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## **Approaches to succession management of non-academic leaders in higher educational institutions: evidence from the University of Cape Coast, Ghana**

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**Abstract:** The University of Cape Coast, Ghana has 15 doctorates and centres with their heads designated as directors. The paper assesses the approach(es) to succession management of non-academic directors of the university. We conducted in-depth interviews with nine of the 15 directors. We presented the qualitative data which was analysed applying inter-textual analytical tool by examining the relationship among our three sets of data to ascertain the extent to which our research objective is achieved. We found that the university does not adopt any formal approach due to the absence of a formal succession plan. The institution therefore depends on its statutes which make succession appear as an ordinary role replacement, thereby departing from the conversational approach to managing talent. We recommend that the university should design and commit to its own leadership succession plan and consider competence/performance record as well, instead of depending solely on seniority as 'succession' criterion.

**Keywords:** succession plan; University of Cape Coast; UCC; non-academic leaders; succession approach; inter-textual analysis, Ghana.

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## 1 Introduction

Human capital is becoming a key component for organisations' competitive advantage, performance and success. Therefore, organisations are competing against each other to acquire and retain talents in order to maintain their operations and continue to grow (Gardner, 2002). This is due to the fact that organisation's success relies on talent – the right people in the right jobs at the right time (Armstrong, 2005). Busine and Watt (2005) believe that the dynamics and complexity of leaders globally are influenced by factors such as globalisation, hyper-competition, rapidly changing workforce, the rise of the knowledge economy and technological advances, expectations of boards and financial markets, emphasis on customer relationships, and changing employee expectations. Rothwell (2001) had earlier revealed that due to challenges of dynamic environment, organisations are pressured greatly to systematically identify and develop future leaders because investing in employees to succeed their leaders will enable a firm invest in its future.

It is no secret that higher education is facing more competition than ever. Darvish and Temelie (2014) opine that today, in higher education, succession planning is more critical than it was a decade earlier, given the retirements or mass departure, coupled with the fact that higher education leadership requires complex relationships that must be developed with diverse internal and external stakeholders. Yet, most higher institutions of learning do not give succession planning a top priority (Rothwell, 2001). There is however increasing competition due to the privatisation of higher education (Stimac and Simic, 2012) calling for stringent approach to the management of universities, including approach to their human resource, especially leadership. In spite of these trends in the

business environment, many organisations acknowledge that less effort exist to support succession management than expected (Busine and Watt, 2005). Supporting Busine and Watt (2005), Mihyo (2008) identifies human capital as the most critical element to be given utmost attention in academic institutions. Related to this, most prominent researchers within human resource believe that the workforce is the most expensive yet poorly managed asset in most organisations (Becker et al., 2009).

It is worth mentioning that in this era of skilled labour shortage, businesses will continue to compete for strong leadership that will help ensure their business continuity and the competition for talent will become increasingly keen (Zeiss, 2005). The situation is not restricted to corporations and other profit-making organisations, but also applicable to higher educational institutions, that are also experiencing the great effect of leadership retirements. This exposes them to the same leadership gaps as profit-making businesses. The situation confirms the Chronicle of Higher Education's (Leubsdorf, 2006) estimate that as many as 6,000 positions in higher education being at risk from large numbers of retiring faculty and administrators, with more than 75% of these vacancies being senior executive positions such as the presidency, directors and heads of sections and units (Leubsdorf, 2006). This calls for senior management to continue to struggle for the best ways to identify and develop leaders for future succession.

Another phenomenon that impact on leadership succession is the changing demographic pattern culminating in increasing number of employees due for retirement and a dwindling number of younger workers available to replace them. Gandossy and Kao reported in 2004 that between 40% and 70% of all senior executives were to become eligible for retirement by 2010 at most major corporations (Gandossy and Kao, 2004). This is contributed largely by shortcomings in internal leadership and management development. For instance, the report puts it at 55, the percentage of managerial vacancies that are filled internally, with the percentage dwindling as these managers rise through the ranks.

Driven by these factors, succession management has become an important talent management initiative to prepare potential leaders in organisations worldwide. The importance of having the right people in senior management roles to act as role models is another key driver for succession planning. In 1998, an article was published claiming that an astonishing number of institutions have no succession planning process in place (Bowen, 2008). With an average employee turnover in academic institutions of 17% annually (Selingo and Carlson, 2006) and looming retirements at educational institutions across the world, succession planning in higher educational institutions cannot be overlooked.

It is therefore incumbent upon today's organisations to institute formalised succession planning that identify those with leadership potentials and nurture their talent. Additionally, as it will likely be much more difficult to procure outside talent, organisations must foster a work environment that maximises retention of high-value employees to keep as good leaders have become a scarce commodity and thus often are the subject of competitive bidding from multiple organisations. Therefore, leaders should not only be developed from within but their retention also remains an ongoing challenge.

Despite the need for, and benefits of succession planning, universities in Ghana have been slow in embracing a formal approach to succession planning for their top leaders (Seniwoliba, 2015). Seniwoliba further posits that much of the public sector especially higher education, however, has historically done little to systematically prepare key organisational leaders for advancement. In view of this, we are motivated by Rothwell's

(2001) submission that succession planning should be the required means of solving employee resourcing challenges such as delays in filling critical positions, a lack of qualified internal candidates, and departure of talented employees for further career goals, or failure of internal replacements in new leadership roles within the organisation. How therefore does University of Cape Coast (UCC) manage its succession plan in order to avert these resourcing challenges?

As part of a larger study that seeks to ascertain how effective succession management could be used to identify, develop and retain talented non-academic senior members for succession into directorship roles at the UCC, the objective of this paper is to explore how the university approaches its succession planning. Specifically, the paper seeks to ascertain the approaches adopted by UCC in managing succession of non-academic senior members to leadership roles. The originality of this paper is in the absence of any such formal study on the university and, more specifically, those that focus on non-academic senior members, which presents a unique problem that calls for this study – the first investigation into the approach(es) adopted by UCC in managing succession of its non-academic leaders. The rest of the paper is organised as follows. The section that follows looks at review of academic and popular literature on succession management approaches, followed by our methodology section. We then present the interview data before analysing the data results. We then form our conclusion, drawing from it the lessons developed from the study.

## **2 Literature review**

This section reviews academic and popular literature on succession planning, focusing on some popular approaches to the concept, which is the focus of this paper.

### *2.1 Succession management*

Different concepts are normally used to mean succession management. Succession management is used interchangeably with concepts such as replacement planning and succession planning but they all mean differently and are viewed as a continuum (Berke, 2005). Berke (2005) opine that replacement planning is on the lower side which involves a reactive approach to staffing that involves identifying replacements for key positions, usually at the senior levels of the organisation with little focus for the development of successors because the incumbent leaders is assumed to be a role model. So whiles replacement planning pay little attention to successor's development to focus on development programmes, succession planning, which is next on the continuum between replacement planning and succession management, involves much more successor development. Succession management is on the highest side, and is described as a proactive approach to managing talent as it involves identification of high potentials for anticipated future needs and focuses on tailored development of these people so that there is a talent pool or leadership pipeline available to meet organisational demands as they arise. It is more detailed approach to manage succession which involves series of HR activities with the aim of developing a pool and a pipeline. Replacement planning should not be confused with succession planning which focuses on developing a pool of people to consider for promotion. It should equally not be confused with talent management,

which focuses on attracting, developing, deploying and retaining the best people (Oppong, 2015). Oppong's definition derived from qualitative data from managers was in two parts: identification and harnessing talents towards the achievement of organisational objectives. He explained the harnessing process to include training and development, retaining and utilising, deploying within the organisation and rewarding their potentials.

Succession planning and management have become an essential human resource initiative in every organisation (Rothwell, 2001). According to the researcher, crises in leadership drive the need for systematic approach to leadership identification and development. In view of this, succession management is the required approach to solve employee resourcing challenges such as delays in filling critical positions, a lack of qualified internal candidates, and departure of talented employees for further career goals, or failure of internal replacements in new leadership roles within the organisation (Rothwell, 2001). Succession management, according to Fulmer and Conger (2004), is not simply a list of employees with possible leadership potential. Rather, it is a system of development activities and opportunities that are aligned with organisational goals so employees can practice needed skills. Byham et al. (2012) believe that unique succession management need of an organisation is based on its size, growth rate, number of expected openings, organisational structure, management commitment and strategic direction. For this, organisations informally identify and develop everybody including those with potentials to become leaders. Several researchers, two being Haung (2001) and Stadler (2011) regard succession management as an aspect of talent management which focuses on identifying, developing and retaining talented employees for succession to leadership positions. Haung (2001) believes that succession management/planning involves a selection of talented employees from a pool of promising candidates best suited for replacing senior managers who leave the firm due to retirement, reassignment, or other reasons. It is a talent management component (Haung, 2001) in organisations with the aim of identifying talents for development to fill current and future vacant leadership positions. Succession management can therefore be viewed as an all-encompassing term which is related to the systematic process of identifying and assessing possible successors into critical roles within a company and providing them with the appropriate skills and experience to be affective in such roles. This closely relates to the definition of Stadler (2011), which authors of this article will want to identify themselves with because the pivot of our study is the determination of critical roles and identification of appropriate approaches to succession to ensure continuity.

## *2.2 Succession management approaches*

As this paper focuses on exploring the succession management approaches, we review some earlier studies in the area. There are several approaches to succession management that organisations can use. Such as short-term planning or emergency replacement; long-term planning or managing talent; and combination of short-term and long-term planning.

Short-term or emergency replacement focuses on urgent human capital needs and is mostly applied in situations such as when a talented employee quits the organisation or anytime the organisation expands in a new direction. Short-term replacement planning is usually used to address an urgent need caused by a sudden development within the organisation, an example of which is when a talented employee unexpectedly exits the

organisation. It can also come into play any time the organisation expands in a new direction or discovers managerial/leadership talent gaps to fill. Generally, human resource functionaries will try to fill the role from within the organisation, but they often turn to external recruitment, if no suitably trained or capable replacement can be identified within the organisation. Rothwell (2001) also view replacement planning as a starting point for succession planning which identifies short-term and long-term emergency backups to fill critical positions. Rothwell (2001) grouped replacement planning into short term and long term. While the short term focuses on finding backups for a critical person who is out for a short time like vacation and annual leave, the long-term replacement planning focuses on finding backups to fill critical position which has become vacant for a long time or forever such as due to death, disability or sudden resignation. Replacement planning should therefore not be regarded as a permanent appointment for people, rather, it can be for people who meet the requirement of a job or job holder in an acting capacity long enough for the organisation to do proper internal and external search for permanent replacement.

Another succession management approach is long-term planning or managing talent. According to Stadler (2011), long-term succession management approach, also referred to as talent management, is future-oriented and focuses on the future needs of the organisation whereby employees in a scientific manner are called upon to part-take in assessment process in order to identify potential assessors. Stadler outlined some advantages of this approach as: talent pools with possible successors for every critical role; defined future skills required for the success of the organisation; and motivated employees due to involvement in their career growth and retention. In spite of the positive impact of this approach, it is viewed as being expensive and time consuming. One significant downside is that existing employee-base may not have the required skills and experience for the critical job roles that may degenerate into depending on outside sources, a situation that may lead to employee resentments. This implies that organisations that adopt this approach should have competent and potential employees ready to fill key leadership roles since it is better to choose successors from within rather than from outside sources. However, research has it that senior and experienced managers are unwilling to initiate and sustain the development of their subordinate managers for fear of taking over their jobs (Oppong, 2015). This is a challenge that should be effectively managed if the long-term planning or talent management approach is to be effective.

As another approach, an organisation can combine the first two approaches (a combination approach). With the combination approach, senior management plan for the long-term development and growth of the organisation and its employees and also for emergency replacements to ensure that business is not affected by knowledge loss or lack of skilled employees (Stadler, 2011). According to Stadler, organisations that decide to adopt this approach in succession management focus on promoting talents from within the organisation as well as drawing talent from the workforce. To supplement the combination approach is the relay succession approach which, according to Vancil (1987) emphasises continuity. The approach involves selection of heir who is made to rise through the ranks to number two position on the organisational hierarchy and is prepared to transit to the leadership position before the incumbent departs. This approach combines coaching since the heir will need to work with the incumbent during the last months or last few years to learn skills and work procedures before the final departure.

Regardless of which of the three distinctive approaches to choose, it should be linked with the overall HR strategy of the organisation. With long-term/talent management being the most preferred, therefore means that it is a long-term strategy-based HR practice and business plan requirement. It stands to reason that succession management strategy cannot be treated in isolation but should be integrated and aligned with HR programmes and systems to make it a success. Linking succession management to HR strategy makes it easy to implement a clear succession management strategy process as clear components are likely to be identified. For instance, Cooperate Leadership Council (see CLC, 2008) identified the following components:

- 1 leadership needs assessment, including identification of the leadership positions
- 2 successor candidate identification, development and transition with the aim of identifying potential successors for critical roles
- 3 tackling and measuring the strategy after executing the strategy.

The work of Haung (2001) adds to the usefulness of strategic succession management plan as it enables organisations to specify managerial functions and performance standards, ensures continuity in management practices, identifies outstanding candidates for senior management positions, and satisfies the aspirations of employees for career progression.

Regardless of the likely benefits from well-managed succession planning, especially with regard to identifying fitting candidates for senior management and executive roles; senior management sometimes proves reluctant to develop their managers. This was revealed from the study of Oppong (2015) that senior managers find such development as costly exercise and an attempt to give away their jobs to subordinates they develop. This probably explains why senior managers often opt for skills development rather than developing the talents of a select few. In this regard, the author distinguished and explained the two approaches that, in the light of employee development, concern for skills mean concern for all, but concern for talent means concern for a select few for succession into critical roles. Therefore, to avoid developing subordinates to succeed them, some senior managers choose to upgrade and update skills, a technique which departs from the succession management approach but still paints a picture that employees' development is catered for.

### **3 Methods**

#### *3.1 Study population*

The study targeted a population of 15 which represent all non-academic senior members in the UCC who perform leadership roles. The target population heads of the seven directorates; heads of three centres; and five heads of divisions, who are all designated as directors.



### *3.2 Data collection*

Interviewing method was employed to collect qualitative data. Due to the small number of participants we targeted all the 15 for interviewing. However, only nine were available and were willing to grant the interviews. Nonetheless, since unstructured interviewing was adopted and each interview expanded for at least one-and-a-half hours, substantial amount of data was collected using probing questions to get deeper explanation and understanding of the issues raised by interviewees on our research objective, which formed the research question. Also, similarities in the responses provided suggest that other six directors would have given similar narrations and, therefore, would not have made much difference to the data.

### *3.3 Data presentation and analysis*

To achieve the purpose of systematic search for meaning from data (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2007), all written and recorded raw data were first transcribed, organised and interrogated in ways that allowed the researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations and mount critiques (Hatch, 2002). We then presented the raw data by quoting texts/narrations as delivered by the interviewees and as they related to the themes generated from the data. Three key themes emerged from the research questions of the bigger study and also reflected in the literature. These were; succession management approaches, identification of potential leaders to leadership roles, and development and retention of potential leaders. However, this article focuses on the presentation and discussion of data under the first theme – succession management approaches.

We employed inter-textual analysis as our data analytical tool, which helped us establish how concepts and texts related and interacted with each other to answer our research question. In all, we generated three types of text including the literature review; the raw interview data as presented; and our findings from analysis of the interview data. Our analysis therefore examined the relationships among these three categories of text to ascertain the extent to which our research objective is achieved to draw our conclusion. As authors are considered ‘insiders’ (employees of the university), some relevant and related information with regard to succession management in the institution were referred to.

## **4 Presentation of interview data**

In line with the objective of the study, participants were asked; “what succession management approach has the institution adopted?” There was the view of majority of the interviewees that management gives their full support in all activities of the informal succession management. Most of the participants mentioned that the institution combines emergency replacement and talent management/long-term approaches as and when appropriate to manage their leadership succession. All participants mentioned that succession to leadership role at the institution is directed by the university statute.

During the interviewing, participants agreed that although the university performs some succession management activities, there is no formal succession plan or strategy in place, so the institution manages succession through various processes and activities informally. This was highlighted by participant 1 who spoke of how difficult it is to determine how UCC approaches succession of non-academic leaders. The situation at hand determines whether to approach succession in the long-term or apply emergency approach directed by the university statute:

Frankly, I cannot really single out any of the approaches as the one UCC has adopted. In an emergency situation, when a position becomes vacant due to the death, resignation or sacking of a leader, we normally refer to the statute as a guide to make the role active. Individuals are also groomed in the long-term for leadership roles. (Participant 1)

Inference here is that the university has no formal succession plan or strategy in place but they manage succession of non-academic senior members to leadership roles on ad-hoc bases. Informally, situations determine the approach to adopt. This implies that management normally waits for vacancy to occur in leadership positions before provisions are made for a successor.

This contingency approach (as and when appropriate) was shared by participant 2 who also added that the institution combines long term and emergency replacement to manage succession informally guided by the establishment of various positions and all-inclusive culture. Participant 2 revealed:

Yes! The strategy for managing succession is how leadership vacancy is filled here. The democratic governance system and our culture outlines all that needs to be done to fill vacant leadership roles. The statute outlines the process needed to be followed to fill any vacant leadership position. In the long term, people are developed to succeed leaders and in emergency situations the deputy will be appointed to act till a substantive leader is appointed or promoted, if qualified. Establishment for various positions and roles within the institution determines the approach we use to fill various leadership roles and how one rises through the ranks. (Participant 2)

Participant 2's narration implies that although there is no formalised succession plan, the statute acts as their strategy or plan for managing succession of non-academic senior members to leadership roles since it determines and directs the appropriate approach to use whenever the need arises. Leadership succession is defined by what goes into a particular role.

In agreeing to participant 2's revelation, participant 5 also made it clear that, there is no plan or strategy in place for the university to manage succession that is why replacing key leadership role is directed by the university statute and aligned with its corporate strategy. The interviewee said that:

UCC has no formal succession plan. I am not aware of any succession plan document or strategy as at now. We are now preparing one. The only document that directs or guide replacement of leaders is the university statutes. It obliges us on how to fill leadership positions and nobody can change it unless our succession plan is ready. It gives direction for long-term replacement planning and emergency replacement. I think informally, the university mixes long-term and short-term approaches. Although we have no succession plan, every leadership succession we make is influence greatly by the corporate strategy of the university. The corporate strategy directs the calibre of leaders we need; their skills, knowledge, abilities, qualification, competence and achievement. (Participant 5)

Participant 5's description also suggests that even though succession to leadership roles is managed informally by emergency replacement and long-term planning, it is also influenced by UCC corporate strategy which is directed by the statute. This implies that management of the institution normally considers the human capital required by the corporate strategy before a successor is appointed.

Out of their description of succession management approach at the institution, both participant 2 and 5 hinted that the university was in the process of developing a well-documented succession plan to align the practices with the corporate strategy for effective succession management which they believe was the concern of management. As participant 2 puts it:

Although well-documented succession plan is in the pipeline, we practice succession informally. There can never be proper succession if it is not aligned with corporate strategy of the institution. Management supports all activities related to staff development, staff training which is a catalyst for equipping employees with skills, competencies, abilities, knowledge and talents. (Participant 2)

Concern was raised about post-retirement contracts, which participants blamed on the absence of a documented succession plan, procedure to groom deserving employees for replacement, as narrated by participant 4:

We have no succession plan. If there is, nobody will wait for an employee to retire and award him a post-retirement contract before somebody as a successor is identified. In practice I think we combine the emergency and the talent management approaches but heads of employees facilitate the process of identifying leaders. (Participant 4)

It can be assumed from participant 4's narration that due to lack of formal succession management plan and strategy, most individuals are offered post retirement contracts. The offer of post-retirement contracts to some leaders could be due to the unpreparedness of the institution in replacing leaders. This comment also implies that the approach is highly decentralised to involve initiatives and recommendation of heads of employees, committees and boards. This suggests that decision on succession does not lie in the hands of the vice-chancellor. The approach in the institution is all inclusive, thus, the institution does not single out individuals for grooming to leadership roles rather all non-academic senior members are given equal treatment to raise through the leadership pipeline to the highest level.

Participants expressed their disappointment on succession management approach at UCC that little was being done on leadership development and succession management and emphasised the emergency approach in filling leadership roles. Participant 6 expresses his disappointment as follows:

Hmm! Looking at how my position was vacant for a while because there was no one with the expertise to replace the previous director, I must say the university does not plan for succession. They always wait for emergency before they start identifying successors to leadership roles. Management normally wait till the incumbent leaves before they look for someone to replace. (Participant 6)

It is assumed that management do little in preparing potential leaders for succession and this explains why they have adopted the emergency approach. In his situation, nobody had been developed internally to replace his predecessor due to unavailable succession

plan. Participant 6 revealed that the situation led to his position remaining vacant for two years before he was contracted to take that role. Being an external candidate also implies that potential leaders are outsourced only in a situation where nobody qualifies internally for such roles.

Participant 7, on the other hand, opines that the institutional approach to succession management is highly influenced by their organisational culture which is directed by promotion and how employees rise through the rank. Using his position as an example, participant 7 had this to say:

From our organisational culture, I think UCC uses the long term. We have our own way of filling leadership roles in a long term. We follow the procedure outlined in the statute. At the same time, in case of any emergency situation such as resignation or death, somebody of equal rank with me will be identified to succeed me. In a situation whereby management are unable to identify anybody on the same rank, a senior-member below the rank will be identified to act until they go through the process to get a potential leader. No matter how well you perform, if you are not promoted you can never succeed a leader here. People who are usually promoted through the ranks internally normally get the opportunity to occupy any leadership role. (Participant 7)

Participant 7's comment signifies that, although the institution does not have formal succession plan, it has its own way of managing succession informally directed by the statute. This he considers as organisational culture – the way the university accepts and approaches its succession management. Leadership succession is not determined by employee performance but highly influenced by how people rise through the rank because an employee can occupy any leadership role only by promotion.

On the contrary, participant 8 feels that the institution really plans for succession just that it has not been formalised as succession plan and the approach is long-term planning. To him, due to their expertise, technicians are mostly outsourced. Participant 8 narrated that:

I am not clear of the approach since I was recruited externally, but with my three years' experience, have observed that we plan for long-term succession just that it is unstructured because as an open organisation, they give opportunity for all to excel and progress. In technical areas, leaders are mostly outsourced whereas in other professions like administration, leaders are internally recruited. UCC has no formal succession plan or strategic documents but informally we practice all that entails in succession management. From the culture of the university, I think we plan for succession of our leaders and every aspect of it is supported by management and is aligned with the corporate strategy. The issue I have is the deployment of the administrative staff. Little consideration is given to their competencies before they succeed leaders. (Participant 8)

It is inferred from the narration of participant 8 that there is no formal succession plan instead the institution uses the statute as a direction to manage succession supported by management. That explains why they are able to fill all leadership vacancies informally. People are deployed any how without considering their competences and a mention was made of an HR director who had no HR qualification or experience. It can be assumed that the university gives opportunity to all individuals to excel and progress through the ranks.

Participant 3, on the issue of succession management approach, shared the opinion of other respondents that the institution informally practice succession plan in the long term and short term but its alignment with leadership roles is questionable. Participant 3 said that:

We plan for the future emergency. In the long term, people are identified, developed and retained and at the same time, due to unforeseen circumstances, the university also has plans for replacements. The combination approach helps the institution to be prepared for all unpredictable leadership role replacements. The best thing for an institution like ours is to have our own succession plan which will enhance leadership continuity, leadership development, organisational survival and talent identification and development. The statutes is a collection of regulations and what the law says concerning how the university should fill leadership vacancies but it does not help the university to identify, recruit, develop, train and retain potentials and talents. (Participant 3)

Participant 3's description implies that the institution plans for replacement of leaders with those who can easily adjust when there is a vacancy through the combination of talent management and emergency replacement. This means that people who desire to be in leadership roles need to focus on their career progression but not on gaining leadership skills, knowledge and experience. It can be assumed that people can assume leadership roles without talent or potential provided they have the required rank and the number of years of service with the university.

Participant 9 shared his opinion with regard to the succession management approach which seemed to capture most of the issues raised by the other participants.

Here we have adopted the long-term and the short-term approaches in the sense that when a leadership vacancy occurs, the most senior person on the rank is selected to succeed the leader. If more people happen to be on the same rank, then we use the date of appointment as criteria to select a successor. In case of emergency too, it is the most senior who is selected to that leadership role. At the moment, we have no succession plan but as I said earlier, informally, we develop people to occupy leadership positions. We are considering having a succession plan because it will guide us in developing and selecting present and future leaders to ensure leadership continuity. In the meantime the statute has been our guide in choosing a successor to any leadership role. We normally identify our potential leaders from within and in a situation nobody qualifies internally, the university will outsource. (Participant 9)

Although there is no formalised succession plan in the institution, Participant 9's description reveals that they observe the organisational culture guided by the statute to appoint leadership successors. Probably everything about succession is embedded in various policies but there is no doubt the institution will soon come out with a formalised succession plan.

## **5 Discussion of results**

This section discusses the qualitative data presented in the earlier section. Outcome on the discussion are compared to the literature reviewed as well as the various narrations as delivered by participants. The empirical findings derived paint vivid picture of the experiences and expectations of the participant as to how the university manages succession of non-academic senior members into leadership roles. The qualitative data

presented revealed many themes as regards how the university approaches management of leadership succession.

### *5.1 Succession management approaches*

From participants experiences it was revealed that although the university has no formal succession plan or strategy in place, management gives all their support to informally manage succession through the combination of short-term or emergency approach and long-term or succession pipeline approach in a leadership development guided by the university statute. Majority of the participants agree that the institution does not have a formal succession plan/strategy to guide them in succession management. The implication here is that no formal succession planning approach is adopted. Rather, succession in the institution has been on ad-hoc basis. This finding supports the opinion of Bowen (2008) on his evaluation of the process of picking presidents in varied institutions, that many institutions do not have a well-structured succession planning process in place. Again the finding corroborate the outcome of Richards (2009) study on succession planning in education that there is limited formal succession planning occurring in colleges and universities.

Notwithstanding, all participants agree that the institution manages succession of leaders informally whenever the need arises. Majority of the participants are of the opinion that they have adopted a combination of emergency replacement and long-term or talent management in their approach to succession management which is in agreement with Stadler's (2011) view that key to succession management is an effective approach that can be short-term/emergency, long-term/talent management, or combination of emergency and talent management approaches. Participants explained that in emergency situations whereby a leader is sacked, resigns, or dies, management appoints the deputy to act until a substantive leader is identified and groomed for the role. Here arises the emergency situation when a vacancy arises before someone is groomed for the role, an exercise that could take a couple of years or more. This explains the existence of many acting leadership roles, which participants mentioned. For instance all provosts of the six colleges of the university are all acting. Even when he/she is changed the new one that comes in also assumes the role in acting capacity. Most of the acting roles are post-retirement contracts for some years to enable management identify and develop a successor but, in some cases, these became permanent acting roles until the holders also resign or die. This reveals the unpreparedness on the part of management to identify and groom successors for some leading roles.

In the long-term management do not identify and select few and develop them for any position, instead all senior members are regarded as potential leaders and all are given equal opportunities, which is combined with rank and seniority, and those who can develop the required skills to benefit from the employee development opportunities. However, this outcome contradict the opinion of Haung (2001) in his exploration of succession management systems and human resource outcomes that succession management/planning involves a selection of talented employees from a pool of promising candidates best suited to replace senior managers who leave the firm due to retirement, reassignment, or other reasons. Approaching succession based on skills instead of talent highlights the distinction made by Oppong (2015) in his evaluation of a management development policy. He explained that concern for skills means concern for all employees but concern for talent means concern for selected few that are targeted for

executive roles. Managing succession through skills development approach therefore does not depart from the day-to-day upgrade of employees' skills, which is a 'must do' for all employers to get best out of their employees.

However, in contrast to the view that there was no formal succession planning it was also revealed that the statute of the institution guides management on the succession management approach to adopt to fill vacant key leadership positions in every situation and the procedure to follow. This statute is an act passed by parliament which gives the institution, which includes the process of managing employees including how to fill positions but it does not contain the detail of a formal succession plan (UCC, 2012). The university statute provides a guide on procedure for full-time appointment, probation period, mentorship for the appointee, procedure for confirmation of appointment, renewal of contract, qualification of appointment for all ranks and promotion through the ranks but it does not provide any information on approach to leadership succession. Since this document guides them in leadership succession, it was considered by some participants that such document serves as succession management strategy. It however falls short a succession strategy or succession plan since it fails to describe detail procedure for identifying, selecting, developing and retaining leadership replacements (Oppong, 2015). The approach adopted in filling leadership roles means that management does not identify high potentials and develop them to fill leadership roles as a well-structured succession planning programme will do, which seem to oppose Haung's (2001) approach that should include selection of talented employees from a pool of promising candidates best suited to replace senior managers who leave the institution.

## *5.2 Management support*

Interview data reveals senior management's support for the succession plan. However the support is mostly in the area of identifying retired senior colleagues to occupy vacant positions. This contradicts the finding of Oppong (2015) that senior managers were unwilling to develop managers for the fear of losing their positions to subordinates they develop. However, in the case of UCC, senior management readily support the system to perpetuate their positions as they are more likely to secure post-retirement contracts when this method of filling leadership positions is sustained. This aspect demonstrates the weakness with the usage of statute as a guide to succession management at the institution. This is in line with finding of Fulmer and Conger (2004) that succession planning and management is not simply a list of employees with possible leadership potential. Rather, it is a system of development activities and opportunities that are aligned with organisational goals and strategic directions. This calls for the need for senior management who are developers and 'owners' of corporate strategies to offer support to provide the needed resources (time, human, materials and financial).

Additionally, senior management have instituted a decentralisation policy which goes to support the succession plan. In practice, this makes the succession process easier since existence of the decentralisation policy allows contributions from all heads of employees in the decision-making process which is paramount to leadership succession as revealed by participants. Senior management support is important for them to own the succession management system and be fully accountable for its success. After all, it was for this purpose that the process of succession management is decentralised across the institution to involve all senior managers through various boards and committees as opine by

Byham et al. (2012) in their assessment of how organisations can grow their own leaders through identification, development, and retention of leadership talents. They believe that senior management should own the succession management process and be accountable for its success, teach special programmes for high potentials, show support in other ways, and be given incentives to participate and develop the potential leaders.

Such a system of a formalised succession plan by top management could help gain the support from the organisation's executives and senior administrators as espoused by Rothwell (2001) in his study investigating how to ensure leadership continuity and building talent from within organisations. It is found that effective succession plans require commitment from top management through a thoughtful communication strategy, identification of those with requisite talent, and organisational commitment to develop. As participants revealed, management supports all activities related to staff development, and have establish a training and development section to oversee staff development issues. However, the development component of the section does not seem to cover succession programmes. As revealed and confirmed by participants that identification and selection is based on skills development, we speculate that the section has little to do with leadership succession planning. This is based on the study result of Oppong (2015) that concern for skills is a 'must do' for every organisation at any stage of its existence to upgrade and update the skills of the employees for improved performance, but not a succession management approach, which requires conscious effort to identify, develop, and retain a select few.

### *5.3 Succession management and corporate strategy alignment*

While there was no formal succession approach, there was a general consensus that the informal succession is highly aligned to their corporate strategy. The leaders identified for key positions are always influenced by what their mission, thrusts and objects require which validates the view of Long et al. (2013) that emerged from their study on succession management in higher education that succession management plan is a proactive process that ensures continuing leadership commitment to the organisation's values, mission, and strategic plan by cautiously developing employees within the organisation in line with the organisation's mission and vision. This outcome agreed with earlier view expressed by Fulmer and Conger (2004) that succession management is a system of development activities and opportunities that are aligned with organisational goals. This is because the corporate strategy of the organisation directs the calibre of leaders they need in terms of skills, knowledge, abilities, qualification, competence and achievements. Thus, there can never be proper succession if it is not aligned with the corporate strategy.

One interesting issue that emerged from the interview data was the need for the institution to have a formal succession plan to make their succession process more effective and beneficial to the institution and its employees. This goes to confirm the university's interest in engaging retired senior members who are believed to be conversant with the mission, vision and values of the institution. In relation with structured succession plan, it was revealed that management was in the process of designing a succession policy and procedure to guide leadership and management succession in the university.



## **6 Our key findings**

It emerges from our analysis that there is no formal approach to leadership succession in place; the university rather approaches its succession on an ad-hoc basis due to the absence of a formal succession plan. The situation makes the university approach its leadership succession as an ordinary role replacement using seniority and both internal and external sourcing, informed by the institution's statutes. It is further found that regardless of the absence of formal succession plan, any leadership replacement is linked to the corporate strategy and the whole system is strongly backed by senior management.

## **7 Our conclusions and recommendation for further research**

We have reviewed earlier studies relating to our research topic; presented our qualitative data as provided by participants; and analysed the data results and established the relationships among these three data sets through inter-textual analytical tool. Our primary finding, which provides answer to our research objective, is that the university does not have any formal approach to its leadership succession. UCC rather focuses on developing the skills of all employees without building any talent pool or leadership pipeline. The approach rather suits skills development rather than managing leadership talent since focus on skills is a 'must do' for all employers to upgrade and update employees for everyday operations while succession planning, an aspect of talent management, focuses on selected few for critical/top level positions.

We also conclude that UCC confuses skills development with talent development because there is no formal document governing leadership succession, a crucial HR activity for the university. This contributes to the ad-hoc approach to replacing directors, including mixture of internal and external sources, and reliance on post-retirement contracts. To ensure smooth transition and continuity of directorship roles therefore, there should be a formal leadership succession planning document to ensure the development of internal talents to replace parting colleagues rather than replacing parting ones with retired colleagues.

However, as an academic institution, the university's management includes both academic and non-academic senior members. As a result, study of leadership succession focusing on only non-academic senior members presents a limitation. Notwithstanding, the study has practical implication for UCC and other institutions of higher learning. Being a required approach to solving internal leadership replacement challenges, making succession planning a priority has the potential of putting such institutions on the path of achieving competitive advantage through its human resource.

As a follow-up to the assessment of the university's directorship succession process, we recommend further research into how the university identifies potential leaders in the face of the unregulated approach to succession. We further suggest that the research should use qualitative data solicited from directors for follow-up views and narrations to ascertain how the findings from our current research inform or relate to the process of identifying potential non-academic leaders.

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