

A Meta-Synthesis on School Leadership Succession: Groundwork For Effective Transition

Ma. Rizza Villamor, Gina Pecson, Lhyn Arcilla, Juvelyn Bacus, Amor Abando, Bernadette Bigcas, Maria Nancy Quinco-Cadosales

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received: October 11, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: May 13, 2022</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords : Meta-synthesis, School leadership succession, Effective leadership transition, Systematic Review</p>	<p><i>The potential school leadership succession plans with its best practices for effective transition were meta-synthesized from seventeen selected studies from 2016 to 2021. These were screened using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for systematic review and were organized using the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram to generate themes on school leadership succession and transition practices. The seventeen publications used in the study resulted to ten themes and three meta-themes. Themes 1 to 3 were categorized as school leadership succession phases, themes 4 to 6 were categorized as challenges and the remaining themes 7 to 10 were categorized as addressing the challenges in school leadership succession. In conclusion, when the schools have a pool of right leaders as identified in the succession planning, then there will be a smooth leadership transition. Thus, it is recommended that educational leaders establish measures to put in place school's succession plan.</i></p>
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Introduction

School leadership succession is bound to happen in any organization but can be one of the most critical events due to improper planning and transition ((Erasmus et al., 2017). Studies have shown that training, guidance, professional development were some of the requirements to gain the leadership position (Taipale, 2012 as cited in David & Abukari, 2019). However, the excruciating demands and expectations from school leaders (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021) lead to shortage of school leaders (Bryant et al., 2017; Pecson & Pogoy, 2021). In addition, there were other issues that need to be addressed such as lack of preparation, inequality in organization, unethical practices in filling the vacant leadership position (Kalman et al., 2017; Cieminski, 2018). As pointed out by Arrieta & Ancho (2020), there were no standard procedures in the criteria and selection of the next successor. In this regard, this study aimed to examine the school leadership succession plans with its effective transition practices to ensure the stability of the school and avoid the risk of losing potential leaders.

According to Cieminski (2018), there should be an adequate pool of qualified candidates for such positions with proper criteria, evaluation, and assessment (Cruickshank, 2018). Therefore, it is critically important for school organization to formulate policies, procedures & pathways in mentoring potential future leaders (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015) to prevent the shortage and to give a smooth flow of turnover to new successors in an organization (Hickson, 2019; Chinonye, 2020).

To date, among the research studies that were conducted in the Philippines revealed that there were no standard procedures in selecting new leaders (Arrieta & Ancho, 2020). Hence, this study can provide researchers and educational leaders on how to create more leaders for school success.

Research Questions

This study used a meta-synthesis approach to examine the leadership succession plans of educational leaders and effective transition practices. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the common leadership succession practices in schools?
2. What are the challenges faced by the educational leaders in succession planning?
3. What recommendations can be suggested to overcome the challenges faced by educational leaders in succession planning?

Methodology

This study used meta-synthesis, a method of systematic review and integration of qualitative findings (Lachal et al., 2017) using an interpretative synthesis of data, including phenomenology, ethnographies, grounded theories, and other integrated and coherent descriptions or explanations of phenomena, events, or cases (Sandelowski & Barroso as cited in Bondas & Hall, 2007; Ludvigsen et al., 2016). It follows a standard set of procedures for qualitative research synthesis (Willig & Wirth, 2018) of data screening and extraction (Shamseer et al., 2015) to generate evidence-based explanations using its theoretical approaches (Lee et al., 2015) that gives an in-depth understanding and breadth in comparison to the results of a single study (Bondas & Hall, 2007).

Search Strategy

Using Publish or Perish Software, literature from Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, and ProQuest databases were used to gather data related to leadership succession (Cadosales et al., 2021). Keyword used was “educational leadership succession”. All studies related to educational leadership succession published from 2016 to 2021 have been downloaded and analyzed. To narrow the list of relevant studies, keywords used were “educational leadership succession”, “succession planning”, “succession practices”, and “qualitative research”. Furthermore, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklist for Systematic Review was used to finalize the list of included studies. The PRISMA 2020 flow diagram was used to organize the extracted data.

Selection/Inclusion Criteria

The studies utilized meta-synthesis approach based on the following inclusion criteria: a study about school leadership succession and transition practices. It must be published qualitative research outputs using English language such as research articles, theses, and dissertation from Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, and ProQuest databases, and 2016-2021 studies. Also, it should be open access and must qualify the CASP checklist.

Search Result

Figure 1 showed the search result in identifying the studies included in the meta-synthesis. The figure displayed PRISMA, an acronym which stands for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Flow Diagram by Page et al. (2021). It involved three levels such as identification, screening, and included. Identification as the initial stage gave a total of 760 studies from the Publish or Perish application. Sixty-nine (69) came from Google Scholar, ten (10) from Taylor and Francis, and two hundred sixty-nine (269) came from ProQuest database. One hundred sixty-seven (167) has been removed due to non-use of the English language. Screening involved 181 literatures but seventy-six (76) of these have been unavailable for access; forty-six (46) have been excluded because the studies were not using a qualitative research method. Fifty-nine (59) have been assessed for eligibility where 24 have no fitting abstract and five (5) did not pass the intensive screening. Using the CASP checklist, only seventeen (17) studies were finally included.

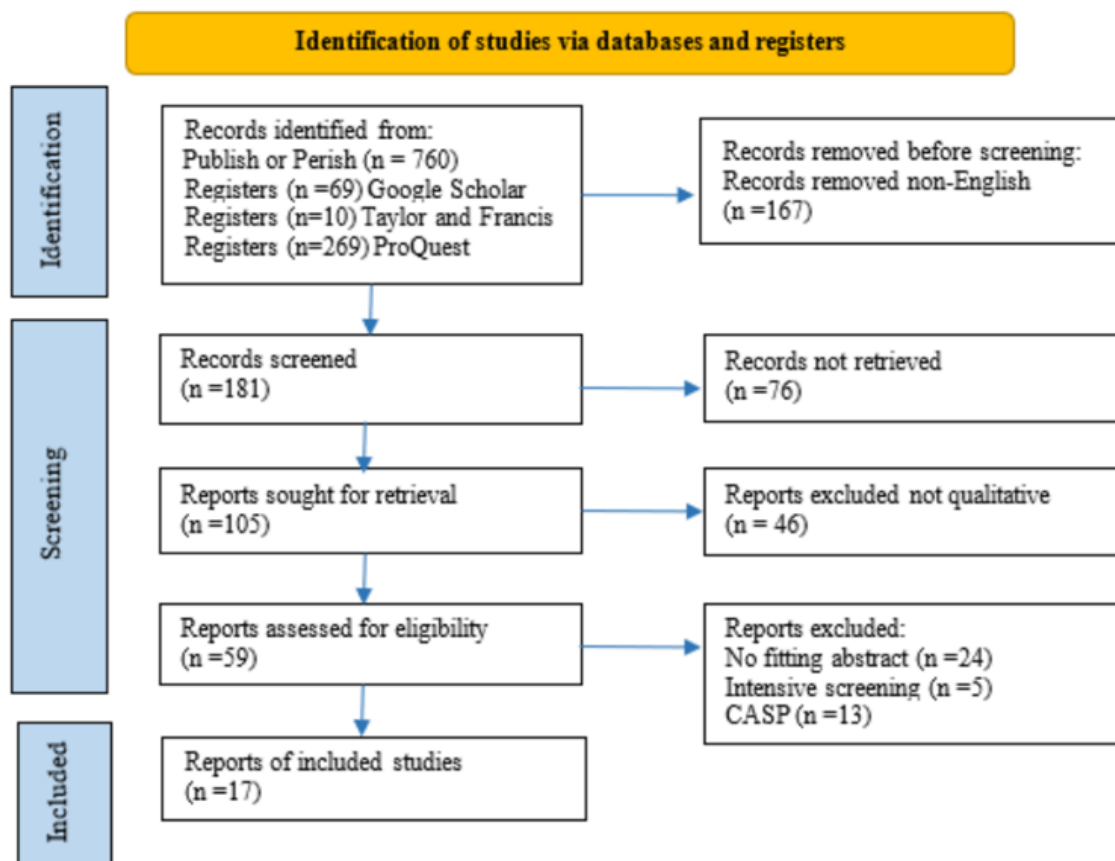


Figure 1. The Flow Diagram of the Study Utilizing PRISMA

Data Analysis

The collected data undergone constant comparison and thematic analysis has been used to analyze qualitative data to generate essential or recurrent themes (Nicolas, 2021). The study followed the six-phase guide of Braun and Clarke (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) which included familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes, descriptions of themes, and lastly, a written report.

Results and Discussion

The following results and discussions were in accordance with the objectives set forth in this study. School leadership succession phases, challenges in school leadership succession, and addressing the challenges of school leadership succession were identified as the three meta-themes. Ten emerging themes have been found also, namely, recruit the right people, raise the bar, training and mentoring, subjective selection process, existence of accountability pressures, lacunae of leadership capacity building, leadership competence, leadership character, leadership capacity, and leadership culture. Table 1 below provided an overview of the final collection of 17 studies included in the meta-synthesis.

Table 1. Studies Focusing on School Leadership Succession included in Meta-synthesis

No.	Author & Year	Generated Codes
1	Connoly, M., Milton, E., Davies, A., & Barrance, R. (2018)	Heightened shared leadership Collaboration between school and community
2	Erasmus, B., Naidoo, L., & Joubert, P. (2017)	Low teacher commitment Congruency of school's vision and employees' vision Lack of role preparation
3	Cruickshank, V. (2018)	Less time on instructional leadership and learning
4	Bryant, J., Escalante, K., & Selva, A. (2017)	More attention to develop principal's leadership and communication skills Training focused on practical approach than theoretical knowledge Professional isolation

5	Peters, G., Gurley, D., Fifolt, M., Collins, L., &McNeese, R (2016)	Work intensification Communication, trust, moral, empowerment School capacity Look for potentials among followers Considered staff allocation
6	Kalman, M., Summak, M. S., &Cimen, I. (2017)	Intellectual stimulation through professional development Understanding and developing people Recognizing expertise as basis for leadership roles Distributing leadership builds the capacity of teachers and leaders Major leadership traits: intelligence, self- confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability Succession planning is a moral obligation of leaders Distributing leadership as the contributing factor in sustaining success Knowledgeable and adaptive to changing environmental conditions Sustainability by building capacity of others to lead
7	Palmer, B., Kelly, J., Mullooly, J. (2016)	Succession is planned and appointment of hard-working professionals Building a community of leaders to distribute leadership and responsibility to new leaders Successful succession planning requires better planning than tenure
8	Ballaro, J. & Polk, L. (2017)	A long lever of leadership Sustainability performance requires strategic abandonment Sustainability and succession planning Increased accountability pressures
9	Sabina, L. & Colwell, C. (2018)	Insufficient succession planning within the system Promoting order and discipline Clarifying the roles and rules Adapting to the context Managing external support Developing self-esteem and sense of belonging Succession planning and building of capacities as essential elements Strategies in building leadership capacity
10	Cieminski, A.B. (2018)	The culture created inspired a shared vision and enabled others to act The opportunities for authentic practice The principals' leadership ideologies Encourages teachers' professional development. Teachers and other personnel need to improve competence to qualify for opportunities. The culture of exclusion and proverbial glass ceiling More leadership programs Organizational structure that embraces equality Importance of mentorship
11	Hickson, C. (2019)	Highly considers the affective domain of the people in school Gaps in knowledge Improve the program management Training in the financial management Procedural justice is strongly related to job Satisfaction, trust in management, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions
12	Brauckmann, S., Pashiardis, P., &Arlestig, H. (2020)	The processes, procedures and practices were unethical and unfair Effectiveness of hiring using "fit" Importance of "fit" within principal selection and the reliability as selection criteria Filling a vacancy: planning and selecting candidates with the best skill sets Promotional traits Additional educational requirements Continued on-the-job- training
13	Campbell, C. D.	Employee performance evaluation Scarcity of women in positions of power in higher education

	(2018)	Inhibition of women promotion due to structural and cultural factors Challenges and opportunities of internal and external hiring Resentment from internal candidates Hiring of administrators externally Understanding of culture and climate of externally hired candidate New perspectives from new leaders Unique opportunities to make impression of external hires
14	Arora, N. (2019)	No micromanaging Focused on assistant principals Induction and mentoring program Tapping and encouraging teachers to become leaders Benefit of partnerships Distribute leadership and empower more teacher leaders Nurturing internal personnel through career planning and training programs Slow to embrace and informal system of succession Succession plan should be based on objective assessment and competencies Potential individuals identified Job assignments for developmental experiences Retention Should be transformative leader to facilitate change Knowledge and experience
15	Chinonye, W. (2020)	Retention of workforce depends on succession planning policy and strategies Necessary human resource to avoid vacuum Getting the right people in the right place at the right time Dependable tool for a sustainable institutional viability No visible operational policy Absence of effective succession planning initiative causing loss of intellectual property Deployment of special strategies to recruit, develop and retain their pool of top talents Trainings/ development/mentoring Human resource management Talent pool-promotables Retention / attraction / development
16	Huggins, K. S., Klar, H. W., Hammonds, H. L., &Buskey, F. C. (2017)	Examination of personal capacities of principals to develop leadership capacities of others Principals' personal capacities to foster the leadership capacities of others Distributed leadership- develops informal leaders and maximizes potential Principals distributing, sharing, and extending leadership Less enthusiasm about sharing few mental models Personal capacities that facilitated leadership capacity building Values, assumptions, beliefs, practical knowledge
17	Juwuno, I. D. &Harly, T. H. (2017)	Succession stages from talent pooling to guiding newly elected leaders The succession process can create instability in the organization Characteristics /personality of leaders

While it is essential for schools to achieve success, a figurehead has to ensure that the organization can sustain itself by placing the right person to take the lead. With the demands placed on school leaders to perform and function efficiently and effectively, many are struggling, exacerbated by the fact that the pandemic has brought about unprecedented challenges (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021).

The seventeen publications used in the study resulted to ten themes and emerging three meta-themes as displayed in Figure 2. The first three (1-3) themes were categorized as school leadership succession phases, fourth to sixth (4-6) themes were categorized as challenges and the remaining themes (7-10) were categorized as addressing the challenges of school leadership succession.

Meta-theme 1: School leadership succession phases

The school succession phases involved a series of activities designed to maintain active and coordinated leadership. Meta-theme 1 incorporates the three major activities that started with recruiting the right people with vibrant talents within and outside the organization, then raising the bar, and finally subjecting them to intensive training and mentoring to become potential successors for key leadership positions. During these phases, the organizational performance is naturally affected due to changes in communication and decision-making processes that occur between principals and teachers (Juwuno&Harly, 2017).

Theme 1: Recruit the right people

One of the most crucial phases in school leadership succession is the recruitment of the right people. Chinonye (2020) emphasized that getting the right people whose talents, skills, & work behaviors that are aligned with the organizational goals can ensure a progressive work performance. This fact can be achieved if succession planning is set in place as mentioned by Kalman et al. (2017) and could help prevent wasted time and energy.

According to Chinonye (2020), good employees are rare and inimitable. Hence, recruiting the right people requires comprehensive evaluation and selection. Likewise, studies revealed that there was a shortage of quality applicants for school leadership positions as pointed out by Cruickshank (2020), therefore, existing school leaders must identify and develop leadership potentials among existing staff. This fact has been supported by Cieminski (2018) as he advanced active recruitment of teachers with leadership potential. Hence, it is necessary to understand that recruiting the right people for the right position is not easy. Though there are several studies suggesting varied strategies for active recruitment of teachers with leadership potential, school leaders should consider all candidates, and not just candidates that come from their internal organization (Sabina & Colwell, 2018). Incumbent leaders were encouraged to take active roles in honing future leaders through creating a talent pool, encouraging staff to take on new roles, and developing a culture of leadership distribution (Cieminski, 2018).

Theme 2: Raise the bar

Raising the bar creates the opportunity to set clear goals and expectations from the employees within the organization which may include their job responsibilities, professional ethics, skills, and development (Du Plessis, 2017). School leaders need to guide, monitor, and track down their expected goals and results that will allow them to grow and excel in their performances. On the contrary, as pointed out by Kalman et al. (2017), lack of information process, top-down imposition of changes, inappropriate evaluation criteria, burnout, distrust, and loss of energy were some of the ill effects due to unclear roles and rules in the organization.

Studies showed that there were many novice principals who have experienced negative consequences of moving too quick and too soon with changes (Leiva et al., 2017), thereby results to lacking in preparation for the role (Espuny et al., 2020) and other issues such as deservingness, competencies, and capabilities (Kalman et al., 2017). At this point, raising the bar is critical to creating sustainable leadership, especially among new leadership in an organization (Ballaro& Polk, 2017). School leaders must capacitate the members of the organization and distribute leadership to build a community of leaders. This is to further ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in leadership development, participate in leadership roles and develop themselves professionally (Huggins et al., 2017).

Theme 3: Training and mentoring

Due to the leadership vacuum, hiring of administrators was done externally, which may sometimes lead to difficulty in adapting to the school culture (Sabina & Colwell, 2018). On the contrary, as pointed out by Palmer et al. (2016), hiring someone who understands and appreciates the culture of the school and community would make the leadership transition easier. To avoid such leadership vacuum, a strong emphasis on training and mentoring programs within the organization have been suggested. Intentional professional growth and development must be done through an internal pool of candidates (Chinonye, 2020) who are willing to undergo training and mentorship programs (Ballaro& Polk, 2017) to fill in vacancies. Notably, trust relationships are integral for a successful training and mentoring program (Hickson, 2019) to boost their morale and use practical applications of their knowledge and skills (Bryant et al., 2017).

Meta-theme 2: Challenges in school leadership succession

As much as the different school leaders and administrators prepare for the succession planning in their respective institutions, different challenges on its implementation are inevitable. Meta-theme 2 addresses different challenges in school leadership succession namely the subjective selection process, existence of accountability pressures, and lacunae of leadership capacity building.

Theme 4: Subjective selection process

Effective succession planning process is essential for the stability of an organization without losing the potential people with their best set of skills in their job performances (Chinonye, 2020). However, studies revealed that the selection of leaders were highly subjective (Blackmore et al., 2006 as cited in Mullooly & Palmer, 2016) where data collected through interviews, resume, and reference checks have no formal systems (Ash et al., 2013 as cited in Mullooly & Palmer, 2016). Hence, it lacked psychometric rigor (Palmer, 2014; Braukmann et al., 2020). Consequently, selection criteria are equally important in evaluating the selection process for future successors, but as Lemoine et al. (2018) pointed out that irrelevant or vague criteria have surfaced over the decades. Admittedly, there is a leadership crisis in the recruitment system (Grissom et al., 2015 as cited in Lemoine et al., 2015). As pointed out by Arora (2019), succession plans should be based on objective assessment and competencies to promote fairness in the selection process. Using objective criteria, potential leaders receive equal rights and opportunities within the organization (Cieminski, 2018).

Theme 5: Existence of accountability pressures

The existence of accountability pressures in leadership succession is one of the challenges in many countries where seniority and hierarchy were some of the unique features being applied in some institutions despite modernization and internationalization in the workplace (Wetprasit, 2016). School leaders are faced with growing demands and responsibilities in their administrative functions, human relations, and instructional functions (Netolicky, 2020 as cited in Pecson & Pogoy, 2021). These demands lead to enormous accountability pressures due to the expectations of governments and other stakeholders. According to Ng & Szeto (2016), principals were under pressure due to the compliance and directives given by the top administration in addressing the different needs of the school.

On the other hand, research has found that the senior teachers have very high levels of control and are prioritized in new leadership roles due to their years of experience and their voices being heard by many (Meyer, 2016). This fact could be one of the main reasons for the unsuccessful management and leadership in schools (Wetprasit, 2016) because lesser opportunities of assignments were given to young trainees due to distrust of senior leaders over them. On the contrary, these existing leaders need to exert their moral obligation in empowering the potential trainees with the tasks (Kalman et al., 2017; Arora, 2019) to develop them from followers to leaders (Peters et al., 2016). Thus, the leadership succession must be carefully planned in preparation for the next leader. A study on the approaches to succession management of non-academic leaders in higher educational institutions recommends that the university should design strategic leadership succession plans (Connolly, 2018) where leaders are empowered, and their voices are heard and valued. This can eventually create a healthy work environment with high-performing organization (Oppong, 2016).

Theme 6: Lacunae of leadership capacity building

The growing demand to have quality education highly requires school leaders who have different sets of skills and competence in leading their respective institutions (Gokuladas, 2019). According to the findings of Ng & Szeto (2016), new principals lack leadership skills, which can become a problem for leading schools. Also, Erasmus et al. (2017) pointed out that because of lack of leadership preparation, it affected the organizational performances where teachers have low commitment and motivation to give their best.

In addition, a study shows that low-capacity building efforts are one of the reasons for poor management of teacher attrition (Fuller, 2017). As Cieminski (2018) mentioned also that school leaders should create a culture of learning and developing leaders to improve their competence and skills. Furthermore, Huggins et al. (2017) points out that it is also important to look at the leader's personal capacities of the leader who can exercise distributed leadership to maximize the potential of future leaders for a successful transition. In other words, developing leadership capacity of the members is an integral part of the organization (Huggins et al., 2017).

Meta-theme 3: Addressing the challenges of school leadership succession

Succession planning is seen as a systemic process for selecting and retaining leaders (Cieminski, 2018). The approach has been utilized to address issues when it comes to transitioning leadership among educational institutions. Meta-theme 3 focuses on leadership competence, character, capacity, and culture to address the challenges of school succession and transition.

Theme 7: Leadership competence

School leaders play a key role in ensuring successful school development efforts and academic student achievement. Studies revealed that leadership competence is considered as the key element for school leadership succession where leaders need to equip themselves to perform their leadership roles and responsibilities (Fernandez, 2010 as cited in Wisittigars&Siengthai, 2019) and be knowledgeable in pedagogical content, interpersonal skills, decision-making, and other managerial skills (Palmer et al., 2016) to ensure changes in the school system without adversely affecting the organization (Kin & Kareem, 2019).

Leadership competence also involves retaining the right pool of skilled individuals (Chinonye, 2020), focus on the applicants' qualifications and professionalization of principalship (Kalman et al., 2017), adaptable and open to change (Arora, 2019) and committed to developing leadership capacity in others (Huggins et al., 2017) which are the essential elements in leadership succession. Therefore, succession practices, such as active recruitment of potential teacher-leaders, use of competency models and screening tools to assess future successors (Mitgang et al., 2013 as cited in Cieminski, 2018). Doing so, it can fill in the organizational gaps by hiring a qualified leader (Cieminski, 2018). Without strong leadership competence, school leaders may continue to struggle to fill these vacant leadership positions (Brauckmann et al., 2020) that could jeopardize the future success of the school and students (Cieminski, 2018).

Theme 8: Leadership character

In profiling leadership development, leadership is always linked with character which should not be ignored aside from competence and commitment (Crossan et al., 2015). Leadership character is critically important in shaping the world we engage in because it matters a lot with the things we choose to decide and do things or even with the things we value which may lead to extraordinary results (Sturm et al., 2017). According to Crossan et al. (2015), studies by behaviorists such as psychologists and organizational theorists have shown that good character traits and values are associated with good leadership. As pointed out by Arora (2019), a leader who is trustworthy, goal-oriented, and authentic can be a catalyst of change in the organization. The performance of an organization is associated with the leadership style and personality (Juwono et al., 2017). It is necessary for leaders to actively improve their moral values, emotional intelligence, and empathy towards other stakeholders (Cieminski, 2018) to fulfill their duties and obligations. Overall, it is important to integrate the values, philosophical foundation of the principals when analyzing the context of leadership in school (Juwono et al., 2017).

Theme 9: Leadership capacity

Bryant et al. (2017) showed in their research that school leaders who placed more emphasis on practice than theory in building the leadership capacity create more opportunities for potential leaders to grow and develop professionally (Palmer et al., 2016). In such a manner, a positive culture is formed where clear vision, mission, and values have a great influence towards teachers who can be potential leaders in the future (Kalman et al., 2017). In addition, the school leader's personal leadership ideology (Cieminski, 2018) inspired teachers to become future school administrators. Meanwhile, to address the need of leadership capacity building, school leaders should understand that part of their job is to be committed in the continuous process of mentoring and developing future leaders (Peters et al., 2016; Ballaro & Polk, 2017). In addition, school leaders should empower people and trust them in decision-making, thereby allowing room for error to help them become more competent (Brauckmann, 2020). School needs structured strategies on how to build school leadership preparation (Sabina & Colwell, 2018) both in theory and in practice. A well-planned school leadership succession is achieved when a leader leaves a legacy by mentoring others, creating future career pathways and capacitates potential future leaders to higher levels of leadership position (Hickson, 2019).

Theme 10: Leadership culture

A deep understanding of the complexities of schools in a holistic manner will enable school leaders to foster harmonious relationships with sound values, beliefs and principles within an organization that promotes a healthy and safe learning environment. Hence, school leaders should create a positive school culture that

includes shared vision (Cieminski, 2018), distributed leadership (Huggins et al., 2017), intellectual stimulation (Kalman et al., 2017), empowerment (Peters et al., 2016), and collaboration (Connolly et al., 2018). Moreover, the school leaders' characters, beliefs, attitudes, and values have exemplified a role model that greatly inspired and influenced others to realize the school vision and mission statement into daily practice (Juwono&Harly, 2017).

Embracing a leadership culture allows people within an organization to develop self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Sabina & Colwell, 2018), which is the best motivator for developing leadership successors (Bryant et al., 2017). This fact also creates stability within the organization because of open communication, trust, and empowerment (Peters et al., 2016) and in turn enhances its school capacity to adapt to its changing environment. Hence, it is crucially important for school leaders to understand that they need to always give room to adapt and adjust their leadership behaviors to accomplish the school vision and mission of the organization which may inspire the people within the organization (Sabina & Colwell, 2018; Arora, 2019).

Figure 2 below summarizes the succession planning practices of school leaders. These educational leaders have various leadership succession practices with different challenges which they overcame by setting standards on their selection process developing leadership traits, culture, and character among constituents.

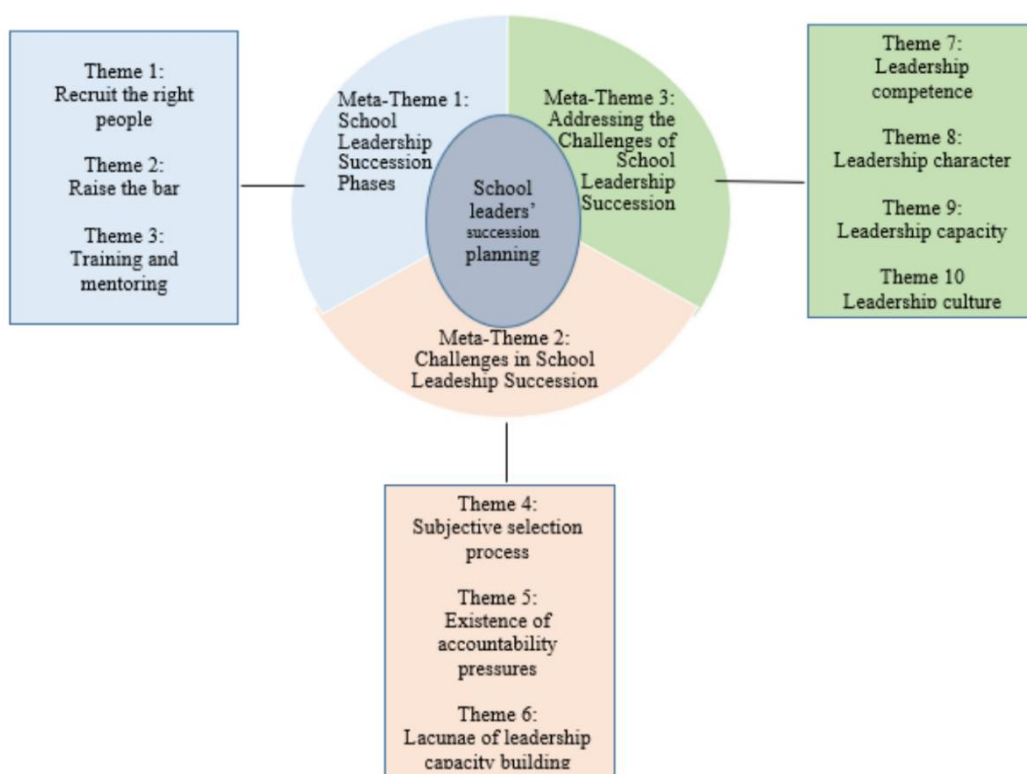


Figure 2: Succession Planning Practices of School Leaders

Conclusion and Recommendation

The succession practices of school leaders generated groundwork for effective transition. When a leadership succession plan is in place, the school will have a pool of right leaders ready to take over when key leaders leave. Thus, it is recommended that educational leaders may adopt these succession practices to ensure successful transition.

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Author Information

Ma. Rizza Villamor

Paknaan National High School
Department of Education Division of Mandaue
Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines 6014

Gina Pecson

Philippine Christian Gospel School
Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines 6000

Lhyn Arcilla

Sacred Heart School- Ateneo de Cebu
Mandaue City, Cebu, Philippines 6014

Juvelyn B. Bacus

Department of Education Carcar City Division
Carcar City, Cebu Philippines 6019

Amor O. Abando

Department of Education Division of Southern Leyte
Maasin City, Southern Leyte, Philippines 6600

Bernadette U. Bigcas

Cebu Normal University
Cebu City Philippines 6000

Maria Nancy Quinco-Cadosales

Cebu Normal University
Cebu City, Philippines 6000
