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Succession Management Planning for Sustainable Educational Businesses: A Management Perspective from Low-Income Countries

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Abstract

Succession management is a critical yet underdeveloped component of sustainable business management in family-owned educational institutions, particularly in low-income countries. Many such institutions rely on founder-centric leadership and informal management planning, exposing them to leadership discontinuity, employee disengagement, and long-term sustainability risks. This conceptual paper examines succession management planning as a strategic management function and explores its implications for leadership continuity, employee engagement, and institutional sustainability. Drawing on management, family business, and educational leadership literature, the study proposes a conceptual framework that explains how structured succession planning contributes to sustainable educational business outcomes through leadership continuity and employee engagement. The paper further aligns succession management practices with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By contextualizing succession planning within educational businesses operating in low-income countries, the study contributes to management scholarship and *offers actionable insights for institutional leaders and policymakers seeking sustainable governance and leadership resilience.*

Keywords: *Succession Management, Sustainability, Educational Business, Management Planning, Low-Income Countries*

Introduction

Educational institutions operating as family-owned businesses represent a significant segment of the private education sector in many low-income countries. These institutions often emerge to address gaps left by public education systems and play an essential role in social and economic development (Aladejebi, 2021) . Despite their importance, the long-term sustainability of such educational businesses remains uncertain, particularly due to weak management planning and poorly structured leadership succession practices.

From a business and management perspective, sustainability extends beyond financial survival to include leadership continuity, institutional credibility, and employee stability (Soares et al., 2021) . In family-owned educational institutions, leadership transitions are frequently influenced by family expectations rather than strategic management considerations. As a result, succession decisions are often reactive, undocumented, and disconnected from broader organizational planning processes (Ahmad et al., 2020).

In low-income countries, these challenges are further intensified by limited managerial capacity, regulatory uncertainty, and dependence on founder-led leadership models. When leadership succession is not systematically planned, educational businesses face disruptions that affect employee morale, academic quality, and stakeholder trust (Nkeobuna & Ugoani, 2020) . Employees, particularly faculty members, often experience uncertainty during leadership transitions, leading to disengagement and increased turnover.

This paper positions succession management planning as a critical element of sustainable business management in family-owned educational institutions. By integrating succession planning into overall management planning processes, educational businesses can enhance leadership continuity, strengthen employee engagement, and ensure long-term organizational sustainability (Monyei et al., 2021) . The study aims to explore succession management practices within this context and highlight their implications for sustainable management in low-income countries.

Despite the growing recognition of succession planning in management literature, limited attention has been given to its role in ensuring sustainability within family-owned educational institutions, particularly in low-income countries (Chirapanda, 2019). Existing studies often examine succession either in corporate settings or from a family business perspective, leaving a gap in understanding how succession management planning functions as a strategic business tool in education (Abaddi, 2025). Addressing this gap, the present study explores succession management practices in family-owned educational institutions and examines their implications for leadership continuity, employee engagement, and long-term sustainability.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Succession Management as a Strategic Management Planning Tool

Succession management is increasingly recognized as a strategic component of organizational management planning. Rather than focusing solely on leadership replacement, effective succession management involves identifying future leaders, developing competencies, and aligning leadership transitions with organizational goals (Fusarelli et al., 2018). In business organizations, succession planning is closely linked to risk management, strategic continuity, and sustainability planning.

Management scholars argue that organizations that embed succession planning into their broader management planning frameworks are better positioned to navigate leadership transitions without disrupting operations (Aldhaheri, 2017). In the context of educational businesses, this strategic alignment becomes particularly important due to the long-term nature of academic programs and stakeholder relationships.

2.2 Family-Owned Educational Institutions as Business Organizations

Family-owned educational institutions operate at the intersection of education and business (De Massis et al., 2015). While their primary mission is educational, they must function as sustainable business entities to survive in competitive and resource-constrained environments. In low-income countries, such institutions often depend heavily on founder leadership, informal governance structures, and family-based decision-making (Civelek et al., 2021).

While family involvement can foster commitment and long-term vision, it can also limit professional management practices. Studies on family businesses highlight that the absence of formal management planning, particularly in leadership succession, increases the risk of organizational instability (Saan et al., 2018) . In educational settings, this instability can compromise academic standards, employee trust, and institutional reputation.

2.3 Sustainability Challenges in Low-Income Countries

Sustainability challenges in low-income countries are shaped by economic constraints, limited institutional support, and human capital shortages. Educational businesses in these contexts often operate with thin financial margins and rely heavily on key individuals for leadership and decision-making (Worlu et al., 2021) . Consequently, leadership transitions pose significant sustainability risks.

From a management perspective, sustainability in such contexts requires proactive planning, capacity building, and institutionalization of leadership processes (Bahmann et al., 2025) . Succession management planning emerges as a critical mechanism through which educational businesses can reduce dependency on individual leaders and strengthen organizational resilience.

2.4 Employee Engagement and Sustainable Management

Employee engagement is a central pillar of sustainable management. Engaged employees contribute to organizational stability, service quality, and long-term performance (Örtenblad & Koris, 2014; Senftlechner & Hiebl, 2015) . Leadership transitions, when poorly managed, often lead to uncertainty, reduced trust, and disengagement among employees.

Human-centered management planning approaches emphasize the importance of communication, participation, and leadership development during succession processes. In educational institutions, where employees are knowledge workers, sustaining engagement during leadership transitions is essential for maintaining academic quality and institutional sustainability. Within a management planning framework, employee engagement functions not only as an outcome of effective leadership transitions but also as a strategic resource that reinforces organizational resilience, service quality, and sustainable performance in educational businesses (Senftlechner & Hiebl, 2015; Tang & Hussin, 2020).

3. Conceptual Framework and SDG Linkage

This study proposes a conceptual framework positioning succession management planning as a driver of leadership continuity and employee engagement, ultimately leading to sustainable educational business outcomes. The framework aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 by ensuring stable academic leadership and Sustainable Development Goal 8 by promoting decent work through leadership stability and employee trust (Aladejebi, 2021).

Table 1: *Key constructs used in this study and their operational definitions*

Construct	Description
Succession Management Planning	Formal processes for identifying, developing, and transitioning leaders
Leadership Continuity	Stability, legitimacy, and clarity during leadership transitions
Employee Engagement	Trust, commitment, and willingness to contribute
Sustainability	Long-term institutional, social, and business viability

The constructs used in this study reflect key management dimensions relevant to leadership succession and sustainability in family-owned educational businesses operating in low-income countries. Succession management planning represents the formalized managerial processes through which institutions identify potential leaders, develop their competencies, and plan leadership transitions in advance to reduce organizational risk (Bąkiewicz, 2020; Ramadani et al., 2017). Leadership continuity refers to the degree of stability, legitimacy, and clarity maintained during leadership transitions, ensuring that strategic direction and governance structures remain intact despite changes in leadership (Tang & Hussin, 2020) . Employee engagement captures the behavioral and psychological connection employees have with the organization, expressed through trust in leadership, commitment to institutional goals, and willingness to contribute beyond formal role requirements. Sustainability, in this context, extends beyond financial survival to encompass long-term institutional viability, social legitimacy, and the capacity of educational businesses to maintain quality, stability, and relevance over time. Together, these constructs provide a comprehensive lens for examining how succession management planning influences both organizational processes and long-term outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

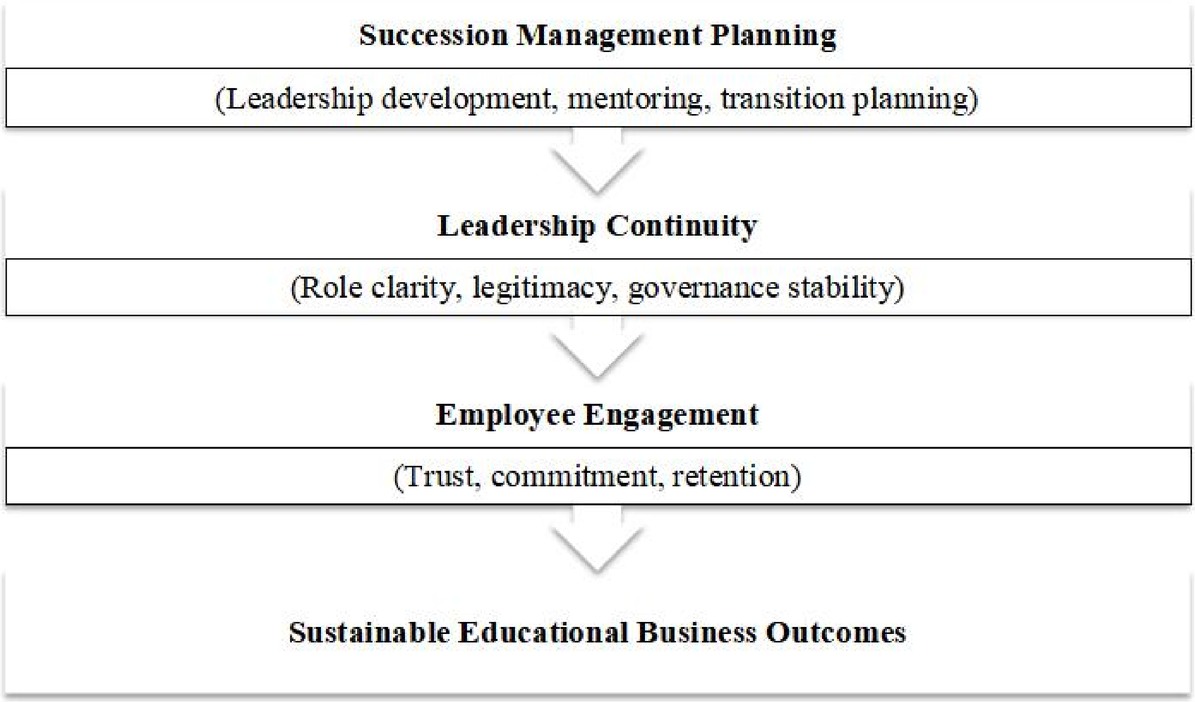

Figure 1 *Proposed conceptual framework linking succession management planning to sustainable educational business outcomes.*

The conceptual framework illustrates a sequential and causal relationship between succession management planning, leadership continuity, employee engagement, and sustainability. Succession management planning is positioned as the primary antecedent, emphasizing leadership development, mentoring, and structured transition planning as core management planning activities (Gagné et al., 2019) . These practices enhance leadership continuity by strengthening role clarity, leadership legitimacy, and governance stability during transition periods. Leadership continuity then serves as a critical mechanism influencing employee perceptions, trust, and commitment (Higuchi, 2014) . When leadership transitions are perceived as credible and well-managed, employee engagement increases, leading to higher retention and organizational commitment. This sustained engagement ultimately supports sustainable educational business outcomes by reinforcing institutional stability, operational resilience, and long-term viability in low-income country contexts.

Table 2*: SDG Alignment*

SDG	Relevance
SDG 4 – Quality Education	Leadership continuity ensures stable academic

	governance and institutional quality
SDG 8 – Decent Work & Economic Growth	Employee engagement and retention promote decent work environments

The proposed framework aligns closely with the sustainability agenda outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Leadership continuity, as facilitated by effective succession management planning, supports SDG 4 by ensuring stable academic governance, consistent institutional leadership, and uninterrupted educational delivery, all of which are essential for maintaining educational quality in low-income country contexts (Aladejebi, 2021) . Simultaneously, the emphasis on employee engagement aligns with SDG 8 by promoting decent work environments characterized by trust, stability, and long-term employment relationships. Engaged employees are more likely to remain with the institution, contribute productively, and support organizational growth, thereby strengthening the economic and social sustainability of educational businesses. By linking succession management planning to both educational quality and decent work outcomes, the framework demonstrates how strategic management practices can contribute meaningfully to global sustainability objectives while addressing local organizational challenges (Nkeobuna & Ugoani, 2020) . Through this alignment, the framework demonstrates how internal management planning practices can directly contribute to global sustainability goals while addressing the structural and human challenges faced by educational businesses in low-income countries.

4. Discussion

The literature suggests that family-owned educational institutions in low-income countries often underestimate the strategic value of succession management planning. Leadership succession is frequently treated as a family matter rather than a business management concern. This approach creates risks not only for leadership continuity but also for overall organizational sustainability.

From a business management perspective, succession planning contributes to sustainability by reducing uncertainty, strengthening leadership legitimacy, and maintaining employee confidence. Institutions that integrate succession planning into their broader management planning frameworks are more likely to experience smooth leadership transitions and sustained employee engagement.

Employee engagement plays a mediating role in this relationship. When employees perceive succession decisions as structured, transparent, and competence-based, they are more likely to trust new leadership and remain committed to the organization. This trust is particularly important in low-income country contexts, where employment stability is a critical concern for employees.

The discussion highlights the need for educational businesses to adopt professional management practices without undermining family values. Sustainable succession management requires balancing family involvement with formal governance and planning mechanisms. This discussion extends existing management literature by demonstrating that succession planning in educational institutions should be understood not merely as a leadership replacement process but as a strategic management planning mechanism with direct implications for sustainability, employee outcomes, and institutional resilience in low-income countries.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This paper underscores the importance of succession management planning as a core element of sustainable business management in family-owned educational institutions operating in low-income countries. Leadership continuity, employee engagement, and organizational sustainability are deeply interconnected and cannot be achieved through informal or ad-hoc succession practices.

Management Implications

From a management perspective, educational businesses should institutionalize succession planning within their strategic management processes rather than treating leadership transition as an informal or family-driven decision. Leadership development and mentoring should be viewed as long-term sustainability investments, while transparent communication during leadership transitions is essential for maintaining employee trust and engagement. At the policy level, educational regulators in low-income countries should encourage governance frameworks that promote professional succession practices and leadership continuity.

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