Topic: Paradox or Paradigm? Enhancing Leadership Development Planning for the Succession of Educational Leaders in the Caribbean

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Abstract

The succession of educational leaders in the ever-changing Caribbean higher educational landscape has been a persistent challenge. The significant challenge is the dichotomous tension between preparing educational leaders for future leadership roles and preparing them with the skills needed to adapt to the rapidly changing environment of contemporary educational leadership practices. This issue represents a paradox, which is the contradictory truth between the traditional leadership status quo and the prioritization of innovation through their leadership practices. In leadership development, there is a paradigmatic shift in the frameworks and assumptions that guide the actions of effective educational leaders. The purpose of this study is to examine the existing literature and strategies on how leadership development programs in the Caribbean higher educational institutions balance the paradox of tradition versus innovation in preparing educational leaders and examine how leadership succession planning frameworks can be adapted to address the paradox of ensuring organizational stability while fostering adaptability. A systematic review methodology was used for this study. The qualitative literature extraction was conducted using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses. (PRISMA) 2020 checklist. This checklist consists of twenty-seven items which were used to guide the reporting quality of the study. Data was extracted from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu. EBSCO, Web of Science, and Scopus. Thirty-two studies were included in the systematic review based on inclusion criteria. The results showed a lack of leadership development programs for the succession of educational leaders in most Caribbean countries. There was a lack of consensus on how to balance the paradox of traditional leadership versus innovative leadership. Most literature called for a paradigm shift in using more contemporary models and frameworks to guide the succession process. It was concluded that paradoxes can hinder the development of future leaders, and whilst there are paradigmatic issues in maintaining modern leadership development programs this may lead to a succession crisis in educational institutions. The way forward is to provide future programs to enhance training, mentorship, and a model framework for enhancing leadership capabilities.

Keywords: *Adaptability; Innovation; Leadership Development Programs; Paradox; Paradigm; Succession Planning*

Introduction

The effectiveness and sustainability of education systems relies heavily on competent leadership, that is directive, transformational, and visionary. Within the Caribbean, effective leadership is the epitome of successful educational systems which play a pivotal role in shaping the institution's culture, students' outcomes, and the quality of instructions (Miller, 2016). Though the Caribbean is characterized by many issues involving its cultural diversity, historical legacies, socio-economic nuances, and educational challenges; added to this, is the rising tension of how best to prepare future educational leaders to face the educational challenges. Dahlan et al. (2021) argued that within the higher education landscape, there is the lack of effective strategies by institutions to fill key leadership positions through succession planning, while Villamor et al (2022) rules that there is the lack of standardized procedures in the criteria and selection of leaders for the future. Succession planning or "a substitute for replacement planning" (Bano et al., 2023) is the process of providing employees with developmental and career advancement opportunities through the retention of talent and improvement of competencies to fill key leadership positions and foster organizational success (Mahusain et al., 2023). This is a technique used for the development of human capital within organizations to meet future needs. Through planning activities, direct support is provided to increase the performance of employees via the provision of training and learning opportunities. Leadership development for higher educational institutions, on the other hand, is the systematic process of enhancing the skills, knowledge, and competencies of individuals in leadership roles.

Higher educational institutions have experienced immense pressures due to the intensity and pace of change within the wider society (Bunescu et al., 2022). There have been mounting pressures based on the needs and expectations of students, industry stakeholders, the need to fill the skills gaps identified in labour market needs assessments, and pressures to remain sustainable, financially stable, and innovative. As higher educational institutions grapple with these changes, there is a need for leadership development and the succession planning to nurture the development of future institutional leaders while enhancing personal and professional growth. Succession planning encompasses a variety of training programs, workshops, mentorship opportunities, and experiential learning activities designed to cultivate effective leaders who can inspire and guide others. The focus is on developing essential leadership qualities such as strategic thinking, decision-making, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and the ability to foster a positive culture. According to Gupta et al (2024), succession is a must in educational institutions because employee dies, leave the job for various reasons, and are re-deployed. Studies have shown that succession planning has been affected by poor communication, lack of knowledge, gender inequality, low priority, and lack of talent (Hoque & Zheng, 2024). Succession planning, if too aggressive, can erode organizational knowledge because of the change in leadership with certain expertise.

In educational leadership, effective succession planning is crucial for ensuring organizational continuity and growth. However, there exists a tension between preparing leaders to maintain traditional institutional practices and equipping them to address the rapidly evolving challenges and demands of contemporary education. This dichotomy presents a paradox: should leadership development focus on fostering continuity and adherence to established paradigms, or should it prioritize innovation and adaptability in response to the dynamic educational landscape? Despite the importance of leadership succession, there is a lack of consensus on how best to design leadership development programs that balance these competing needs. Therefore, this systematic review seeks to explore how educational leadership development planning can be enhanced to effectively navigate this paradox and/or paradigm, addressing both the need for consistent leadership and the capacity to innovate within an increasingly complex educational environment. To solve this issue, the search was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do educational articles perceive the balance between traditional leadership paradigms and the need for innovative approaches in leadership development?

2. What strategies can be employed in leadership development programs to prepare leaders for both maintaining continuity and embracing innovation in educational settings?

3. What leadership succession planning framework(s) should be adapted to address the paradox of ensuring organizational stability while fostering adaptability in educational leadership?

This systematic review will contribute to understanding how educational institutions can improve leadership succession planning, ensuring that future leaders are both capable of preserving the values and goals of their institutions while also leading through change and innovation. Three research gaps were identified – (1) literature search revealed few systematic studies that focuses on Caribbean-specific leadership succession, (2) limited evidence-based policy framework within the Caribbean, and (3) leadership development and succession planning models are based on western frameworks and does not directly address the cultural realities of the Caribbean. It is hoped that future studies will reduce these gaps.

Methodology

A systematic review methodology was used for this study. This systematic review aims to explore and synthesize the existing literature on leadership development and succession planning for educational leaders in the Caribbean. The review assessed how existing leadership programs address the paradox of maintaining established practices while fostering innovation to meet contemporary educational needs. The literature extraction was conducted using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 checklist. This checklist consists of twenty-seven items which were used to guide the reporting quality of the study. An extensive literature search was conducted by extracting data from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu. EBSCO, Web of Science, and Scopus.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria: Seventy-five studies were screened for the systematic review based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria. The articles were written in English and published between 2005-2025, articles included leadership succession practices and employed a model/theory/framework for higher education leadership. Empirical studies that were peer reviewed and in the field of education were also included. Excluded from the study were articles written before 2005, articles containing the succession of leaders in non-educational institutions, and articles that did not address leadership succession planning within the higher educational context. Thirty-two articles were then included in the study.

Data Analysis: The Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis where the researcher got familiar with the data, generated codes, searched for themes, reviewed the existing themes, named the themes, then generating the report.
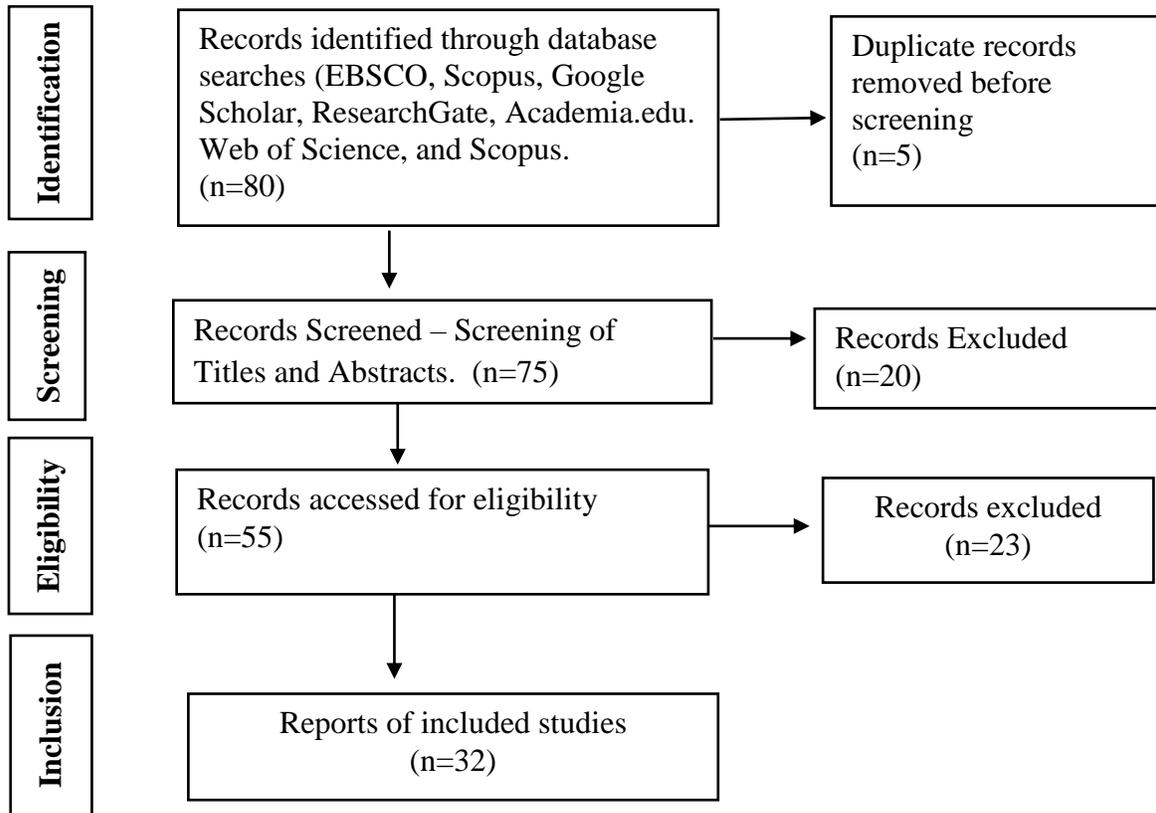
Figure 1: The Systematic Review Process

(Flowchart diagram)

- **Identification**: Records identified through database searches (EBSCO, Scopus, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu. Web of Science, and Scopus. (n=80) → Duplicate records removed before screening (n=5)
- **Screening**: Records Screened – Screening of Titles and Abstracts. (n=75) → Records Excluded (n=20)
- **Eligibility**: Records accessed for eligibility (n=55) → Records excluded (n=23)
- **Inclusion**: Reports of included studies (n=32)

Findings and Discussions

The findings were drawn from a combination of literature from various Caribbean countries and the rest of the world, with Jamaica (n=5), Barbados (n=2), Trinidad and Tobago (n=2), St. Lucia (n=1), the Bahamas (n=2), and the rest of the world (20) producing major results. Wilson (2021) stated that the Bahamas are faced with numerous challenges resulting from an aging workforce, change management issues, and the lack of proper succession planning. The research questions were used to guide the search.

Research Question 1: How Do Educational Articles Perceive the Balance Between Traditional Leadership Paradigms and the Need for Innovative Approaches in Leadership Development?

There were two themes emerging from this research question.

Theme 1: Traditional Hierarchical Leadership Models Versus Innovative Leadership

The most common theme that emerged from the analysis of the data using the thematic approach was the dichotomous tension between traditional hierarchical leadership models and the growing need for adaptive, innovative leadership. Studies recognized the need to balance traditional versus innovative approaches, with ten studies (n=10) noting that leaders should adhere to traditional leadership. Traditional leadership paradigms are prevalent within the Caribbean educational setting and are considered useful as

it preserves memories and organizational culture, ensures clarity, authority, and smoother transition into leadership positions. On the contrary, a paradox exists because traditional approaches are said to be inadequate in addressing complex contemporary issues facing the higher education systems (Leithwood, 2017). Barrett-Maitland et al (2024) supports this claim and argued that traditional approach utilized in Jamaican universities is inflexible, non-responsive to the realities of a changing world, highly bureaucratic, and deeply steeped in our colonial history. We can argue that leaders within the Caribbean educational system operate in a context where authority, structure, and stability are valued, but the changing demands of education require more collaborative, transformative leadership. Gupta et al (2024) believed in innovative leadership stating that the context of education is constantly changing and succession planning has a significant role in developing effective leaders for educational reforms and innovations.

Seven studies (n=7) stating that educational leaders should be innovative – adapting to technological advancements and evolving educational policies. Creating new pathways to leadership is an innovation that broadens the pool of future academic leaders. Penn (2025) contends that universities should implement "internal leadership academies" to cultivate leadership skills and borrow succession planning models from corporate entities and create a pathway for leadership development initiatives. Jamaica has adapted a model for the development of school leaders through the National College for Educational leadership (NCEL) and the University of the West Indies; Barbados facilitated a professional development certification program called "leadership development for middle managers" to provide capacity building within organizations. The UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) in collaboration with Laspau - a nonprofit affiliate of the Harvard University - provides leadership, management, and training program for sustainable education.

Fifteen studies (n=15) on the other hand, focused on a blended model incorporating both traditional and innovative approaches. Leithwood et al (2008) found that leaders who were most successful were able to balance the need for stability with that for innovation.

Theme 2: Lack of Formalized Succession Planning Structures

Leadership development for the succession of higher educational leaders is rarely documented into policies within many Caribbean countries. All 32 studies (n=32) indicated that for most Caribbean countries, there are no clearly articulated strategies for the identification, monitoring, and transition of future leaders who are often selected based on seniority, "entitlement", and personal/political affiliation and ties rather than through merit-based system or a formalized succession plan, resulting in leadership gaps (Wilson, 2021). The paradox of it all is that many succession plans within higher education have only a simple prototype and lack standardized management systems and processes. The so-called succession also only stops at the handover of positions and authority (Hoque & Zheng, 2024, p.12). Dahlan et al (2021) stated that succession planning must be implemented as a part of the strategic management process of the institution to retain employees, prepare the institution for future challenges, and for employee retention. Gupta et al (2024) iterated that institutions may employ the use of SWOT analysis, use personal and professional profiles, and competency frameworks to create a formalized succession planning structure. The following institutions within the Caribbean have documented governance structure which includes succession planning processes: the University of the West Indies, the University of Guyana, St. Georges University, the University of Technology, Jamaica, College of the Bahamas, University of the Southern Caribbean, Northern Caribbean University, and the United Theological College of the West indies.

Research Question 2: **What Strategies Can Be Employed in Leadership Development Programs to Prepare Leaders for Both Maintaining Continuity and Embracing Innovation in Educational Settings?**

A good leadership development program requires the support from top managers and employees alike. The institutions' culture should support succession planning; however, the culture may prove to be a challenge for its successful implementation. Implementation difficulties may occur if the culture is toxic, succession planning is misunderstood, and if there is no buy-in from leaders. The workplace must be inclusive and respectable, as Chaturvedi (2016) states that a hostile work environment disrupts succession planning. There were three themes emerging from the analysis of the various articles.

Theme 3: Mentorship, Coaching, And Leadership Programs for Greater Continuity

There were thirty-two studies (n=32) that emphasize mentorship programs, coaching, and leadership programs within educational institutions to be the central pillar to leadership development. These programs ensure that leadership succession occurs smoothly, providing the necessary help and support for emerging leaders. Through mentorship, an individual with more experience provides guidance to another with less experience to support growth and development. Cohall (2021), a Caribbean scholar, discussed the necessities of mentorship for leaders and argues that formal mentorship programs are essential for developing future academic leaders in the Caribbean. Mentorship enhances resilience, professional growth, and leadership. Paradoxically, Gillian Paul in his address to the United Nations stated that high performing administrators within higher educational institutions are so busy and indispensable making it difficult to mentor others for the purpose of succession planning (Paul, 2007). Mentorship programs are needed to transfer institutional knowledge and to build future leadership for the institution (Buckway, 2020).

Through coaching, leaders/potential leaders can determine and harvest their potential whilst developing their personal and professional life. Coaching enhances leadership development by supporting goal setting, problem-solving, change-management, and facilitates relationship building and reflection which cultivates long-term development (Horvath et al., 2024). Though coaching can enhance the self-awareness of leaders; paradoxically, where leaders resist change, are driven by fear, or work in a toxic culture, the new thinking of innovation and adaptability are eroded (Kets De Vries, 2008).

Leadership development is also done using professional development tools; these according to Baban (2025) should be tied to the strategic management processes of higher educational institutions and translate the vision of HEI leaders into reality. The paradox of it all is that short-sighted and passive leaders have little or no interest in institutional professional development because of their highly bureaucratic organizational structure and forms of leadership. The traditional model conforms to the bureaucratic system which utilizes traditional learning for PD stifling creativity (Zalfqar et al., 2021)

Theme 4: Continuous Improvement by Using a Talent Management Plan

Ten articles (n=10) stated that the most common strategy is to first determine the gap between the competencies possessed by the leaders and the desired competencies needed to propel to higher positions. Principals should take "innovation consciousness, innovation ability, and innovation results" as the basis for training, measuring, and using talents, and effectively grasp the work of using, caring, and motivating talents (Hoque & Zheng, 2024, p. 2). Bano et al (2023) stated that the issue with implementing a robust talent management plan for higher educational institutions is the lack of competency-based models. This model aligns the employees' skills with the needs of the organization. Paradoxically, the issues with employing competency-based models in many Caribbean institutions arise because job roles are not clarified, the institutions do not have a comprehensive performance management system, training

Topic: Paradox or Paradigm? Enhancing Leadership Development Planning for the Succession of Educational Leaders in the Caribbean

267

programs are either absent or not effective to remove skills gap, and there are no planned programs for succession planning.

Theme 5: Agile, Distributive, Transformational, and Adaptive Leadership

Twelve studies (n=12) outlined that leaders must be empowered to build trust and share leadership to ensure continuity and embrace innovation. Distributive leadership ensures that leadership capacities are spread across individuals and teams. Distributed leadership model suites the innovative paradigm as it provides greater flexibility and allow for more employees to assume leadership roles regardless of their "formal titles." Unlike the hierarchical paradigm, this form leadership builds on collaboration and trust. Agile leadership also supports an innovative leadership paradigm. It is a form of leadership that fosters innovation because it is based on flexibility, collaboration, and continuous improvement allowing employees to develop within their succession roles (Ncube et al., 2024). For succession planning to be effective, the institution must have a culture that believes in defined values and shared vision (Society for Human Resource Management, 2015), which is provided through both distributive and agile leadership.

Twenty studies (n=20) outlined the use of adaptive leadership to boost succession planning, where leaders involve future leaders and faculty to become involved in decision making, training and development. Through adaptive leadership, HEI leaders can effectively respond to complex challenges and empower workers – this form of leadership is essential for leadership development (Hubahib, 2024). Similarly, transformational leadership is used to motivate and empower future leaders. Litz and Hourani (2020) argue that to nurture an institution's culture and create the level of change necessary to foster innovation, transformational leaders need to work toward influencing their shared beliefs and values - this is a good strategy for leadership development.

Research Question 3: What Leadership Succession Planning Framework(S) Can Be Adapted to Address the Paradox of Ensuring Organizational Stability While Fostering Adaptability in Educational Leadership?

The literature suggests that a hybrid approach must be used to reduce the paradox between stability and innovation. Stability requires continuity while adaptability requires innovation, therefore, a well-designed succession planning framework will address the issue. The framework for succession planning may range from institutions having a pool of talented, educated. and skilled workers to fill positions once they become available; selecting from external candidates; or having a formalized framework where the institution creates a formal database. One theme was derived from the systematic analysis.

Theme 6: Use Artificial Intelligence in Succession Planning and Leadership Development

Ten studies (n=10) indicated that artificial intelligence may positively impact succession planning because it provides a more in-depth examination of the talent pool and deeper analysis of the skills necessary for leadership roles (Attamimi et al., 2024). Artificial intelligence may be used to identify strengths, weaknesses, areas of improvement and potential growth. By using AI, organizations can better align the future leader and training needs with the goals of the institution (Talodhikar & Farooque, 2025). Soltis (2019) also added to the conversation by supporting the claim that AI is supported by big data analysis and may be used for risk assessment, scenario planning, and trend analysis. Gupta & Arora (2019) believes that sustainability may be achieved because AI will facilitate the future needs of leaders based on the current trends and the goals of the institution. Though AI can assess the skills gaps of potential leaders and personalize development plans, there are many issues surrounding the use of AI in succession planning such as ethical issues, governance, and compliance issues may arise. Therefore, institutions must employ governance frameworks (Ogunbukola, 2024).

Discussion

The tension in preparing higher education leaders for future roles is balancing the skills of the leaders with the skills demanded by the environment. Higher education leaders need to balance the bureaucratic environment with their ability to foster a collegial environment, create a balance between managing academics and their increasing role in managing resources, and balance the tension between their individual needs with creating a sense of shared purpose (Stefani, 2015).

Higher educational institutions that plan for leadership transition are in a better trajectory to adapt to change and maintain continuity. Succession planning is not a one-time event, and higher educational leaders need to develop various skills to adapt to changes. Leaders need to: (1) develop strategic agility by being proactive, understanding trends, and being able to adapt to changes; (2) develop ethical leadership skills by embracing accountability and transparency, (3) be involved in collaborative leadership through the distribution of tasks and empowerment of future leaders, (4) develop vision oriented skills by developing clear goals and align it with the organization and foster a culture of innovation, and (5) develop effective communication and digital literacy skills. Niknamian (2020) showed that leadership skills and competencies are the requirements for succession planning. The strategies for success are to create leadership development programs where future leaders can invest in training, coaching and mentorship, and skill-building opportunities. To reduce the dichotomous tension between preparing educational leaders for future leadership roles and preparing them with the skills needed to adapt to a changing environment is to prioritize leaders with diverse backgrounds, experience, and innovative ideas.

There are various succession planning models that can be implemented within the Caribbean higher education system. A hybrid approach could also be maintained where the institutions take guidance from two or more models since there is no one "best fit" model. The traditional paradigm focuses on traditional replacement planning model that focuses on the grooming of one individual for a key role rather than ascribing to the talent pool management model where a pool of future leaders is created disregarding. Muslim et al (2012) stated that maintaining a talent pool model is the best succession planning tool rather than naming one replacement for a job. A leadership development model is more suitable for developing a pipeline of leaders through mentorship, coaching, and training programs. While the competency-based model is used where succession of future leaders is more aligned with the institution's strategy. The model that is most ideal for Caribbean institutions of higher learning will be based on the institutions focus, philosophy, governance structure, and their quest to reduce the tension or the paradox of traditional leadership versus innovative leadership.

Recommendations

To create a paradigmatic shift, a team approach to implement the academic plans at the institutional level should be adapted in higher educational institutions. Institutions should adopt a competency-based approach for leadership roles that align with the mission, vision, and strategies of the institution while bridging the skills gap to promote effective leaders. Training programs must be designed and tailored to the needs of the institution. Adaptive and innovative frameworks will reduce the paradox that exists. Future studies should examine future leaders' perception of leadership development and succession planning within their own institutions.

Conclusion

 The results of this review suggest that Caribbean educational institutions must rethink leadership development for succession planning. A successful succession planning model must prepare leaders to sustain the core values of education while also encouraging them to embrace innovation to address

modern challenges. Key barriers such as lack of funding, resistance to change, and insufficient leadership training resources need to be addressed to build a more sustainable and adaptive leadership framework. Though some studies concluded that Caribbean higher educational institutions are beginning to transform themselves from traditional to innovative, the process is slow. It was concluded that paradoxes can hinder the development of future leaders, and whilst there are paradigmatic issues in maintaining modern leadership development programs this may lead to a succession crisis in educational institutions. The way forward is to provide future programs to enhance training, mentorship, and a model framework for enhancing leadership capabilities.

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