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Succession planning as a strategic recipe for business continuity: Empirical evidence from Nigeria's health sector

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Abstract

There is a preponderance of evidence to the effect of a disturbing trend of business discontinuity of private hospitals in Nigeria, thus raising a fundamental question as to the place and quality of succession planning in the system. Expectedly, the consequential impact of this negative development on the nation's health sector is becoming a major source of concern for health authorities, analysts and researchers. This study appraises the relationship between succession planning and business continuity of private hospitals in Port Harcourt, Nigeria's energy capital. Adopting a cross-sectional and quasi-experimental research design with directors, doctors, and nurses in private hospitals as the population of the study, two (2) copies of the research questionnaire were administered to each of the one hundred and eighteen (118) licensed and registered private hospitals in Port Harcourt. A total of two hundred and thirty-six (236) were returned and the data retrieved therefrom analyzed, using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23.0). Results of the analyses demonstrate significant relationship between the proxies of ***Succession Planning*** (the predictor variable) and those of ***Business Continuity*** (the criterion variable). The study concludes that succession planning is a strong predictor of business continuity and implicates poor succession planning as a major cause of the observed business discontinuity in private hospitals in Port Harcourt. It recommends that private hospitals take seriously the need for optimizing their communication plan, implementing a formal succession plan, implementing flexible working policies, and instituting relevant training and mental health programmes at the workplace as part of their business continuity plan.

Keyword: Succession Planning; Business Continuity; Leadership Succession; Successor Training and Development; Corporate Sustainability; Knowledge Retention

1. Introduction

The healthcare sector in Nigeria is witnessing incredible changes within the last few decades due to intense competition, sophisticated health equipment, government policies, information & communication technology, and other human or psychological factors. These changes however are more in the area of competitive warfare among public and private owned hospitals due to the endless quest by management of these organizations to continually improve business continuity in the bid to enhance organizational progress (Okeke et al., 2022). Private hospitals can remain in operation or business when the right skilled personnel mount the helm of affair and this can be realized through succession planning. Succession planning is a key strategy for business operation and continuity. The power and influence of effective succession planning cannot be overemphasis (Cho et al., 2018). Business continuity is arguably one of the fundamental objectives many organizations are interested in achieving. However, hospitals (both private and public) are not left out, even as they strive to improve success and stay competitive. Overall, the main objective of human resource practices in organizations is to continuously remain active in business and performance to sustain the

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organization's competitive advantage and the performance of several firms in a hyper competitive business landscape is mainly tied to the availability of human capital at their disposal.

Succession planning must be systematized into organizational learning and expertise among employees, design and encourage developmental paths, for it to achieve the required results (Ali et al., 2019). The challenges of having no successor are seen in the history of Alexander the Great as his empire was divided between his generals upon his death (Martin, 2021). According to Tamunomiebi and Okwakpam (2019), succession planning has an influence on retaining staff within the organization. Organizations need an effective succession planning program in order to realize this benefit and retain talent (Tamunomiebi & Okwakpam, 2019). The efficiency in hospitals can be realized when succession planning is in place (Bram et al., 2020). Succession planning refers to "the process that facilitates the transfer of management control from one family member to another" (Ali & Mehreen, 2019) and entails the degree to which the family business is engaged in selecting and training the successor, communicating succession decisions to members of the Board, and deciding on the post succession strategy and the post-succession role of the incumbent leaders (Jindal & Shaikh, 2021).

In the face of the attendant keen competition within the healthcare sector in Port Harcourt, experienced, and competent employees can enable the private hospitals enhance their competitive position and overall organizational performance. There are sufficient evidences that healthcare workers switch jobs incessantly. Report has it that out of 75,000 Nigerian doctors, over 33,000 have left the country, leaving behind only about 42,000 to man all health institutions in the country (Faduyile, 2019). The root cause of healthcare workers attrition is largely linked to discontentment with scheduling challenges, long working hours, illness and patient volume variability. Challenges such as attrition, retirement, illness and turnover are realities that the organization needs to constantly be aware of and prepare for.

Plethora of studies has been conducted on succession planning and business continuity among which are Olatunbosun, and Onuoha, (2020) who investigated the relationship between succession planning and sustainability of family-owned schools, and findings indicates a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of succession planning (successor selection and successor preparation) and sustainability. Adeleke et al. (2021) evaluated the effect of succession planning on the performance of family-owned Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's). Okeke et al. (2022) explained what succession planning is and the role it plays in granting competitive advantage to Family-owned Business (FOB) that implement it. Monyei et al. (2021) studied the impact of succession management on the long-term viability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos, Nigeria. Bienose et al. (2021) did a study which examined the influence of management succession planning on family business continuity was investigated in Lagos State, Nigeria.

However, looking at previous studies, there appears to be a scarcity of empirical work testing the succession planning and business continuity in health sector and Nigeria in particular, sustainability of private owned hospitals in segments to capture fully organizational sustainability and knowledge retention, yet sustainability of private hospitals stands out as a turning point for building generational enterprises in Nigeria.

1.1. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The fundamental aim of this study was to determine the relationship between succession planning and business continuity of private hospitals in Port Harcourt. The specific objectives were to:

- Ascertain the relationship between leadership succession and corporate sustainability;
- Examine the relationship between leadership succession and knowledge retention;
- Determine the relationship between successor training and development and corporate sustainability; and
- Explore the relationship between successor training and development and knowledge retention.

1.2. Research Hypothesis

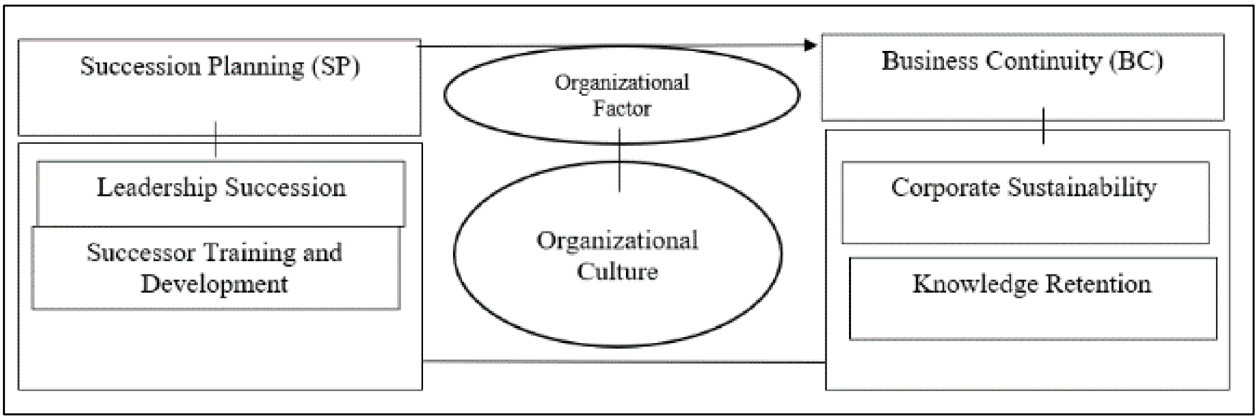
Based on the objectives and research questions, we developed our research hypotheses below:

- H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between leadership succession and corporate sustainability in of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.
- H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between leadership succession and knowledge retention in of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.
- H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between successor training and development and corporate sustainability in of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

- H_{04}: There is no significant relationship between successor training and development and knowledge retention in of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

2. Literature review

2.1. Conceptual Framework



Source: Independent/dependent variables adapted from Monyei, et al. (2021), Olubiyi et al. (2022), Mokgalapa (2023).

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework on succession planning and business continuity of private hospitals in Port Harcourt

2.2. Succession Planning

Succession planning is a dominant theme in business research and it is seen as intergenerational transfer and a process in which the owner plans for the transfer of knowledge, skills, values, management, control and ownership of a business entity to the next generation. Succession in organizational theory and practices refers to the process of transferring managerial control from one leader or one generation of leaders to the next. Succession planning refers to a systematic a process of identifying, developing, preparing and retaining employees within the institution for current and future leadership positions (Pila et al., 2016). Succession planning includes employee development strategies such as mentoring and structured leadership development programmes (Pedersen et al., 2018). Effective succession planning thus refers to a formal, recognized programme, which includes a continuous process of timely development and preservation of knowledge capital and intellectual memory to guarantee leadership stability for long-term institutional success (Kamil et al., 2016).

According to Esuh et al. (2011) succession planning is a process where firms plan for the future transfer of ownership. The motive behind this is to transfer ownership of the firm to any of the family members rather than shutting down the business altogether. Succession planning is generally considered to be a unique, case-by-case process, where a one size-fits-all mentality is simply not appropriate (Sambrook, 2005). Effective succession or talent-pool management concerns itself with building a series of feeder groups up and down the entire leadership pipeline or progression (Sambrook, 2005). Succession planning arises from the family firm's intention to pursue succession for two reasons. Succession planning is about ensuring leadership continuity, and developing the best potential successors in the institution (Fibuch & Van Way III, 2012). Succession planning involves the identification of key internal leadership positions, and future vacancies in those positions, as well as identification of potential successors to occupy those vacancies (Oduwusi, 2018).

2.3. Business Continuity

Business Continuity refers a comprehensively managed effort to prioritize key business processes, identify significant threats to normal operation, and plan mitigation strategies to ensure effective and efficient organizational response to the challenges that surface during and after a crisis (ASIS International, 2006). Business continuity can be defined as "a management process that identifies risk, threats and vulnerabilities that could impact an entity's continued operations and provides a framework for building organizational resilience and the capability for an effective response". Different studies have given different measures of business continuity with Venter et al. (2009) having them as perceived future continuity and firm harmony, Lucio et al. (2015) presented these measures as stewardship, governance, communication, professionalization, education and development of family members, continuity planning and corporate citizenship such as fire, flood, illness or other disaster. Business continuity (BC) is defined as the capability of the organization to continue delivery of products or services at acceptable predefined levels following a disruptive incident

(Elis, 2007). Furthermore, business continuity (sometimes referred to as business continuance) describes the processes and procedures an organization puts in place to ensure that essential functions can continue during and after a disaster.

2.3.1. Corporate Sustainability

The ability of a company to persist is referred to as corporate sustainability (Amini & Bienstock, 2014). Sustainability is defined as long-term company success that also assists with advancing the economy and society in terms of promoting a stable society and a healthy environment. It concerns contributing constructively to society, while also safeguarding the company's operations and the communities in which it operates (Monyei et al., 2020). The three pillars of business sustainability that have been identified are environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. The use of resources to meet human, economic, social, and environmental demands in a way that respects the interests of current and future generations, is known as sustainable development, which is discussed next. In essence, corporate sustainability is the belief that businesses and their directors have a responsibility that extends beyond profit (Halm & Figge, 2011). Dyllick and Hockert (2002) widely accepted definition of business sustainability is helpful to understand its current usage. The authors describe business sustainability as a company's ability to meet the needs of its immediate stakeholders without jeopardizing its potential to meet the needs of future stakeholders. This explanation's scope, which is clearly borrowed from sustainable development, is restricted to the organization. The company's stakeholders, or those who have direct control over its operations, finances, or market, are a source of concern.

2.3.2. Knowledge Retention

Retention refers to deliberate efforts and adoption of policies to retain competent and skilled potential future leaders to achieve institutional goals and prevent loss of human capital (Akhtar et al., 2015). According to Rothwell et al. (2015), implementation of strategies to retain, identify and develop potential successors that can make an impact on employees at operational level necessitates an institution that is committed to the successful integration of career and succession planning programmes. Irtaimeh et al. (2016) assert that the increasing trend of turnover could be aggravated if institutions do not have leadership development programmes in place to groom existing talent. Knowledge retention also known as knowledge continuity. It is part of knowledge management that relates to the loss of knowledge due to the loss of employees. Nonetheless, Levy (2011) found that the preservation of knowledge is still in its infancy stage academically. It is found that, most of the knowledge management methodologies are focusing on knowledge subjects instead of the specific individual (Dalkir, 2005). In addition, Wiig (1993) suggested that knowledge management only implies a long-term solution and not immediate aids needed to gain the immediate knowledge of an individual, thus transferring it to others within the organization.

2.4. Succession Planning and Business Continuity

Development of succession planning policies enables continuity in the organisation should the current leadership/management leave the organisation for various reasons. Unlike replacement planning, succession planning does not seek departmental backups if emergencies occur, but determines future demands and needs across departmental level to ensure a pool of talent at the different levels. These pools of talent are developed over time and will fill leadership positions if vacancies occur due to unanticipated resignation, retirement or death. In many countries, succession planning is still limited or non-existent through little focus on preparing successors to take over future leadership positions (Evans, 2016). Consequently, firms often suffer a brain drain, losing expertise, institutional knowledge and memory when predecessors exit private hospital for whatever reason (Badara et al., 2015). Organisations can avoid crises by developing succession planning policies that help the organisation's experienced leaders to pass on knowledge to less experienced employees before the experienced employees leave the organisation. Additionally, since the continuity of the business is accompanied by the well-being of the family, succession planning is done for the greater good of the family (Lansberg & Astrachan, 2014).

2.4.1. Leadership Succession and Business Continuity

Leadership succession is a potentially disruptive inevitable event/ process that every organization faces (Giambatista et al., 2015). Recently, organizations have been dealing with leadership successions more frequently (Charan, 2015), since top leaders' average tenure is shortening (Gardner Jr, 2019). While planned successions can lead to relatively smoother transitions and may have minimal or even positive impact on post-succession performance, unplanned transitions can shake their organizations hard (Vancil, 2017). Leadership succession is defined in this study as the degree to which an establishment is engaged in training the successor, communicating succession decisions to members of the organization, and deciding on the post-succession strategy and the post succession role of the incumbent (Sharma et al., 2003b). When leadership opportunities come up there are challenges with identifying a suitable candidate (Wolfe & Luhn-Wolfe, 2019). Leadership succession refers to deliberate decisions taken by institutions to embark on a process to identify and prepare for a smooth transition as leaders enter and exit the institution (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

As in any institution, leadership succession is essential to drive quality teaching and training programmes and maintain a competitive edge. A delay or inability of an establishment to fill leadership positions could stall or prevent continuous professional development that is vital to strengthen firms' capacity and transform health workers education. Moreover, leadership succession guarantee**s** the relationship between effective leadership stability and optimal learner performance and achievement. There is a cause-and-effect relationship between leadership and succession planning.

2.4.2. Successor Training and Development and Business Continuity

Successor training and development refers to concrete actions taken by organization to inspire and influence workers to act willingly and work hard to achieve predefined institutional goals and objectives (Peters-Hawkins & Kingsberry, 2018). Successor training and development is a lifelong process that occurs in stages. During the process deliberate efforts are taken by institutions to achieve institutional and employee predefined goals. These efforts include providing employees with career information and advancement opportunities, supporting them to recognize and realize their niche and strengths, plan and implement career goals, and improve themselves for their career path (Waheed & Zaim, 2019). Successor training and development of potential successors involves collaboration between top management, human resources departments and line managers (Titzer & Evans, 2016). Successor training and development through succession planning refers to a process that focuses on planning and governance of human resources to identify and prepare future leaders in the institution (Ahmad et al., 2015). Successor training and development is simply the result of interactions between individuals who choose what best fits their ideas and the company that offers options that meet their goals. Career development, career planning, and career management all have a dual purpose in mind" (Okeke et al., 2022). Successor training and development commences with the identification of the most appropriate individual development requirements, leading to the development of the persons input to team and organizational development.

2.5. Theoretical Review

2.5.1. Human Resource Attribution Theory

Research study shows that HRM practices are associated with organizational performance through their influences on employee attitude and behaviour and employee perceptions of HRM (Katou, 2014). Based on this suggestion, Maat (2011) have come up with the construct HR attributions theory. The theme of the HR attribution says the attributions that employees develop about the intentions of management adopting particular HR practices have consequences for their individual attitudes and behaviours, and ultimately, unit performance, (Rimi & Yusoff , 2013). Nishii et al. (2008) examine five main HRM practices including staffing, training, benefits, pay, and performance appraisals and identify employees attribute these HRM practices to (i) enhance (service) quality; (ii) keep costs down; (iii) promote employee well-being; (iv) get the most work out of them; and (v) comply with union requirements. Employee attribution to HRM practices as management intention to promote employee service quality and well-being is positively related to HRM practices and employee attitude and behaviour relationship. On the other hand, employee attribution to HRM practices as management policies to minimize costs and to exploit employees is negatively related to HRM practices and employee attitude and behavior relationship. However, employee attribution to HRM practices as management conformity to the pressure of union is not significantly related to their attitude and behavior. Nishii et al. (2008) confirm their assumptions by testing the theory in a service organization.

2.6. Empirical Review

Monyei et al. (2021) studied the impact of succession management on the long-term viability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos, Nigeria. Participants for the study, which employed a descriptive survey research technique, were recruited from five SMEs across Lagos State based on their number of years in operation, employee strength, and branch locations. The hypotheses were examined using the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, which revealed that succession planning was associated with corporate sustainability among SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria ($r = 0.934$, p-value 0.05).

Bienose et al. (2021) did a study which examined the influence of management succession planning on family business continuity was investigated in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study was conducted using a survey research approach. When this study was done, there were 8712 registered family businesses in Lagos State. The study employed the Cochran formula sample size determination method to pick a sample size of 477 participants using a standard random sampling strategy. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that management style had no significant impact on the survival of family businesses in Lagos State, Nigeria, that organisational structure had a significant impact on business growth, that organisational culture had a significant impact on business performance, and that the managerial transition process had a significant impact on sales growth.

Olubiyi et al. (2022) examined the effect of succession planning on family business continuity in Lagos State, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted for this paper with 503 selected SMEs operating in Lagos State as the target population. Taro Yamane sample size method was adopted and data was collected through the use of structured questionnaire adapted and validated for the study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire items ranges between 0.850 and 0.775. The questionnaire response rate was 93.20%. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential (Pearson product moment correlation and regression analysis) statistics.

2.7. Gaps in Literature

Generally speaking, most studies related to succession planning provide a mix of variables used to account for the impact of succession planning in various organizations across the globe. Reviews like Nejla et al. (2019) captured human resource planning, career development, and selection procedure regulatory framework. Few studies where the main concern was succession planning or CEO succession planning did not measure transition process, performance metric, and training and development of successors. Similarly, measuring business continuity using corporate sustainability and knowledge retention, hasn't been performed. Business continuity has been dealt with by some researchers across global. For instance, studies by Heather (2019) & Byadigera (2019) carried out investigations on business continuity. Heather (2019) used business continuity as an adjustable tactic to prepare for business operation restoration following a disruption. Plethora of studies has been conducted on succession planning and business continuity among which are Olatunbosun, and Onuoha, (2020) who investigated the relationship between succession planning and sustainability of family-owned schools, and findings indicates a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of succession planning (successor selection and successor preparation) and sustainability. Bokhari, et al., (2020) at the other hand tested the impact of succession planning and strategic flexibility, towards the business sustainability. Adeleke, et al., (2021) evaluated the effect of succession planning on the performance of family-owned Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's). Adedayo, et al., (2016) studied Planning for succession and firm's sustainability of family businesses in Lagos and Ogun States, Nigeria. Okeke et al. (2022) explained what succession planning is and the role it plays in granting competitive advantage to Family-Owned Business (FOB) that implement it. Monyei, et al. (2021) studied the impact of succession management on the long-term viability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Lagos, Nigeria. Bienose et al. (2021) did a study which examined the influence of management succession planning on family business continuity was investigated in Lagos State, Nigeria. Marega et al. (2020) determined the effect of succession planning on business performance: Empirical evidence of The Bells University, Covenant University, and Crawford University. Siambi (2022) investigated on Leadership Succession Planning and Organization Transition: A Review of Literature. Ghazali et al. (2021) studied on the conceptual paper highlights the necessity to have a proper workforce and succession planning in place in order to have the right leadership in the right place at the right time. Olubiyi et al. (2022) examined the effect of succession planning on family business continuity in Lagos State, Nigeria. Mokgalapa (2023) studied on the impact of leadership succession planning in organizations. Lowan and Chisoro (2016) studied on the impact of succession planning for business survival: a case of Kwalita business consultants, Johannesburg (South Africa). Yasmeen et al. (2021) studied on revitalizing organizations' emergency succession planning in the face of the covid-19 outbreak. Umans et al. (2018) built on implementation intention theory to indicate that both business and family governance practices influence the succession planning process in family firms. In addition, this study draws on goal adjustment theory to explore whether the family CEO's emotions, being his or her inability to let go of the family firm, hamper the governance decisions of the board of directors concerning that succession planning process. Ali et al. (2019) study was to identify and evaluate the components of talent management via the succession planning approach in governmental organizations. Rhoda et al. (2018) examined the perceptions of succession planning by owners/founders of family businesses and its importance in ensuring the continuity and prosperity of businesses in the Wa Municipality, Ghana. Akinyele et al. (2015) considered the impact of succession planning on business persistence. Maguta (2016) examined the impact of succession planning techniques on the daily operations of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kenya. Syeda and Abida (2014) studied the succession planning impact on employee commitment in the telecommunications industry.

However, looking at previous studies, there appears to be a scarcity of empirical work testing the succession planning and business continuity in health sector and Nigeria in particular, sustainability of private owned hospitals in segments to capture fully organizational sustainability and knowledge retention, yet sustainability of private hospitals stands out as a turning point for building generational enterprises in Nigeria. Hence, this study fills the gap by empirically testing three dimensions of succession planning: leadership succession successor training development while business continuity is measured with corporate sustainability and knowledge retention and organizational cultural as moderator. It is against this point the researcher seeks to investigate the relationship between succession planning and business continuity of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study was quasi-experimental research design in nature, and cross-sectional survey design was employed. The investigation was conducted in a non-contrived environment, and so, the researcher will not be in complete control of elements of the research.

3.2. Population of the Study

The population of this study is all the Private Hospitals in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. According to the Medical and dental Council of Nigeria Rivers State Chapter, there are one hundred and eighteen (118) licensed and registered private hospitals in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Technique

Two (2) copies of questionnaire were administered to owners, directors, middle management and doctors in each of the one hundred and eighteen (118) licensed and registered private hospitals in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, which gave a total of two hundred and thirty-six (236) copies of questionnaire. Purposive sampling was used, which is non-probability purposive sampling. The data for this study was obtained from primary source of data. Like we said earlier, the instrument for this study was questionnaire.

3.4. Method Data Analysis

Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used for the test of hypotheses relating to the dimensions.

3.5. Validity and Reliability of Instruments

This study undergone various forms of validity check, which includes face validity, and content validity. On the other hand, reliability talks about consistency of the instrument, and this involved test and re-test methods, after which, the instrument was subjected to Cronbach's alpha test with the aid of SPSS 23, under the benchmark of 7.0.

Table 1 Reliability Test Output

S/N	Instruments	No. of items	Outputs
1	Leadership succession	4	0.817
2	Successor training and development	4	0.828
3	Corporate sustainability	4	0.844
4	Knowledge retention	4	0.812

Source: Cronbach Alpha, 2025

4. Results

Two hundred and thirty-six (236) copies of questionnaire were distributed to owners, directors, middle management and doctors of the one hundred and eighteen (118) private hospitals in Port Harcourt. 66.9% of the total respondents were males, while 33.1% of respondents were females. Two hundred and five (205) respondents were married corresponding to 86.9%, twenty-seven (27) respondents representing 11.4% of the total respondents were singles while four (4) respondents representing 1.7% were either divorced or separated. It revealed that none of the respondent had an ordinary level certificate (SSCE) as their highest educational qualification, 18.6% had an ordinary National Diploma/NCE Certificate, 52.1% had a Bachelor Degree/HND Certificate, while 15.7% had a Masters Degree, and 13.6% of the respondents indicated others. Analysis further revealed that 8.1% of the total respondents fell within the 20-30 years age bracket, 31.3% fell within the 31-40 years bracket, 45.3% fell within the 41-50 years bracket while 15.3% fell within the above 51 years bracket.

4.1. Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested using the Spearman's Rank Correlation.

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between leadership succession and corporate sustainability of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between leadership succession and corporate sustainability

Correlations				
			Leadership Succession	**Corporate Sustainability**
Spearman's rho	Leadership Succession	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.965**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
		N	236	236
	Corporate Sustainability	Correlation Coefficient	0.965**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
		N	236	236
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Survey Data, 2025

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (rho = 0.965) between leadership succession and corporate sustainability is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination (r^2 = 0.931) indicated that 93.1% of corporate sustainability can be explained by leadership succession. The significant value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between leadership succession and corporate sustainability in of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between leadership succession and knowledge retention of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

Table 3 Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between leadership succession and knowledge retention

Correlations				
			Leadership Succession	**Knowledge Retention**
Spearman's rho	Leadership Succession	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.945**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	236	236
	Knowledge Retention	Correlation Coefficient	0.945**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	236	236
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Survey Data, 2025

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (rho = 0.945) between leadership succession and knowledge retention is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination (r^2 = 0.797) indicated that 79.7% of knowledge retention can be explained by leadership succession. The significant value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between leadership succession and knowledge retention of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between successor training and development and corporate sustainability of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

Table 4 Correlation Analysis showing the liaison betwixt successor training and development and corporate sustainability

Correlations				
			Successor Training and Development	Corporate Sustainability
Spearman's rho	Successor Training and Development	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.804**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.004
		N	236	236
	Corporate Sustainability	Correlation Coefficient	0.804**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.004	.
		N	236	236
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Survey Data, 2025

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (rho = 0.804) between successor training and development and corporate sustainability is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.646$) indicates that 64.6% of corporate sustainability can be explained by successor training and development. The significant value of 0.004 ($p < 0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between successor training and development and corporate sustainability of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

H_{o4}: There is no significant relationship between successor training and development and knowledge retention of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between successor training and development and knowledge retention

Correlations				
			Successor Training and Development	**Knowledge Retention**
Spearman's rho	Successor Training and Development	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.762**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.000
		N	236	236
	Knowledge Retention	Correlation Coefficient	0.762**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	.
		N	236	236
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

Source: Survey Data, 2025

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (rho = 0.762) between successor training and development and knowledge retention is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.581$) indicated that 58.1%

of knowledge retention is can be explained by successor training and development. The significant value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between successor training and development and knowledge retention of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1. Relationship between Leadership Succession and Corporate Sustainability

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (rho = 0.965) between leadership succession and corporate sustainability is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.931$) indicated that 93.1% of corporate sustainability can be explained by leadership succession. The significant value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result was supported by the study of Karaevli (2017) finds that the impact of CEO origin on firm performance is moderated by environmental munificence, prior firm performance, and changes in the top management team members. In their meta-analysis, Schepker et al. (2017) find that succession plan in place reduces the negative impact of leadership succession on firm performance. Quigley et al. (2017) hence firm narratives play a major role in post succession performance.

5.2. Relationship between Leadership Succession and Knowledge Retention

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (rho = 0.945) between leadership succession and knowledge retention is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.797$) indicated that 79.7% of knowledge retention can be explained by leadership succession. The significant value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between leadership succession and knowledge retention of private hospitals in Port Harcourt. The result was supported by the study of Karaevli (2017) finds that the impact of CEO origin on firm performance is moderated by environmental munificence, prior firm performance, and changes in the top management team members. In their meta-analysis, Schepker et al. (2017) find that succession plan in place reduces the negative impact of leadership succession on firm performance. Quigley et al. (2017) hence firm narratives play a major role in post succession performance.

5.3. Relationship between Successor Training and Development and Corporate Sustainability

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (r = 0.804) between successor training and development and corporate sustainability is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.646$) indicates that 64.6% of corporate sustainability can be explained by successor training and development. The significant value of 0.004 ($p< 0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between successor training and development and corporate sustainability of private hospitals in Port Harcourt. In submission of the findings, as a result, it will create leaders who are incompetent or exhausted, which may harm the organisation with ripple effects across other administrators, faculties, researchers, and students (Morris & Laipple, 2015). Potnuru & Sahoo (2016) asserted that there is a positive relationship between human resource development interventions and employee competencies. Meanwhile, employees' competencies are enhanced through training and development initiatives (Kaur & Kaur, 2020).

5.4. Relationship between Successor Training and Development and Knowledge Retention

From the result of the above table, the correlation coefficient (r = 0.762) between successor training and development and knowledge retention is very strong and positive. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = 0.581$) indicated that 58.1% of knowledge retention can be explained by successor training and development. The significant value of 0.000 ($p<0.05$) reveals a significant relationship. Based on that, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between successor training and development and knowledge retention of private hospitals in Port Harcourt.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This study investigated the relationship between succession planning and business continuity by taking the case of private hospitals in Port Harcourt into account. In this study, the findings of the survey revealed that the private hospitals capacity to achieve business continuity is determined by its succession planning significantly and positively. It was evidenced that succession planning was critical increasing business continuity via corporate sustainability and knowledge retention. The results showed the relationship between leadership succession and corporate sustainability has a significant impact. The results showed the relationship between leadership succession and knowledge retention was statistically significant and positive, thus positive impact was found. The succession level of leaders to reuse the firm's service and recommend it to others depends on their continuity of business level which leads to knowledge retention. As the stated in the second objective of this study, it is concluded that successor training and development impacts private hospitals' business continuity. The findings revealed that successor training and development significantly influence knowledge retention in private hospitals in Port Harcourt. In view of the above conclusions, the following recommendations are considered relevant;

- Private hospitals should realise the need for optimizing their communication plan, implementing a formal succession plan, implementing flexible working policies, and instituting relevant training and mental health programmes at the workplace as part of their business continuity plan.
- The Covid-19 virus has taught private hospitals many lessons, one of the most important is that it has become a wake-up call for organizations to revitalise their emergency succession plan immediately to cater for multiple leadership vacant positions from lower management right to the top management, and to prioritise doctors' mental and physical well-being at all times.
- Professional assessment gap should be carried out at least ten years before the incumbent is due to retire as this allows time for a smooth and easy transition of leadership and assets.
- This review of succession planning scholarship has revealed that if the 'going concern' principle of organizations is to be achieved, management should make deliberate efforts to formalize the succession planning process with the clear understanding that it is a continuous, transparent and participatory process, and thus a crucial management imperative.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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