and attract talents. The findings of this study promote future research on exploring strategies and tools to deploy Artificial Intelligence (AI) in talent management and succession planning, and how IT advancement can help in improving organizations' human capital efficiencies.

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## Appendix A: Participation Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Louai Damer. I am a doctoral student at Walden University's Doctorate of Business Administration Program. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: Successful Talent Management Strategies Business Leaders Use to Improve Succession Planning. The intention of this research is to explore how can succession planning support employees' career growth opportunities and organizations' sustainability.

The study involves collecting data on talent management strategies through conducting interviews with qualified participants and document review from your organization. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The study is entirely anonymous; therefore, it does not require you to provide any identifying information about the organization and participants. Collected data will not be used unless it is checked and approved by you or qualified participants.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter below.

Your participation in the research will be of great importance to assist in social change by exploring effective talent development strategies that can lead to future leaders success in their jobs. As a result, talent management strategies can support communities' citizens through increased focus on effective talent development, career growth, and coaching. Moreover, talent management strategies might have another social impact by creating new jobs for qualified coaches, regulators, and certification bodies.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Louai Damer

Doctoral Student, Walden University

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

**Interview(s):** To interview business leaders of MNCs in the Southeast region

1. The interviewer will acknowledge and appreciate the interviewees' time and support in the study.
2. All interviews will start with a brief introduction to the research topic, the researcher, and how the research findings might contribute to social change and business practice.
3. The interviewer will make a note of the date and time of the interview session; moreover, the interviewer will advise interviewees that interviews consist of 6 interview questions and shall not take more than 1 hour,
4. The interviewer will review with the interviewees the signed informed consent, and invite interviewees to inquire about the informed consent if required.
5. The interviewer will advise the interviews that the interview will be audio recorded to ensure that the interviewer will be able to transcribe the interview with a full account of provided answers.
6. Interview questions are designed to enable comprehensive responses. The interviewer may expand on the main question through an adjunct question to ensure that responses cover the question area. The interviewer will provide sufficient time against each question.
7. The interviewer will invite interviewees for any additional data they deem relevant to the research topic that the researcher might not have covered in the interview questions.



8. The interviewer to advise the interviewees that a transcript of their answers will be provided shortly as part of member check process, the interviewer will encourage interviews to share any discrepancies to ensure data accuracy.
9. The interviewer will close the interview session after thanking interviewees for their time, support, and participation.

## Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What strategies have you used to deliver a successful talent development program to improve succession planning?
2. What strategies do you use to identify high potential employees entitled to a talent development program for succession planning?
3. How have you evaluated the succession planning strategies' efficacy?
4. What talent development strategies did you find worked best to improve succession planning?
5. What, if any, human resources' strategies have you used to support talent development programs for succession planning?
6. What other information would you like to add that we did not address to help me understand the talent development strategies your organization uses to improve succession planning?