Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal
IEEPJ
University of Hormozgan
Online ISSN: 2588 - 4395
Homepage: https://ieepj.hormozgan.ac.ir

Model of Succession Dimensions in Primary School Principals: A Structural Equation Modeling Study

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Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:
Received 24 June 2023
Received in revised form 25 July 2023
Accepted 16 September 2023
Published online 01 December 2023

Keywords:
Succession,
Management skills
Elementary school principals,
Structural equation modeling

ABSTRACT

Objective: The current study was undertaken with the aim of formulating a model for the dimensions of succession in primary school principals through the application of structural equation modeling.

Methods: The present study utilized a mixed research design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative phase employed thematic analysis, while the quantitative phase employed survey methodology. The qualitative sample consisted of units of analysis from Nahj al-Balagheh and experts in religious sciences in this particular field. In contrast, the quantitative sample comprised principals from secondary schools in Tehran. Data collection in the qualitative phase was conducted through interviews with experts, while the quantitative phase gathered information through the use of a questionnaire.

Results: The findings revealed the dimensions of succession among school principals as derived from the teachings of Nahj al-Balagheh. These dimensions encompass social capabilities, creative management, specialized capabilities, managerial capabilities, effective management within a meritocratic system, personality traits, and motivation. Furthermore, the model derived from the qualitative data was subjected to testing through structural equation modeling, demonstrating a favorable fit with the data.

Conclusions: The findings of this study offer valuable insights to senior education managers in the selection process for primary school principals, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of management skills among this group.

Cite this article: Rezaei, K., Bagheri, M., Moazzami, M. & Jahed, H. (2023). Model of succession dimensions in primary school principals: a structural equation modeling study. *Iranian Evolutionary Educational Psychology Journal*, 5 (4), 1-14.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/5.4.1

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Publisher: University of Hormozgan.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22034/5.4.1

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[DOI: 10.22034/5.4.1]

Introduction

In contemporary organizations, there is a significant emphasis placed on intangible assets such as innovation, intellectual capital, brand name, entrepreneurship, and creativity. These particular resources serve as the fundamental pillars that position the organization as an exemplar. Organizations prioritize individuals and, once the appropriate individuals are strategically placed, they undertake measures to surpass their competitors. Research indicates that in order to achieve success, it is imperative to assign individuals to suitable positions and ascertain the optimal functions for each position. In the present competitive and dynamic environment, the notion of succession breeding is increasingly being raised due to heightened international competition and evolving technology. Essentially, succession breeding is a process rooted in knowledge and serves as the outcome of knowledge application. Technological advancements, globalization, the necessity to promptly respond to environmental changes, cost reduction in the face of intense competition, diminishing employee loyalty, displacement, globalization, the aspiration for a knowledge-based economy, the advancement of technology, a career path without boundaries, escalating changes, workforce diversity, and shifts in employee preferences and expectations intensify the imperative nature of succession (Zein Eldini Bidmeshki, 2013). Succession planning is a continuous process that involves identifying successors for crucial roles within an organization and cultivating their capabilities in a manner that prepares them for future leadership positions (Ahmadi, 216). Let us consider the evidence from literature and tradition, which demonstrates that employing these criteria to address social, political, cultural, economic, and military issues surpasses the effectiveness of the established Western criteria. Leadership in Islam encompasses the overall leadership of an individual over religious and worldly affairs, encompassing both religious leadership and political leadership (Hosseini, 2017). Schools are renowned for their ability to establish a mission, vision, strategic plan, and professional development, yet only a few schools invest the time to formulate a leadership succession plan (Ali, 2019).

Statistical evidence demonstrates that contemporary organizations lack a specific executive approach when it comes to selecting a successor. The data reveals that a significant portion, namely 67%, of global organizations do not possess any succession system for implementation. Furthermore, 45% of these organizations lack a development plan for their managers. This data suggests that the transition from theory to practice poses a considerable challenge for succession

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management within organizations (Bukhari, 2020). The succession system stands as a fundamental component in the human resources and strategic planning of any organization. In essence, succession management ensures the effectiveness of the management transfer process within organizations and mitigates the risks associated with knowledge loss, which greatly impacts organizational success. Moreover, it is intricately linked to enhancing employee performance and facilitating career progression. The absence of proper planning for the succession system can directly contribute to the organization's downfall through the departure of key personnel. Conversely, identifying suitable alternatives necessitates a complex design and strategy (Sabzwari Yousefabad, 2017). Succession management represents an ongoing and systematic endeavor to secure leadership continuity, foster the development of intellectual capital and knowledge, and facilitate individual growth for the future of the organization (Ramula, 2021).

Succession management is an unavoidable and potential process that every organization confronts. Recently, organizations have shown increased concern for succession management (Fadiy, 2019). Succession activities are crucial arrangements utilized by organizational policymakers to derive sustainable benefits from capable and skilled human resources. The departure of proficient employees at various levels of the organization due to retirement, resignation, promotion, termination of service, and even death creates a void and shortage in key organizational positions. This can disrupt the organization's progress towards achieving its goals (Mirsafian, 2019). Many organizations place excessive emphasis on succession management and talent development processes, disregarding the fact that talented employees do not prefer to remain in their positions for an extended period. It is evident that most organizations fail to implement necessary replacement methods for potential employees (Elbad, 2019). Shipker et al. (2018) introduced succession planning as a factor influencing people's inclination towards organizational conflict, while Ali and Mehrin (2019) identified effective succession systems as factors that reduce the likelihood of employees leaving the organization and enhance emotional commitment. Consequently, the presence of an effective succession system is a necessity for every organization. Succession management ensures the continuity of leadership and, as a significant and structured tool, nurtures internal successors for key positions within the organization. It also caters to the future needs of employees, enhances the quality of candidates by developing competencies, and bridges skill gaps (Davoudi, 2015). Succession management is not merely about filling future

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organizational positions, but rather a methodical process that involves identifying key positions, determining necessary competencies and qualifications, selecting talented internal candidates, developing them, choosing successors, and ensuring resource availability. Presently, the education system has entrusted the management of its various departments to teachers with educational backgrounds and experience. However, educational experience alone cannot serve as proof of success in managerial and leadership roles within education (Nasrati, 2016). In the context of schools, it can be observed that schools face an increase in the turnover of managers, and any change in leadership directly impacts several areas. Similarly, executive positions in the public, private, and non-profit sectors are predominantly held by individuals approaching retirement age (Fusarelli, 2018). Without a well-developed succession plan that can be promptly implemented, schools risk losing valuable personnel and encountering various challenges, as well as a significant sense of instability among stakeholders. Therefore, it is imperative for schools to have a succession plan in place to ensure continued success. As stated by Calarso (2013), school administrators must recognize that a well-developed succession plan should be a priority for any organization and should be established prior to a change in leadership rather than during a crisis.

The examination of research conducted domestically and internationally has revealed that studies have been conducted in the area of designing a succession model. Notable research includes the works of Timuri (1401), Faizi (1400), Ghorbani (1399), Rajaipour (2019), Elbad (2019), Daudi (2027), Amin (2026), Zakari (2025), Torabi (2025), Zakari (2024), Jackson (2022), Ramola (2021), Eli Weeks (2021), Rabi (2021), Tucker (2020), Bukhari et al. (2020), Ogwani (2020), and Umans (2019). These studies have emphasized the need for further investigation.

In terms of the significance and necessity of this research, studies indicate that the appointment and replacement of managers in the education and training sector currently rely on guidelines and instructions provided by provincial authorities. However, due to the lack of up-to-date instructions, written programs, and insufficient scientific support for the succession of managers in education and training, top-level managers within the organization believe it is essential to review the succession system and managerial competence in this field. Additionally, the examination of the noble book Nahj al-Balagheh, which represents the life and government model of Imam Ali (AS) and serves as a supreme example of Islamic governance under the guardianship of Imam Masoum, highlights the importance of extracting models and intellectual frameworks for the management

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of contemporary Islamic society. Furthermore, despite research efforts focused on extracting the components of surrogate parenting, the components of the substitute parenting model in the education system remain unclear. Consequently, considering the lack of research in this area regarding succession and the need for a conceptual model based on religious teachings in education, this study aims to address the following question: What does a structural equation modeling study on the design of dimensions of succession in primary school principals entail?

Materials and Methods

The present study is characterized by its practicality with respect to its objectives and the utilization of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data as well as descriptive, analytical, and survey methods. The qualitative phase of the research involved a statistical population that comprised units of Nahj al-Balagha analysis and twelve religious science experts specializing in Nahj al-Balagha as well as experts in Quranic sciences and hadith. The qualitative analysis was conducted on the content of the Nahj al-Balagha book. The sampling process initially involved the selection of relevant research articles and the Nahj al-Balagheh book as sources. Subsequently, specific statistical samples or units of analysis were identified, including the competencies of managers and successors in sermons, wisdom, and the letters of Nahj al-Balagheh. The experts for the qualitative method were identified through snowball sampling. For the quantitative part, the statistical population consisted of principals from secondary schools in Tehran city, who were selected using the cluster sampling method. Based on Cochran's sample size formula, a total of 384 individuals were selected. In the qualitative section, data collection was conducted through interviews with experts, while in the quantitative stage, information was gathered through a questionnaire. In the qualitative method, face validity was employed to ensure the reliability of the variables. This involved presenting the defined variables to a group of experts (including twelve experts) who then verified the validity of the variables and the steps taken. Structural equation modeling was performed using SPSS and Smart PLS software in the quantitative part, employing descriptive and inferential statistical methods. In terms of ethical considerations, the statistical samples were assured that the questions were exclusively for research purposes and there was no need to provide names and surnames. Furthermore, the subjects' participation in the research was

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voluntary, and there was no compulsion. Additionally, the subjects were informed that they could withdraw from the training sessions at any time.

Results

After the interview, open, central and selective codes were extracted. It should be mentioned that theoretical saturation was achieved after conducting 10 interviews. In this way, new extracted codes were not added to the total of codes in the 11th interview and the extracted codes were repeated. According to Nahj al-Balagheh's teachings, the dimensions of succession planning for principals of girls' schools in the city of Karaj are: individual dimension, interpersonal dimension and individual abilities, motivation, personality traits, creative management, effective management in meritocracy, social abilities, ability Management skills and specialized capabilities. In Table 1, the main concepts, categories and codes related to them are presented.

1. Table 1: Core coding and identification of categories and concepts related to the dimensions of succession

Concept	Category	Code
Individual	Personal behaviors in leadership and striving for continuous self-evaluation	**Having perseverance and seriousness in work** **Flexibility in thinking** Review and improve effectiveness
	Quality-based learning Job responsibility	**Facilitating conversation and mastering negotiation skills** **Welcome to critical thinking** Interacting and benefiting from effective internal and external participation in order to support the identification of communication needs
	Willingness to continuously learn and develop and improve professional capabilities	Active listening and refraining from judging employees and taking hasty measures
	Rethinking and thinking continuously about improving one's qualifications and the set of colleagues	Having a spirit of criticism and healthy and positive competition in order to advance the skill goals of the educational system
Interpersonal	Legality and adherence to professional values Identifying the critical success factors of crisis management	**Applying programs based on leadership standards, organizational development and change management.** **Need for continuous improvement** Skill in financial management
	Right understanding of the organization's vision	**Creating and developing the mission, ideal and culture of the organization** Knowing and understanding career goals
	Lead the creation and development of change programs	Prioritizing improvement activities
	Modifying the structure and processes continuously and in order to improve the effectiveness of training	Strengthening administrative-scientific skills to improve educational and administrative processes Applying and strengthening new and creative methods in educational-administrative processes Creating a quick and easy platform to solve problems and register comments and suggestions
Individual capabilities	Staff training	Creating opportunities and helping to grow and develop

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	Using technology to support improvement	Attention to education technology in order to improve the quality of teaching for easy and better learning
	Development of information literacy - technology and mastery of technologies	Development of information-technology literacy and mastery of educational and research technologies Communication with virtual networks and exchange of news and information up-to-date and fast scientific, social, educational, academic and...
	Attention to time management	**Strengthening effective interaction and friendly relations between employees and management** Promotion of knowledge management
Motivation	Professional behavior design	Designing professional behavior is a simplification process, which is the result of the collective and conscious effort of society members.
	Designing the professional behavior of social and economic activity	
Personality characters	Commitment to continuous learning, learning from own experiences and others	Pursuit of perfection and professional growth indicators such as: commitment to continuous and continuous learning, learning from one's own and others' experiences, continuous and in-depth study in the professional field, keeping one's information up-to-date
	Faithfulness to the promise, transparency and honesty, respect for equality with colleagues and students	
Creative management	Faithfulness to the promise, transparency and honesty, respect for equality with colleagues and students	Perfectionism and professional growth indicators such as: commitment to continuous and continuous learning
	Planning, collaboration	Leadership and management skills (system thinking, flexibility, etc.)
Effective management in meritocracy	The process of work is towards more intense changes.	Succession of school principals is an aspect of human life. Nothing is continuous and constant like development and transformation. In organizations and institutions
	Succession of school principals is a continuous process regarding the assessment of educational needs	Succession of school principals is a continuous process of evaluating the educational needs of each person and planning to meet these needs.
	Managers of supervision and control	
Social capabilities	Learning	Organizations want employees to learn and develop their abilities
	develop their abilities	
Management capabilities	Professional skills of the employee	Scientific skills are part of the employee's professional skills
	Scientific skills	
Specialized capabilities	Education and professional knowledge	Innovation of education and professional knowledge, more and more diverse studies with interest in research and innovation
	Interest in research and innovation	

Friedman's test was used to prioritize the dimensions of succession. According to the results of this test, social capabilities, creative management, specialized capabilities, managerial capabilities,

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effective management in meritocracy, personality traits, and motivation are in the first to seventh priority, respectively (table 2).

Table 2. The final prioritization of succession dimensions

Dimention	Priority
Social capabilities	1
Creative management	2
Specialized capabilities	3
Management capabilities	4
Effective management in meritocracy	5
Personality characteristics	6
Motivation	7

Figure 1 presents the final analyzed model. The presented model shows that the beta coefficients of the components of succession and the central phenomenon of succession are all statistically significant at an acceptable level ($p < 0.05$) and the model has relatively good fit indices.

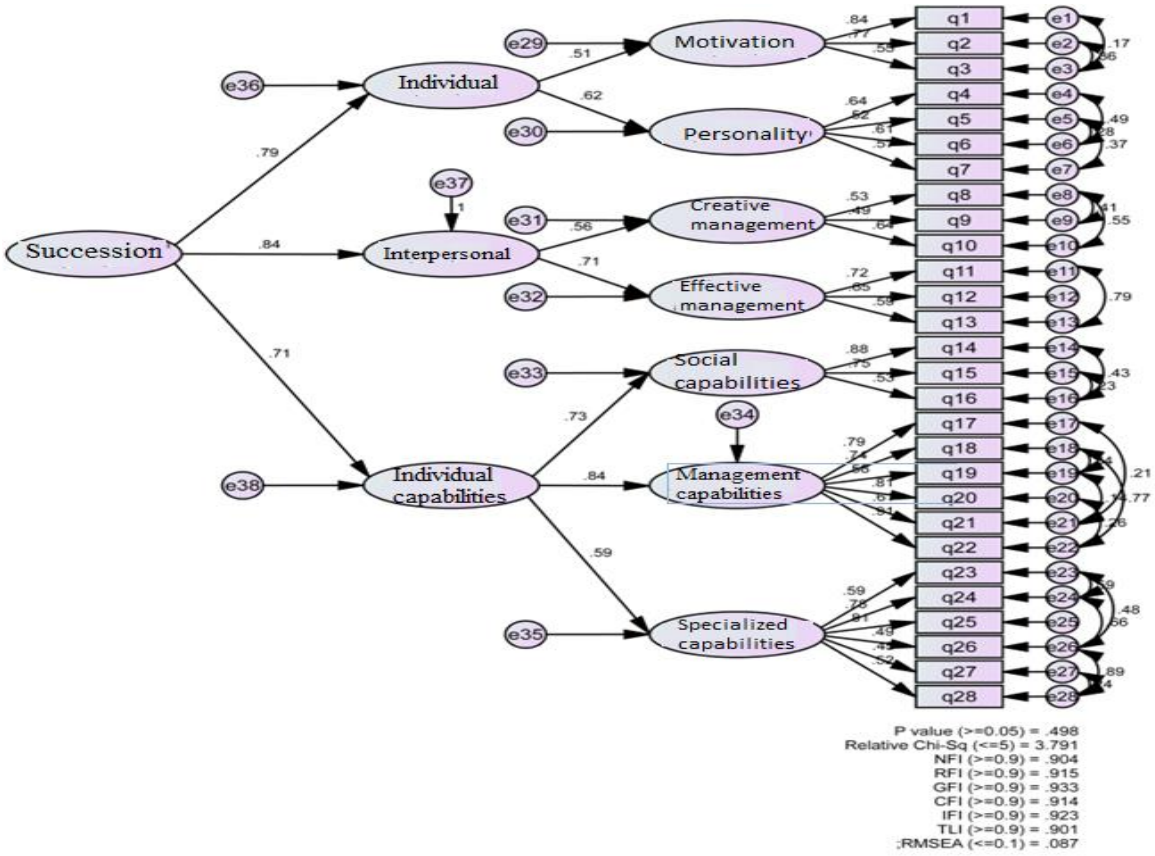

Figure 1. Structural equation model of succession dimensions

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Discussion

The aim of this study was to develop a conceptual model for succession dimensions among primary school principals through the utilization of structural equation modeling. The findings demonstrated that the succession dimensions among school principals, as guided by the teachings of Nahj al-Balagheh, encompass the individual dimension, which comprises personality traits and motivation. Additionally, the interpersonal dimension encompasses creative management and effective management within a meritocratic framework. The individual capabilities encompass social capabilities, management capabilities, and specialized capabilities.

Moreover, the research conducted by Timuri (2022), Faizi (2021), Ghorbani (2020), Rajaipour (2020), Elbad (2020), Davodi (2018), Amin (2017), Zakari (2016), Torabi (2016), Zakari (2014), Jackson (2022), Ramola (2021), Eli Weeks (2021), Robi (2021), Tucker (2020), Bukhari et al. (2020), Ogwani (2020), and Umans (2019) was closely aligned with this study.

In terms of addressing the research question, it is important to emphasize that the core objective of a succession program is to identify, train, and develop individuals who possess the necessary knowledge and skills to assume key positions. According to Rothal (2010), organizations are currently operating in a demanding world. The pursuit of higher levels of quality and productivity necessitates that future managers possess significantly greater capabilities and competence compared to current managers. Consequently, succession programs have undergone a remarkable and commendable evolution over the past decade. However, despite the significance of succession management systems, particularly at the upper echelons of organizations, many organizations either lack or fail to implement effective succession management. It is estimated that approximately 70% of the entire succession system remains unimplemented in the long term.

The objective of this research was to devise a model that encompasses the dimensions of succession in primary school principals. This study employed structural equation modeling to investigate the aforementioned dimensions. The findings revealed that the succession dimensions of school principals, as per the teachings of Nahj al-Balagheh, consist of two main aspects. The first aspect, known as the individual dimension, includes personality traits and motivation as its key components. The second aspect, termed the interpersonal dimension, encompasses creative management and effective management within a meritocracy framework. Additionally, the

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individual capabilities dimension comprises social capabilities, management capabilities, and specialized capabilities.

Moreover, in line with emerging scientific trends that focus on developing indigenous models of progress, and considering the Supreme Leader's emphasis on the application of the Iranian Islamic model, it has become imperative to design models derived from authentic Islamic texts and the practices of the Infallible Imams (AS) in the administration of public affairs and public sector management. This central element and executive of progress programs must be duly addressed. From an individual standpoint, succession planning entails the selection and training of internal employees for organizational leadership positions. It can be regarded as a form of talent management, wherein an institution or organization aims to implement a succession plan by identifying and nurturing talented individuals within its ranks. This allows them to develop their talents and skills, with a particular focus on enhancing managerial, supervisory, and leadership abilities.

It should be noted that a succession plan may not be limited solely to management positions within an organization. Leading organizations strive to adopt a broader concept known as succession management. According to Carta (2007), succession is a process that involves the selection of suitable employees, based on their qualifications and talents, to assume high-level and key management positions in an organization. The position and concept of individuals in both divine and material schools also serve as criteria for selecting individuals for positions and management roles. Islamic management emphasizes not only production but also the pursuit of human excellence. When choosing managers for the country, Imam Ali (A.S.) placed great emphasis on their perceptiveness, ability to diagnose and analyze problems, and their capacity to find appropriate solutions during crises.

Regarding the interpersonal dimension, the results indicate that the succession plan should be implemented and communicated in a transparent manner, ensuring that individuals are fully aware of their current position. Kanger and Fulmer (2009) argue that succession planning should encompass the cultivation and preparation of leadership and management capabilities within an organization, under the umbrella of succession management. Distinguishing superior succession systems is their emphasis on nurturing and developing the capabilities of individuals, rather than solely relying on finding ready-made successors. These systems introduce a fresh perspective and

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structure to organizations, reminding everyone that cultivating leaders and retaining talented employees is a top priority, an ongoing process, and an indispensable responsibility of all managers.

In the discourse surrounding the research proposals, it is imperative to acknowledge the provision of effective cultural, educational, and administrative interactions between the department's experts and the managers. This is crucial as it fosters heightened motivation and self-assurance, thus enabling managers to make effective decisions in complex scenarios. Additionally, it is essential to garner the perspective of senior managers and establish a consensus among them in order to facilitate the succession process. Given the substantial significance of senior managers' cooperation in the successful completion of any process or system, including the succession process, concerted efforts must be exerted to achieve this pivotal acceptance. When considering the limitations of the research, it is important to note that the community of experts and their change can be implemented using this model with slight variation. Consequently, exercising caution is imperative when generalizing the findings of this research.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

K.R, M.B, M.M and H.J contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

Funding

The authors did (not) receive support from any organization for the submitted work.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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