

Original Article (Mixed)

Designing a Talent-Oriented Succession Planning Model with a Meritocracy Approach in the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare of East Azerbaijan Province

Reza Sadighi , Soleiman Iranzadeh , Davood Paydarfard 

Department of Management, Ta.C., Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to design a talent-based succession model with a meritocracy approach in the Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare Organization of East Azerbaijan Province. The research method was conducted as an exploratory mixed method. In the qualitative part, data were collected through 15 semi-structured interviews with experts in the fields of human resources, public administration and human capital development, and were examined using the Brown and Clark content analysis method. In the quantitative part, data from 177 questionnaires completed by employees and managers of the organization were used to test the model. The content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. The results of thematic analysis showed that talent-based succession planning includes eight main categories: ethical and professional commitment, organizational structure and processes, professional competencies, individual competencies, managerial competencies, leadership competencies, organizational culture, and talent management. Quantitative findings also indicated that “ethical commitment” and “individual competency” are most important, and “talent management” is least important. In addition, the results of structural equation modeling confirmed the appropriate fit of the proposed model. Finally, the designed model can serve as a scientific and indigenous framework to promote the succession planning system in public sector organizations and lead to improved organizational efficiency and sustainability by strengthening meritocracy and developing talents.

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Corresponding Author: Soleiman Iranzadeh

Email: iranزadeh@iaut.ac.ir

Extended abstract

Introduction

In recent decades, extensive developments in the economic, social, and technological fields have led to the formation of a dynamic and complex environment for organizations. In such circumstances, the concept of a “knowledge-based economy” has become more important than ever, and the position of human resources as the most valuable asset of organizations has become more prominent. In order to survive and maintain a competitive advantage in this changing environment, organizations are forced to make maximum use of human resources capacities; for this reason, the traditional approach to human resource management has gradually given way to a strategic and forward-looking approach. In fact, the success and progress of organizations in the present era largely depends on their ability to identify, attract, develop and retain specialized, committed and talented employees; which has doubled the importance of “strategic succession planning” (Rothwell, 2010; Sanjideh et al., 2022; Bano et al., 2022; Toukali et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the increase in labor turnover and the desire of competent individuals to migrate or choose career paths that are commensurate with their competencies and talents have led organizations to continuously compete with each other to attract, develop, and retain elite human resources (Sanjideh et al., 2022). Experience shows that failure to identify, promote, and retain talented individuals can lead to the departure of these employees from the organization and disrupt the process of achieving macro goals. On the other hand, timely identification of competent replacements for key positions not only protects the organization from the consequences of retirement, resignation, transfer, or other reasons for leaving the service of key personnel, but also ensures the organization's dynamism, flexibility, and adaptability to environmental changes (Bano et al., 2022).

In this regard, succession planning is considered a strategic tool to ensure the sustainability of the organization and the continuity of missions. A distinctive feature of modern succession planning is a meritocratic and talent-based approach to selecting and developing successors. According to this approach, organizations should have a written plan not only for senior management, but also for all risky job levels to prevent knowledge and operational gaps from emerging in times of crisis (Bano et al., 2022; Janahmadi et al., 2022). Meritocracy and talent-based are two essential components of this approach; because relying on the competence, capacity, and competence of individuals guarantees the quality and effectiveness of replacements in critical positions of the organization. Given that the process of identifying and selecting talents requires the use of precise and scientific tools and mechanisms, succession management is not simply an administrative procedure, but rather a dynamic, interactive, and multifaceted system that covers all dimensions and components of the organization's human capital with a systemic approach (Feyzi et al., 2021).

In addition, the importance of succession planning has been repeatedly emphasized in published studies. Khodaparast et al. (2024) examined the dimensions and processes affecting succession planning in educational organizations in a study. A review of these studies shows that the issue of succession planning has also gained a prominent position in domestic literature and doubles the need to design indigenous and meritocratic models. Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer this question: How is the design of a succession planning model based on individual talent with a meritocratic approach in the Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare Organization of East Azerbaijan Province?



Theoretical Framework

Succession Development

Succession development is defined as a structured and strategic process in organizations that aims to identify, evaluate, and develop talented employees in order to prepare them to assume key positions in the future. (Phillips, 2020).

Meritocracy

The meritocracy perspective, which is rooted in social justice theories, emphasizes that the selection of individuals for organizational positions should be based on their actual qualifications, capabilities, and competencies (Young, 1958; Bano et al., 2022).

Bahramzadeh (2025) conducted a study aimed at presenting a model of the effectiveness of succession development with a fourth-generation approach in universities in the central organization of Islamic Azad University. The findings showed that 32 factors were identified in four dimensions of personal competencies, professional competencies, specialized skills, and talent management. The results of confirmatory factor analysis indicated that all dimensions and components had appropriate validity and reliability and the proposed model can be used as a comprehensive model for succession planning in fourth-generation universities.

Sarlak et al. (2023) designed a succession planning model with an emphasis on talent management in Semnan Water and Wastewater Company. The findings showed that the model includes causal conditions (support from senior management, organizational strategy), contextual conditions (organizational culture and structure), intervening conditions (laws and financial resources), strategies (identification and development of talents), and outcomes (performance improvement and risk reduction).

Research methodology

The research method was conducted as an exploratory mixed method. In the qualitative section, data were collected through 15 semi-structured interviews with experts in the fields of human resources, public administration, and human capital development and analyzed using the Brown and Clark content analysis method. In the quantitative part, data from 177 questionnaires completed by employees and managers of the organization were used to test the model.

Research findings

Thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the data. The results of the thematic analysis showed that talent-based succession planning includes eight main categories: ethical and professional commitment, organizational structure and processes, professional competencies, individual competencies, managerial competencies, leadership competencies, organizational culture, and talent management. The quantitative findings also indicated that "ethical commitment" and "individual competency" are most important, and "talent management" is least important. In addition, the results of structural equation modeling confirmed the appropriate fit of the proposed model. Finally, the designed model can be a scientific and indigenous framework to promote the succession planning system in public sector organizations and lead to improved organizational efficiency and sustainability by strengthening meritocracy and developing talents.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to design a talent-based succession model with a meritocracy approach in the Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare Organization of East Azerbaijan Province. The results of this study are consistent with the results of Rothwell (2010), Bano et



al. (2022), Tavakoli et al. (2024), Zayer Hojagan et al. (2022), Hudiyah et al. (2025), Clarke et al. (2024), Ebrahimi & Daneshnejad (2022), Idriss (2025), Coffie et al. (2024), Musale (2025), Najafi et al. (2021), Sarlak et al. (2023), and ScottMadden (2025).

Based on the research results, the following suggestions are made:

Establish a talent management unit and design a successor bank for key jobs.

Utilize scientific tools such as assessment centers, competency tests, and 360-degree evaluations.

Design and implement future leader development programs including specialized training, mentoring, and challenge projects