Understanding the value of Succession Planning within an Irish context of Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Projects

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Abstract

The theory of succession planning identifies that succession planning strategies are critical to organisational success operating in competitive environments. However, succession planning is more effective if aligned with succession management and not primarily focused on key designated positions within the organisation. The successes of succession planning strategies are influenced by several variables, succession management, leadership development and knowledge management.

The primary research question was to evaluate if management in organisation Y in their experience, support the literature finding that succession planning is critical to an organisation's success. Objective **(1)** was to identify if the organisation aligned succession management and planning activities; (**2**) to identify if organisation Y focusses on the development of staff at all levels, as opposed to designated positions within the business and if they have a leadership development strategy; **(3)** if the organisations subsidiaries actively engage in the acquiring and sharing of knowledge throughout the wider organisation. The researcher utilised a qualitative approach to gather primary data through semi structured interviews. The data collected from six midlevel management participants chosen through a convenience sample, was analysed to identify themes.

The research focus was aimed at organisation Y who operate in the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) sector of Ireland. The study was based on four sub companies whose primary objective is the O&M of motorway infrastructure.

The research identified that succession planning was implemented at a very senior level within the organisation, but at an operational level a succession management approach was established. The analysis identified that this strategy is adapted in response to the efficient (lean) and flat structure of the individual four companies. As such promotional opportunities are limited within the companies and a succession management strategy allows the development of staff to benefit the broader organisation.

In conclusion it was identified that organisation Y, has invested in leadership development over the last three years in response to an improving economy. This has an added advantage of improving job satisfaction and staff retention within the organisation. The organisation places a great emphasis on acquiring and capturing of explicit knowledge and sharing of both tacit and explicit knowledge through working groups. The operational management personnel at each company has a high degree of tacit knowledge due to the autonomy provided within their roles.

The study would benefit from additional research to examine the risks to organisational competitiveness posed by this level of long term autonomy as the economy continues to improve. Further research into succession strategies within other organisations operating within the same sector would provide a deeper insight into the value of succession planning and management initiatives.

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Abbreviations

KM   Knowledge Management

MMaRC   Motorway Maintenance and Renewal Contracts

O&M   Operation and Maintenance

PPP   Public Private Partnership

SP   Succession Planning

SP&M   Succession Planning and Management

1   Introduction

The researcher undertook this study to explore the value of succession planning within the Irish operation and maintenance sector to evaluate its importance from the experience and opinions of professional working within the industry.

The literature review focused on the area of succession planning and identified a gap in the literature available from the perspective of midlevel management in terms of succession planning strategies of organisations operating in the Irish context of Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Projects. Succession planning is identified as a critical component to organisations maintaining a competitive advantage. Rothwell (2002) defines succession planning as a solution to resolve future talent needs of organisations. Similar definitions define succession planning as a planned transition of leadership within the organisation (Garman and Glawe, 2004a). Regardless of the definition, the authors agree that succession planning is vital for the continued success of the organisation in a highly competitive environment and having appropriately competent personnel in the correct positions. Rothwell (2002). argues that most firms fail to prepare for the future replacement of experienced managers and instead rely on an ad-hoc replacement strategy, rather than a planned initiative within the organisation. The peered reviewed articles identified several variables that can influence the effectiveness of succession planning strategies, namely Succession Management, Leadership Development and Knowledge Management (KM). The literature suggests that succession planning and management (SP&M) strategies should be aligned by organisation to be more effective, and that the organisational development strategy should not be focus on designated position, but to develop staff with a broad range of knowledge (Groves, 2007). Hence, preparing the organisation for today and the future. Si Xue (2017) argues that knowledge management is critical to organisation continued success, both in terms of explicit and tacit knowledge management. Organisational success is built on the creativity, knowledge and experience of its work force (Muthuveloo, Shanmugam and Teoh, 2017), but a failure to adequately prepare for the departure of experienced personnel may have a negative impact on a firm's operation in a competitive market place.

The researcher identified a gap in the literature in relation to succession planning strategies within the operation and maintenance sector of motorway infrastructure projects. The case study research evaluates the concept of succession planning based on the primary data collected from participants of Organization Y, who is responsible for the operation and Maintenance (O&M) of a several high-speed motorways within Ireland. The participants were chosen through a convenience sample from midlevel management positions, taken from four subsidiaries of the organisation. This sector is a relatively new and young industry, which initially commenced in the early 90's through Public Private Partnerships (PPP) and expanded in 2013 with the introduction of Motorway Maintenance and Renewal Contractors (MMaRC). The study will also aim to understand the importance of knowledge management and how this is utilised to gain a competitive advantage within the organisation. The researcher will also explore the organisation leadership development strategy from the experience of the participants and try to understand it benefit in line with succession planning.

The researcher utilised a qualitative case study approached to obtained primary data through semi structured interviews from the six participants of organisation Y. The data was based on the operational experience of the six participants and was analysed using a thematic approach to identify common themes across the interviews.

This researcher undertook a deductive approach and identified commonalities between the literature review and the analysis of the data gathered through semi structured interviews. Such as developing managers with a broad knowledge of the organisation and not just for a designated position within the organisation. It was also identified that the organisation recognises the value of collecting and sharing of knowledge throughout the entire organisation. A key point highlighted was that the organisation culture encourages the development of employees and recognises this as a method to increase job satisfaction and staff retention. This study examines the importance of succession planning, management, leadership development and knowledge management activities within the operation and maintenance sector of Ireland, specifically from the view point of midlevel management within organisation Y.

1.1   Dissertation Overview

The main body of the dissertation is broken down into nine dedicated sections, with each section following on from the other in sequence. Each section concludes with a summary of what was discussed within the body of the chapter.

Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to topic of succession planning and set the scene for the following eight sections. Including a rational for undertaken the study.

Chapter 2 provides the literature research findings and delves into the common themes identified, namely succession management, leadership development and knowledge management. The chapter concludes with description of the organisation and sector the research will focus on.

Chapter 3 details the primarily research question and three objectives to be investigated.

Chapter 4 details the research methodology, approach and the rational for utilising a qualitative approach to collect primary data for answering the research question and objectives. The primary data is based on the experience of six midlevel manager and a thematic approach.is utilised to analyse the data collected from the semi structured interviews.

Chapter 5 provides a descriptive analysis of the findings and is based on the responses, experience and opinions of the participants working in the operation and maintenance sector within Ireland.

Chapter 6 discusses the case study research in terms of the literature review findings, identifies communalities and differences between the case study research and literature findings.

Chapter 7, 8 & 9 discusses the limitation of the study, provides a recommendation for further study and concludes with a conclusion to the dissertation.

2   Literature Review

In a highly competitive environment organisational success is built on the creativity and productivity of its workforce. A failure to plan or develop resources for today and the future can result in a loss of competitive advantage. This literature review will explore the main themes surrounding succession planning to assess the organisation under review. A literature review will examine material surrounding succession planning, succession management, leadership development and knowledge management. This review will support the research question and objectives to identify their importance and the rational for this research.

2.1   Succession Planning

Rothwell (2005) defines succession planning as "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement".

All organisations at one point or other experience departures from both midlevel and senior management position. but a failure to adequately prepare for the departure of experienced personnel may have a negative impact on a firm's operation in a competitive market place. Managers over time build up a wealth of knowledge and working relationships both externally and within the organisations environment. A sudden departure can severely impact day to day operations, disrupt productivity and harmony within the organisations due to uncertainty (Berns and Klarner, 2017).

Succession planning is identified as key component in the continued success of a business to ensure continuity and uninterrupted service to the customer. Many studies focus on the importance of Chief Operating Officer (COO) succession planning within the organisation and agree it is a vital component in the success of the continued operation (Berns and Klarner, 2017). General Electric (GE) six-year CEO development process to ensure candidates acquired and developed the appropriate level of experience prior to appointing the successful candidate to top job, highlights the emphasis on the importance focused by large organisations on finding the correct successor for key roles.

Research has identified that internal succession of CEO or "Relay Succession" created less turbulence with company stakeholders, as the stakeholders became accustomed to the new CEO prior to appointment (Zhang and Rajagopalan, 2004). This form of succession from within the organisation provides benefits to both the candidate and the board. The candidate gets the opportunity to develop, gain experience and send a strong signal to the board by their performance, but the board is also given the opportunity to appraise the candidate prior to appointment and make alternative arrangements if unhappy with the candidate commitment or performance. However other studies suggest that potential heirs can leave the company for promotion elsewhere as result of the existing incumbent failing to step down (Zhang and Rajagopalan, 2004). Further research on CEO succession planning identified that external appointments have a negative effect on shareholders wealth, as opposed to a positive effect by internal appointments (Shen and Cannella, 2003). But a failure of succession planning is to concentrate efforts on the CEO position and not on other critical positions within the organisation (Fibuch and Van Way, 2012).

Research undertaken by Grove (2007), identified that organisations benefited from focusing not just at executive positions, but with the leadership development of midlevel management, thus reaping the benefits of the capital investment. But the process is more effective within firms that engaged internal leaders within the process. By aligning succession planning and leadership development you plan for the further needs of the organisation and develop competent personnel at the same time (Fulmer and Conger, 2004). The research by Grove (2007) highlights the need for commitment and ownership (buy-in) from existing leaders to act as mentors in developing employees with potential to grow within the firm. Other research supports this theory and emphasises the focus of an organisation ought to be on forward succession planning. Instead of focused succession planning based on the employee's position (job title) within the organisation, the emphasis should be based on the competency of the employee to develop their potential in an ever changing dynamic environment (Guinn, 2009; Rothwell, 2005b;). The organisation should focus efforts to develop individuals across the organisation for future changes in the management structure, but Rothwell (2005), argues that this should not be limited to senior managements and to do so would result in a failure in the succession

planning process and lead to a shortage in required talent, thus a loss in competitive advantage. Technology advancements mean both the internal and external environment change at a rapid pace (Chaharbaghi and Willis, 2000). Furthermore, the needs of the customer change and so does their perception of perceived value. As such the job specification is continually changing to suit the environment. It is better to develop the person for the future, as opposed to develop the person for a designated role. Conger and Fulmer (2003) identified a failure with succession planning that may occur if the person appointed to the top job does not hold all-round knowledge of the organisation, even if that person is extremely efficient in certain aspects of the organisation. Their research supports both Guinn (2009) and Grove (2007) research in that succession planning should be focused on the development of talent within the organisation and not on the top jobs (Conger and Fulmer, 2003). But talent development must be monitored and reviewed to ensure the employee is moving in the right direction with a focused development strategy. A study undertaken by Stanford University, involving interviews with executives at twenty companies identified a failure to align succession planning and talent development activities; instead these were treated as separate activities within the companies (Larcker and Saslow, 2014).

Garman and Glawe (2004) summaries the common themes identified in their succession planning research, when trying to identify this is set out in table 1 as follows:

Succession Planning "Best Practices": Common Themes

Topic	Recommendations	Exemplary source(s)
Overall process	• Tie methods to organizational strategic planning • Enlist top-level collaboration/endorsements • Involve departments and potential successors as process co-owners • Communicate openly; make the process as transparent as possible • Pilot test before broader roll-out	Herrera (2002) Rothwell (2002) Karaevli & Hall (2003) Conger & Fulmer (2003) Burns-Martin (2002)
Selection	• Identify a "talent pool"; multiple potential successors and multiple potential promotions • Develop formal selection criteria • Use multiple assessment methods • Provide manager training on selection	Byham, Smith, & Paese (2002) Kesler (2002)
Development	• Mandate development planning and follow-up as part of the process • Tie manager bonuses to planning participation and follow-through • Create development plans tailored to individual needs and succession opportunities • Use job rotations and other work-related projects for development	Rothwell (2002) Patton & Pratt (2002) Hicks (2000)
Program maintenance Evaluation	• Keep the process simple and efficient • Approach the process flexibly, and evolve it continuously • Set specific goals for succession planning programs, and measure progress against them regularly	Conger & Fulmer (2003) Karaevli & Hall (2003) Kesler (2002)

Table 1: Summary of Succession Planning Common Themes

Source: Garman and Glawe (2004, P. 121)

Meanwhile, a study undertaken identified a direct correlation between knowledge management practices and career development, as influencing factors on the successful implementation of succession planning within higher level institutes (Ku, Akmal and Kamil, 2016). An interesting conclusion identified that leadership style had very little impact on succession planning.

During this literature review several concepts continue to be identified in relation to succession planning, namely, Leadership and Knowledge Management, succession management, knowledge transfer (management) and leadership development.

2.2   Succession Management

Where succession planning is essential to preparing the organisation for the departures of personnel from key positions through retirement or loss; succession management prepares the overall organisation for the needs in the future.

Succession management is defined as a process of identifying competent personnel within the organisation and developing the employee to enable them to acquire the appropriate experience, skills and knowledge to meet both the existing and future needs of the organisation (Stadler, 2011). Rothwell (2005), argues that the key to employee retention in a changing economy lies in the development of existing staff through succession management. Conger and Fulmer (2003) argue that succession management is more effective if targeted at positions within the organisation that are difficult to fill, that is "linchpin" position within the organisation, positions that sudden departures would result in instant disruption to the operational activities. Often, these are typically established positions that are taken for granted within the organisation. Positions within the organisation that has developed over time with experience and acquired substantial tacit knowledge. This is knowledge gained from performing duties within the organisation and not available through documents or procedures, but gained and passed through time from employee to employee (Muthuveloo, Shanmugam and Teoh, 2017).

Succession management requires employee engagement, as employees may feel territorial about their position and reluctant to share information, thus organisation transparency is essential to its success. But is this point of view still valid in today's environment, with increasing competition and competitive advantage gained through innovation and improvement? The sharing of information and the standardisation of procedures and processes within organisation is vital to continued success (Porter, 1990). Pennell (2011), argues that although succession planning prepares the organisation for future talent needs to fill leadership position. The aligning of SP&M not just prepares the organisation for future leaders, but ensures continuity of employees to essential positions within the organisation (Pennell, 2010; Rothwell, 2005a).

2.3   Leadership Development

Leadership development has moved up the list of organisation priorities and is identified as a topic of increasing importance to senior management within organisations striving to remain competitive (Buus and Saslow, 2005). However, Buus and Saslow (2005) identified a requirement for a continued commitment of

investment as being essential to leadership development and that leadership development is not just a Human Resource (HR) initiative and must be driven by senior management. The study included 52 organisations across Europe and identified that during the recent economic downturn, 38% of organisations remained committed to a steady capital investment in leadership development. However, leadership development without direction is a waste of capital investment. Development of individuals needs to be aligned with the organisation's corporate strategy to fulfil the talent needs of the company both today and in the future. Leadership development programmes without this aspect leave employees frustrated and do not return value for the capital investment (Fernández-Aráoz, Roscoe, Aramaki 2017). Conger and Fulmer (2003) share agreement with this theory and believe that leadership development fails if the employee is not provided with the opportunity to utilise their newly acquired knowledge or skill; furthermore, the employee may become frustrated in their existing role and disillusioned with the organisation. It is also important that new leaders develop the skills of delegation and understand that moving into a leadership role does not mean burning the candle at both ends (Sostrin, 2017). To be an effective leader you cannot manage every aspect of the day to day activities. It is important to understand your priorities and what makes you effective as a leader to others. This is where succession management plays a key role in developing not just managers but leaders for the future of your industry. Groves (2007) identifies the importance of aligning leadership development and succession planning strategies within the organisation.

2.4   Knowledge Management

Knowledge management (KM) is defined as the "processes related to the acquisition, storage and effective use of organizational knowledge to meet organizational objectives" (Uslu, Bülbül and Çubuk, 2015). In the context of succession planning, knowledge management is essential to ensure the transfer of knowledge within the organisation and provide potential leaders with the knowledge to succeed. Organisational knowledge is widely viewed as a core ingredient for competitive advantage and the loss of experienced personnel, without adequate knowledge management or the transfer of knowledge practices in place, can result in a loss in competitive advantage. A sudden departure from the organisation can

result in significant disruption to the operation, unless measures have been adequately implemented to ensure a bank of knowledge is maintained for future use.

Throughout the economic downturn many firms cut back staff numbers through natural retirement and redundancy (Johennesse and Chou, 2017), with many activities and responsibilities spread across retained management with increased workloads. This has resulted in an increased level of tacit knowledge transfer through on the job blended learning and experience. Which increased the number of managers performing multiple roles and gaining enhanced experience of a broader scope of the organisation's operational activities. The key benefit being a reduction in operational cost and improved value across the organisation. Although no person is irreplaceable, the effectiveness of organisations to manage this transition and prepare for sudden departures from the organisation is critical to continued success and an ability to maintain a competitive advantage.

But as the economy improves, voluntary turnover increases as people move for financial, family or other reasons (Cascio, 2014). A wealth of knowledge walks out the door (Smith, 2001) and organisations that have not prepared adequately will suffer knock-on effects for a time to come. Rothwell (2005), highlights the increased workload and distribution of responsibilities to existing management because of slimming down of the organisation during a recessionary period is a motivating factor for managers to become disillusioned in the work place, particularly if the economic rewards do not meet the perceived efforts of the employee. The disruption can result in a loss of competitive advantage for the organisation (Durst and Wilhelm, 2012). This highlights the strategic importance of preparing personnel adequately to fill the breach if required.

As the economic climate improves following the recent recession and competition increases for talented personnel, both the retention and knowledge transfer of talented employees become even more of an issue for every organisation (Barnett and Davis, 2008).

It is also recognised in literature that knowledge is an asset and a source of competitive advantage (Si Xue, 2017; Manhart and Thalmann, 2015). Si Xue (2017) argues that innovation is created through knowledge management and the creation

of ideas unique to that business sector. Through innovation and the development of new ideas and technologies organisation remain competitive and ahead of their rivals as long as they continue to innovate (Porter, 1990). KM is not just a source of competitive advantage but a key ingredient to organisational success (Lo and Abdullah, 2017; Si Xue, 2017). However if the knowledge is not harvested and shared within the organisation, the internal experience and expertise is not fully utilised by the organisation as a competitive advantage (Bhatt, 2002). The goal for an organisation is to find the balance between the sharing and protecting of knowledge to the organisations benefit. A study by Ku et al (2016) into the variables that directly affect the outcomes of succession planning identified a strong relationship between knowledge management and succession planning. KM is a significant source of competitor advantage. All change involves a certain level of uncertainty and the way knowledge is managed and transferred can affect the level of uncertainty within an organisation. But do organisations apply enough resources and capital to the process of storing and sharing of knowledge in a constant changing environment? Do organisations have the time to record, distribute and share knowledge within the wider organisation? To effectively utilise in-house knowledge, employees must record, transfer and share their knowledge gained through experience of their industry, but this needs to be encouraged by the organisation culture (Smith, 2001) to flourish within the organisation environment.

It is essential that an organisation understand what their employees do and what value is created as a result (Brown and Duguid, 2000). But it must also understand the gap between employee's tacit and explicit knowledge; thus, what creates essential value to the organisations development and success. By identifying what knowledge is of value and sharing that information ensures a more efficient operation (Harlow, 2008). Explicit knowledge is recorded in manuals, procedure, and organisational best practice and shared within the organisation. Where tacit knowledge is gained through experience on the job or a broad range of roles; this knowledge is not easily articulated or recorded in manuals (Jøranli, 2018; Muthuveloo, Shanmugam and Teoh, 2017; Harlow, 2008; Smith, 2001). In linchpin positions this is passed on by colleagues through years of working together. The knowledge is essential to the fluent operation and should be identified and tabulated where possible (Roy and Mitra, 2017). Tabulation inefficacies may be down to

organisation culture, lack of time, personal capabilities or workloads. Experience and a comprehensive knowledge bank allow an organisation to respond to a changing environment at a much faster rate. This can be a primary source of competitive advantage when competing on global market (Si Xue, 2017).

2.5   Summary of Literature Findings

A review of the literature found that succession planning and succession management (SP&M) practices should be aligned to maintain an organisation competitive advantage in a dynamic environment. Succession planning enables an organisation to prepare leaders for senior executive positions, whereas succession management identifies and develops competent staff for the future needs of the organisation. This study will evaluate if SP&M is viewed as a critical component in an Operational and Maintenance (O&M) sector within the Irish arm of a global organisation.

Leadership development fails and results in disillusioned employees if development does not provide practical opportunities to gain experience and advancement within the organisation. The study will evaluate if this approach is given much weight within the operation and maintenance sector of organisation Y. But is this a practical approach adopted by midlevel management and do time constraints in today hectic environment allow for such opportunities?

Knowledge management within the organisation is critical to maintaining a competitive advantage. Where the talent is not readily available to fill the void, especially if the incumbent's knowledge is gained through extensive experience working in a specialised field. The study will identify if knowledge management is viewed as a critical component in an operational and maintenance organisation based in Ireland and if this knowledge is fully utilised in the wider organisation.

2.6   Research Focus

The research will be focussed on the Irish subsidiaries of Organisation Y, a global organisation with a headquarters in Paris and subsidiaries around the globe. The Irish entity is a market leader in the operational and maintenance of motorway

infrastructure contracts within Ireland, including toll facilities, tunnels and motorways. For the study, four subsides have been selected that manage and maintain motorway infrastructure only. This includes motorways, junctions, road furniture (safety barriers, landscaping, pavements, public lighting and drainage systems) and structures. The organisation manages four subsidiaries responsible for operating and maintaining 441km of key motorway infrastructure routes throughout Ireland. The participant organisation is unique in that it provides key managerial personnel to each of the four subsidiaries, including a central Human Resource, Finance and IT services from a central location in Dublin. Each subsidiary has a high number of employees with a consistent company structure; such as an individual general manager, six senior managers and 40 to 50 operational staff depending on the project needs and requirements per subsidiary. It is accepted within the organisation that all managers must perform the role of human resource in one form or another to succeed in the work place. This study will be following a deductive approach identify if the finding from the literature is supported from an Irish context within the operation and maintenance sector.

In total the four subsidiaries have over 240 employees operating a combination of day and night time shifts to provide a 24-hour operation to meet stringent KPI's. Each of the subsides is supported by twenty operations personnel based in a centralised office in Dublin. The four subsides are publicly limited and operate exclusively within the southern counties of Ireland. The four subsidiaries will be referred to as organisation Y for this study and interviews will be held with operational managers from the subsides and the centralised head office who supply support services.

3   Research Question

The **primary research question** will be to evaluate if management of organisation Y in their experience support the literature finding that succession planning is critical to an organisation success and what is their understanding of succession planning?

This will examine the experience of midlevel managers and gain an understanding of their knowledge and experience of SP&M from an industry prospective. That is a real-life working approach and is driven from the literature findings. The study will be guided by the above research question: The literature identifies that succession planning is critical to an organisation success.

Objective 1 will be to identify if succession planning and succession management activities are aligned within Organisation Y.

The literature suggests that an organisation engaging in succession planning should align activities with succession management to achieve greater success (Pennell, 2010; Rothwell, 2005a).

Objective 2 will be to identify if organisation Y focuses on the development of staff at all levels, as opposed to focusing on job titles or designated positions within the organisation. and does management follow a leadership development strategy within the organisation?

Guinn (2009), Rothwell (2005) and Grove (2007) point out that succession planning should focus not on the job title or position within the organisation, but on developing talent within the organisation to meet the talent needs of the future.

Objective 3 will be to identify if management actively engage in obtaining knowledge within the individual subsidiaries and the sharing of this knowledge throughout the greater organisation?

The literature identifies that knowledge management is critical to the success of organisation operating in a competitive environment (Si Xue, 2017; Manhart and Thalmann, 2015).

4 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous section was the first step in the research and was to undertake a literature review of succession planning to develop an understanding of the common themes such as succession management and knowledge management. These themes were then used to extend the review of literature to develop a research question and objective. This stage is utilised to identify the methodology used to plan, obtain and analyse the data from participants in organisation Y to allow the primary and objectives to be answered. Figure 1 identifies an overview of the research process form, the identification of themes to data collection, analysis and recommendations:
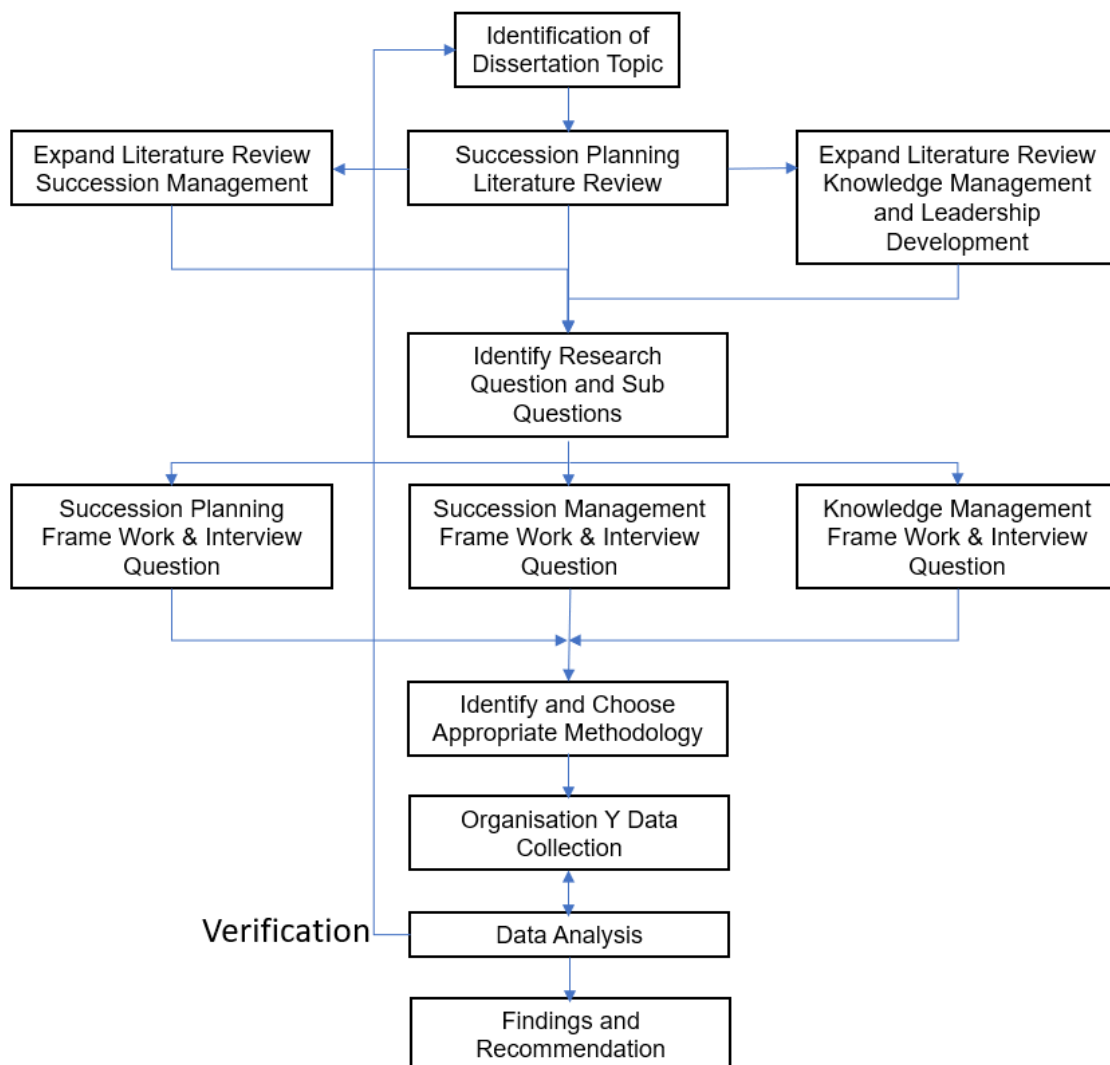
Figure 1: Overview of Research Process
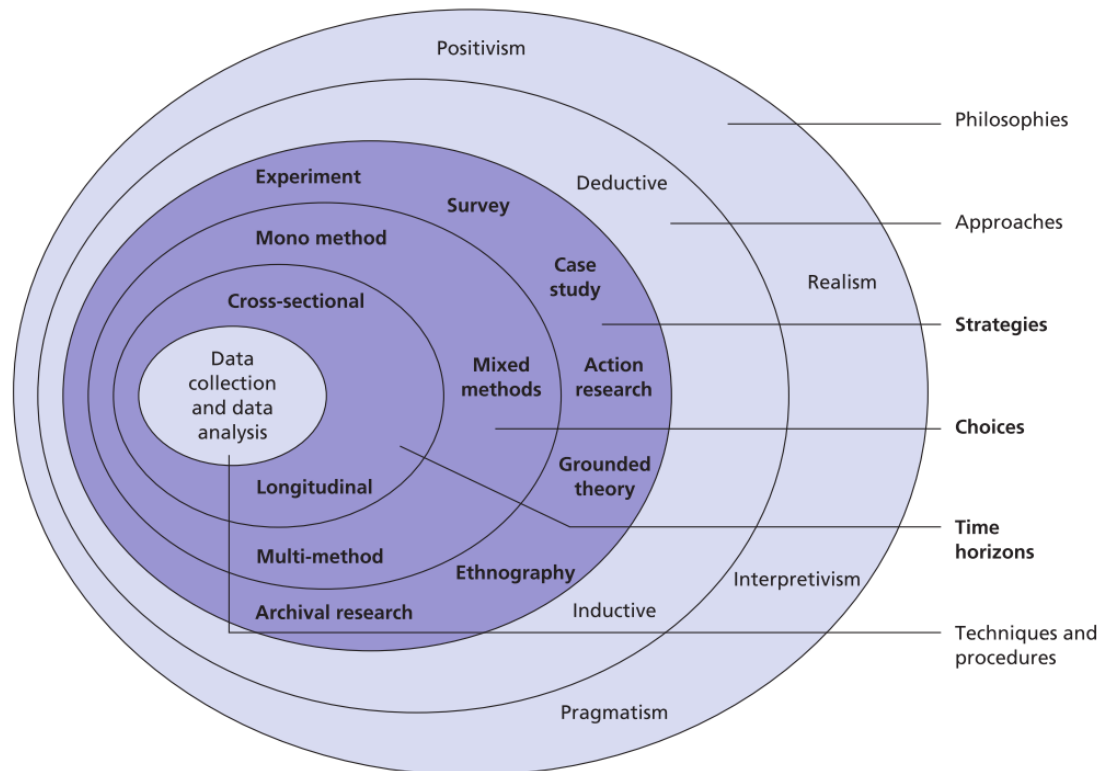
4.2   Research Methods

To date various methods have been utilised to measure succession planning and management at all level of organisations. Different authors have measured succession in a variety of ways, including quantitative and qualitative methods or a combination of both methods to collect and analyse data.

According to Rabionet (2011), qualitative research is a flexible approach to obtaining data from a participants in a study. This is a flexible and interactive approach that analyse data based on words gathered from a semi structured or structured interview. This allows the researcher to adjust/modify the structure of the interview depending on the answers and to suit the research objective. Qualitative research is based on the interpretation of words, expression and knowledge of the participants within the study (Levitt*, Creswell, Josselson, Bamber, Frost and Suárez-Orozco*, 2017). Qualitative data requires fewer participants than quantitative research and can provide an in dept view based of experience and knowledge of the study group or organisation.

Quantitative research tends to focus on the scientific nature of the data collected through surveys and requires a high number of participants to achieve justifiable results. The data is analysed through statistical, mathematical or other techniques. The research aims to measure the extent of the phenomenon under study, examining trends and changes in the field under study. However it does not answer the why or provide further insights into the behaviour or motivations of the participants (Goertzen, 2017). Brown (1937) highlights that quantitative research is ideal for identifying the "what" through a statistical analysis of big data, whereas qualitative research is best suited for understating the why through words (Hyde, 2000). Browns 1937 research is still valid today, however there is also a criticism in research that although quantitative is ideal for the what, this is factually based on numbers, whereas qualitative data collection can be ambiguous and down to interpretation (Barnham, 2016).

The literature review suggests that the method should be driven by the research topic or the questions to be answered. A view point held by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2008), when designing your research plan. The "Research Onion" by

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) identifies the research strategies and philosophises available for the purpose of designing your research plan.

Source: (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009. P 138)

The researcher considered undertaken both a quantitative and qualitative approach, but due to the time limitation and number of experienced midlevel managers available to take part in the study. The researcher believes that a qualitative approach will provide an in dept knowledge of succession planning from organisation Y, based on the experience and opinion of the participants taken part within the study. Many researchers from the literature review undertaken have adopted this approach to investigate the succession planning processes and obtain data through a semi structured interview process (Manhart and Thalmann, 2015; Pandey and Sharma, 2014; Durst and Wilhelm, 2012). As such, the methodology used for the piece of research will be of a qualitative nature. This approach has been chosen as it is viewed as the best option available to gather insightful and meaningful feedback from participants (Katılmış, 2017). After reviewing the number of participants available from midlevel management ranks of organisation Y to take part in the study, it is felt that a quantitative study would not be enough to provide insightful result. Qualitative research is more suitable when undertaken research

with a small number of participants to obtain an insightful understanding of a research topic (Hogan, Dolan and Donnelly, 2009)

4.3   Research Approach

The research onion identifies seven types of research strategies, namely Experiment, Survey, Case study, Action research, Grounded theory, Ethnography and Archival research.

The researcher first decided to follow a deductive research approach, which is to determine if the data collected from organisation Y reflects the theory from the literature review, as opposed to an inductive approach where the data is first collected, and the theory generated from the findings. The deductive approach is used to test the theory identified and the inductive approach is a theory development approach from data collected (Spens and Kovacs, 2005; Hyde, 2000). An example of these approaches would be if the theory identified that males preferred to drive cars that are coloured white in their mid-thirties. A deductive approach will either identify that the data collected from a sample population agrees or disagrees with this theory. Whereas the inductive approach would collect and analyse the data and develop a theory from the data, that males in their thirties prefer driving cars that are coloured white. A deductive approach can follow either a quantitative or qualitative method of data collection (Hyde, 2000). As such the researcher considered undertaking either a case study or a survey approach.

4.3.1 Surveys

Surveys are common practice in research. Many organisations use surveys to gauge the level of employee engagement, behaviour and level of happiness within the organisation. A common question is how you feel about the method the company communicates with you. Surveys require direct questions and provide answers to What, Who and Where (Williams, 2017; Hyde, 2000). Surveys can be questionnaires or interviews and facilitate data collection through either a qualitative or quantitative process. These are typically deductive in nature, but according to

Saunders .et al. (2005), the data analysis technique should be a key deciding factor when deciding the research method to be employed.

4.3.2 Case Study

Case studies are like surveys and are utilised by researchers to obtain and analyse data. Case studies can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory in nature (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2008; Yin, 2006). Case studies are used to study a phenomenon in its real environment. According to Yin (2006) case studies can answer the What, Why and How. This strategy can be undertaken to study a single phenomenon within multiple organisation or a single organisation. Similar to a survey, data may be collected and analysed using either a quantitative or qualitative approach. The qualitative case study will be descriptive in nature and concentrate on what participants report and feel is important to tell you. Qualitative case studies can be seen as soft research and down to interpretation of the replies to open ended questions.

4.4 Data Sample

Saunders *et al.,*(2009) holds the view the convenience sampling is an acceptable method when undertaking a study within a limited timeframe. This method has been adopted by the researcher due to the time constraints of the study. The researcher has direct access to participants within his own organisation and can obtain the knowledge and opinion of the experienced participants operating within the sector. As previously discussed, organisation Y is made up of many subsidiaries operating within Ireland. Participants will be selected from four of these subsidiaries operating with the operation and maintenance sector directly responsible for managing motorway infrastructure.

The following criteria was utilised to identify appropriate candidates for the sample group from within organisation Y.

Criteria	Measure
Experience	Must have a minimum of three years' experience in the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) sector.
Position	Must have a minimum of three dependants that report directly to them.
Development	Must have been promoted into the existing role from either within the organisation or outside. Their current position must be a step up from a previous position held.

Table 2: Criteria for Selecting Participants

Eight participants within organisation Y have been identified, contacted and have indicated a willingness to take part in this study for research purposes only.

Participant	Gender	Applicable experience
A	Male	Operations manager with over seven years' experience in operations, manages multiple sites, responsible for day to day operations and reports directly to the general manager.
B	Male	Operations manager with over twelve years' experience in operations and maintenance of roads, responsible for day to day operations, fulfilling contractual obligation and reports directly to the general manager/client and engages with the relevant stake holders.
C	Male	Senior manager with over five years' experience in operations and maintenance of roads, responsible for day to day operations, fulfilling contractual obligation and reports directly to the general manager/client and engages with the relevant stake holders. Has gained experience working with similar organisation at different levels of management.
D	Male	Senior Engineer with over ten years' experience in the construction of motorway infrastructure and currently

Participant	Gender	Applicable experience
		responsible for day to day operations in the maintenance of all aspect of motorway infrastructure.
E	Male	Has a significant amount of experience working as a consultant to multiple agencies involved in the design and construction of operation and maintenance projects. Currently operation manager for maintaining over 90km of key motorway infrastructure.
F	Male	Has over ten years' experience as operation construction manager on large scale infrastructure projects within Ireland, working for both contractor and client. Current operation maintenance manager for an integral part of the road network within Ireland.
G	Female	Has extensive experience in the Human Resource sector working in operation and maintenance of road infrastructure projects. Responsible for day to day activities within multiple subsidiaries within organisation Y, with over 20 years' experience in the HR sector.
H	Female	Holds over ten years' experience working in the finance sector for operations and maintenance projects. Currently responsible for managing finance activities at two subsidiaries within organisation Y.

Table 3: Invited Participants

Note: all the participants outlined in table 3 currently hold midlevel management positions with organisation Y and have been promoted into their current positions from within the organisations, except for participants E and F, who were external appointments into the organisation.

4.5   Pilot Interview

A pilot study was undertaken with a senior member of the organisation to test the understanding of the interview questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009), ensure clarity and verify that the questions were suitable to acquire the data required to resolve the primary and secondary research questions.

The pilot study identified several observations regarding the interview questions posed and the participants' understanding of the topics.

- The participant could not clearly define succession planning and management or knowledge management. But demonstrated a high-level of understanding of the topics in the responses. For example, when asked to define an understanding of succession management, the participant could not; but later in the interview went on to describe how the organisation holds an annual review meeting with senior management to identify members of the organisation for further development. Employees that the organisation felt were capable of progressing and with the correct training/guidance could meet the needs of a growing competitive organisation.

- Similarly, with the organisation's approach to knowledge management activities, the participant identified the organisation's ability to generate documents to record processes and procedures utilised within their department. These are also used to share best practices within the wider organisation. But this information was obtained after a serious of follow up questions for clarifications to responses. The participant identified the organisation's ability to manage explicit knowledge but did not have a formal understanding of the term Knowledge Management.

Following a review of the questions used for the pilot interview and the responses, the researcher separated the interview question into three distinct sections of the interview process:

1. Succession Planning and Management (SP&M)
2. Leadership Development
3. Knowledge Management

A brief introduction was included to section 1 and 2 to provide a clear understanding of the terms and a formal understanding of each topic prior to devilling into the interview questions themselves. The pilot also identified that a question was to closed/direct and was required to be modified to be more open. As the question received a yes/no response and did not provide insight to the participants experience.

Interview questions were developed based on the literature findings with the aim to answer the primary research question and objectives. Garman and Glawe (2004) summaries the common themes identified in their succession planning research was used as the framework to develop the interview questions. Interview questions are outlined in appendix A.

4.6   Interviews

Interviews were undertaken during the month of July, with dates, times and locations of the interviews tabulated within appendix B. Prior to the interviews taking place, each participant was contacted informally via telephone or in person to inform them of the study and request their participation. This was then followed up with a formal invitation via email that contained a brief description of the study, along with the primary research question to be evaluated, an interview guide and notification to inform the participant the interview would be recorded to allow an in dept analysis at a later stage. An interview consent form was included within this correspondence (see appendix C for a copy) to inform the participant of the rights under the study, such as the right to confidentiality, the right to terminate their participation at any stage prior, during or after the interview. The interviews were scheduled for a date, time and venue for the participants convenience and were recorded and transcribed for the purposes of the qualitative analysis.

Following lessons learned during the pilot interview, each interview commenced with a brief introduction to the topic and informal chit chat to put the participant at ease. This allowed the participant to relax and be more forthcoming in their responses. Each interview was held in positive engagement and ranged from 25 to 35 minutes. Some participants were found to be more direct in their responses and to the point which reduced the interview timeframe. The data collected was based

on the participant's individual experiences within the organisation and working in the operation and maintenance sector within Ireland. The primary data collected was analysed to answer the research questions.

4.7   Data Collection

The primary data collected from participants is to be examined to answer the research questions and compare the findings from the interview with the literature review findings. The researcher focused on primary data collection to evaluate the experience of the midlevel management team within organisation Y.

All semi structured interviews were recorded for data collection purposes, with the full written consent from each participant. Interviews were held with midlevel managers to gain an understanding of their prospective of succession planning and management (SP&M) within the organisation. Once completed the interviews transcripts were analysed to identify trends. The qualitative approach allows the gathering of insightful data from each participant (Jung, *Scott and Davis*, 2009).

The interviews were semi structured in nature and the interviewer had a list of topics depending on the responses received. According to Durst et al. (2012) this will allow the gathering of information and identify how much information is known about the subject within the organisation. One on one, face to face interviews were held with each participant during the study. Any follow up queries requiring clarification were obtained via a telephone conversation with the participant if required. Transparency and confidentiality of information is of the utmost importance.

Each participant was issued with an outline of the study, including:

- The purpose of the study as part of a requirement to fulfil a master's in management (MSc) with the National College of Ireland (NCIRL).
- The data collected would be used for the sole above purpose and would not be shared with any third party.
- Once the dissertation and master programme are complete, all recordings and transcripts will be permanently deleted.

- At any stage during the interview proceeding, the participant may refuse to answer any question or questions and can withdraw their permission to take part in the study.

Interview information and consent forms are located within appendix B of this document.

Note, participant D and G were unable to attend interviews due to annual leave and other work commitments. A telephone interview was held with participant G, however this interview was disregarded, as the researcher felt the interviewee was not engaged in the process and no new insights were identified during the interview.

4.8   Data Analysis

Due to the researcher being part of the organisation under review and his direct accesses to the selected participants within the study, a purposeful sample was chosen. This was primarily chosen due to the time limitation of the research allocated to complete the dissertation and to ensure the sample pool was spread across the four subsidiaries of the organisation. A thematic analysis was used to identify themes from the data collected based on the research question and objectives (Miller, Richard J; Munoz, Laura; Hurt, 2016; Braun and Clarke, 2006;). The interview recordings were listened to multiple times to ensure the researcher become familiar with the content. The transcripts were read thoroughly to identify valid meanings and themes amongst the interviews. The thematic approaches follow a six-stage process as outline by Braun and Clarke (2006) as follows:

1. Familiarising Yourself with the Data
   To achieve this objective the data was transcribed and read several times until the data was clearly understood. To aid this process and the time limitation of the study, the searcher listened to the audio recording during his daily commute to work and home
2. Generate Initial Codes
   This involves identifying interesting ideas from the data collected
3. Searching for Themes
   This section involves grouping coded section together to identify common themes
4. Reviewing Themes

5. Defining and naming themes

6. Developing a report of the findings for the dissertation

4.9 Ethics

Qualitative data collection through semi structured interviews is based on primary data collected from the interviewees experience and expressed opinions on the chosen field or area of expertise. As such it is extremely important that both the participants and researcher is protected during the process (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Ramcharan and Cutcliffe (2001) advise that each participant involved in qualitative research should be informed of the research purpose prior to consenting and free to remove their consent at any point during the study.

Regarding ethical, confidentiality and the method of recording (audio) the interviews, this process was fully transparent and covered under a letter of consent that each participant signed prior to the start of the interview; if unhappy at any stage, the participant was informed they could stop the interview or refuse to answer any questions. The participants where provided with an opportunity to review the interview transcript and the opportunity to object or retract their consent.

A letter of consent was issued to each participant, including a brief description of the research focus and the purpose of the study prior to the interview taking place. This allowed the person enough time to consider the topic under review in advance of consenting to their inclusion in the study. Each person included within the study was referred to as participant by an alphabetic letter and their names are not included for confidentiality purposes. It is not considered that any ethical breaches occurred, and each participant was assured that once the research was completed and confirmation from the college was received that the data was no longer required, all recordings would be permanently deleted. In the meantime, all recordings would be located on a secure server only accessible by the researcher. Each volunteer within the study was assured that their name would not appear within the data collected or findings presented.

A pilot interview was undertaken with a senior member of the organisation to test and ensure the questions were fit for the purpose intended. Guidance on the matter was provided by my dissertation supervisor.

4.10 Summary of Research Methodology Approach

A Qualitative approach was used to obtain primary data from the participant within organisation Y through semi structured interviews. The primary data collected was based on the interviewees experience working within the operation and maintenance sector within Ireland. The pilot interview was instrumental in developing both the interview questions (based on the literature) and the structure of the interview itself. The researcher feels that this approach provided enough data to answer the research questions and objectives.

However, the research could be further expanded to a wider sample population and would benefit from the inclusion of more senior top-level management for data collection purposes to gain a greater insight into succession planning within organisation Y. The chosen sample population of midlevel management provided insight into their perception of succession planning and management initiatives within the organisation under study. But would benefit from insight of senior level manager knowledge of organisational strategies. The study would also benefit from a comparison with another organisation operating within the same sector.

5   Analysis and Findings

5.1   Introduction

The primary data collected from each participant within organisation Y was analysed with the aim of answering the primary research question and objectives. In total six face to face interviews were held with operational managers across the four subsidiaries of the organisation. A thematic analysis approach was utilised to identify themes for evaluations. The interviews took a semi structured approach and each interview was held with positive engagement. The themes were evaluated based on the questions developed from the literature reviewed and the following sections identify the findings from the investigations. The data collected was based on the operational experience of the managers taken part in the study. Each participant had a minimum of three experience in the operational and maintenance sector within Ireland. The findings/analysis will refer to each participant as identified in table three. A summary of the key themes will be provided in this chpter of the report.

5.2   Findings

5.2.1   Research Question

The peered reviewed literature identified that succession planning is critical to an organisation success. The findings identify that the view of management within organisation Y supports this theory, particularly as the economy continues to improve on the back end of a global recession. The recession created an abundance of available talent to organisations looking for skill and competent labour at short notice, but as the economy improves, that talent waterfall is no longer available, except at increased cost to the organisation.

The findings of the study identified that participants understood both succession planning and management (SP&M) practices and the importance for the organisation to have a strategy in place

> *'without succession planning in place, we may as well go backwards'*
> *(Participant F)*

Participants A, B, C, F and H agreed that the organisation has a succession planning strategy in place, but only at a very senior level within the organisation and not focused at midlevel management ranks down. But the organisation is extremely effective at succession management from a midlevel management point of view. Specifically, at encouraging employees to develop and gain a broader knowledge of the organisation. The primary difficulty at operational level with succession planning establishment was identified as the "Flat Structure" of the subsidiaries. The resource turnover is relatively low and it's difficult to develop a person or persons for a position that may not become available in the near further.

> *'it's actually quite hard because you're trying to balance. You know you'll have some people that want to move on and you can say yeah, they could actually, you know, for these key positions they will be really good. But unless one of those positions come up, there was no place to move up'* *(Participant H)*

This can create other challenges in an improving economy.

> *'recently a person moved to another organisation and we found it difficult and time consuming to recruit the appropriate replacement'* *(Participant A)*

Some participants expressed the belief that it is extremely challenging to implement succession planning at an operational level that is lean and in line with budgetary commitments. As such succession management was a better fit at operational level. Half of the participants (50%) identified that succession management allowed the organisation to encourage employee development, increase job satisfaction and incentivise staff loyalty within the organisation.

> *'For me it important that all management have a broad knowledge of the organisation. This allows the development of staff and encourages job satisfaction (Participant C)'*

One participant reported that they had considered a succession planning strategy previously within their subsidiary, but with a shortage of promotional opportunities at an operational level and a low turnover in management positions, felt that succession management was more suited as there was no guarantee of the position becoming available and this would lead to frustration and encourage employees to

look elsewhere for employment (Participant A). However, the study also recognised that without SP&M processes employees may become frustrated and lose motivation without being further challenged; that is people may become stagnant and continued development was essential to engagement and job satisfaction. In the final section of the succession planning survey, all participants agreed that the organisation harvested a culture of development and encourage employees to grow and expand their area of knowledge and responsibility.

> *'Yes, we have a culture of encouraging growth and development within the organisation. The organisation would look internally first when position become available for the right fit' (Participant H)*

> *'Yes, we have a progressive organisation that has an open culture and is aware without employee growth. The organisation cannot grow and develop' (Participant F)*

The participants also agreed that succession planning below a management level such as supervisor/foreman was not feasible. This is a direct result of a low turnover of supervisors/foremen an if a position became available the number of internal employees with suitable experience would fill the void with some guidance. This was a result of a combination of factors:

- Supervisor/foremen and operatives working closely together on a day to day basis.
- Blended learning and experience gain through providing annual leave cover.
- Additional training/resources are readily available to get a new appointee up to speed within these roles.

> *'In the event that a supervisor left the organisation, other staff would be available to step in with a small amount of guidance' (Participant B)*

When queried if the participants felt that succession planning and management played a key role with appointments within the organisation, five of the participants believed that it did, and one participant was unsure.

> *'Yes, not always with the same company, but in another part of the organisation, it's important that internal staff see an opportunity to further develop and to move into promoted positions' (Participant C)*

> *Yes and no, through succession management we have a pool of talent if a position or need becomes available' (Participant E)*

> *'Definitely, from my experience there has been internal appointments and promotions. You still have to go through the process of applying and there will be internal competition' (Participant H)*

One participant believed that the organisation looked internal, as well as externally, but suggested that the organisation could improve by understanding the key strengths and weaknesses of all their employees. This is a process that was started by senior management and reviewed annual. But needs to be updated on a continual basis and is time driven.

> *'Yes, I think we do promote internal and across the organisation, but we could probably improve by fully understanding the strength and weakness of each person with the organisation' (Participant F)*
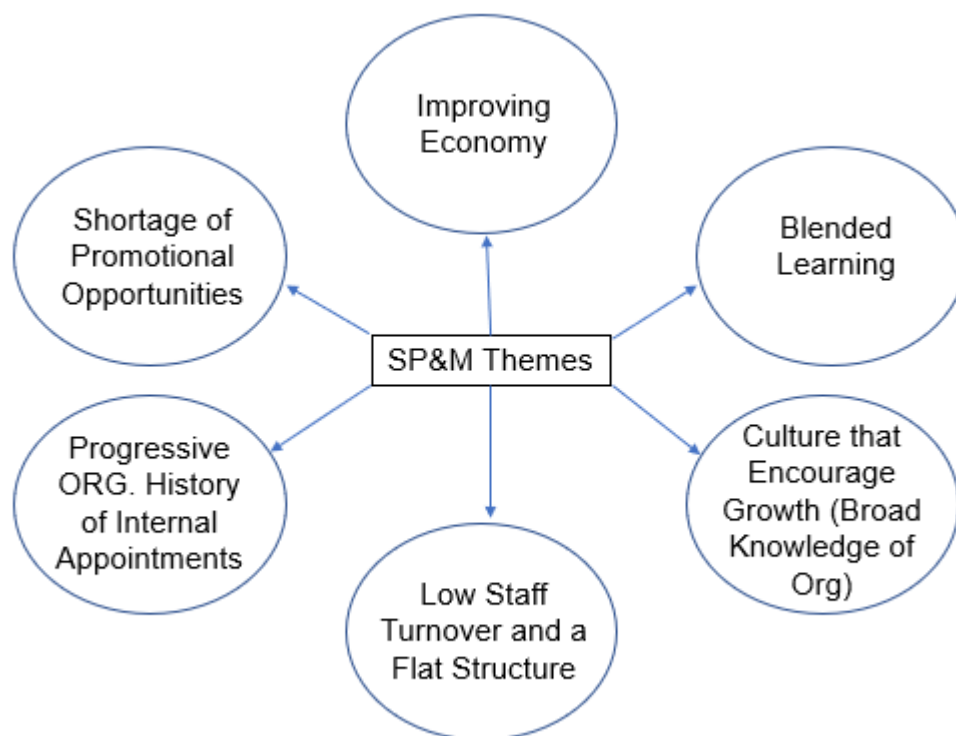

Figure 2: Summary of SP&M Themes Identified

5.2.2 Objective 1

Objective 1 was to identify if succession planning and succession management activities are aligned within Organisation Y. When questioned if they felt the organisation aligned succession planning and management activities, the responding participants had mixed reactions. Forty percent thought the organisation aligned these activities; forty percent was of the opinion they did not; ten percent stated they were not sure but felt this occurred at a very senior level and ten percent provided no indication.

> *'I'm not sure we definitely develop employees and provide a range of experience, but in terms of aligning SP&M, I'm not sure that we do this' (Participant A)*

> *'No, we are a very lean organisation and would follow more of a succession management approach and encourage staff to move into other areas and take on more responsibility' (Precipitant B)*

The consensus view was that this may occur at a very senior level within the organisation, but participants felt that managers were developed to have a broad knowledge of the organisation, as opposed to targeting a specific position. Combining this point with a low turnover of management and promotional opportunities, the general feel was that development at operational level was more succession management than planning.

> *'Yes, but at a very high level within the organisation and nurtured by human resources, we probably follow more of a succession management strategy' (Precipitant C)*

> *'We do encourage internal staff to develop outside of their scope and put themselves forward for internal opportunities' (Participant F)*

5.2.3 Objective 2

Objective 2 was to identify if organisation Y had a practice of identifying employees for development and if management followed a leadership development strategy within the organisation.

It was the view of all participants that the organisations strategy to leadership development had changed over the last three years in response to an improvement in the general economy. It is believed this change was implemented due to the growth of the organisation and the recognition of the need to develop mangers and leaders throughout the organisation.

> *'The wider organisation is growing and it's important that staff are further developed for new opportunities the organisation may expand into' (Participant A)*

But also, to retain existing managers and attract skilled resources in a competitive environment.

> *'Over the last three years the organisation has invested heavily in leadership development of managers within the organisation' (Participant A)*

Participant C also identified that leadership development was not just at a senior level within the organisation but focused at all managerial levels through both group and individual training programmes.

> *'The organisation is invested in leadership development at all levels of the organisation and recently moved to the next stage with one on one development' (Participant C)*

The findings identify that this is not just a general approach to development, but an examination of the individual strength and weaknesses to focus development on the area that require improvement.

> *'At a senior level we identify people based on their experience and skill set. This is reviewed annually, and human resources would progress at a more local level' (Participant C)*

The study uncovered that training is driven by agreed areas of improvement with the individual and based on the role they are currently performing. In other words, an area of weakness is only an area of weakness depending on the role the person is performing. It is also considered to be more effective if the individual identifies and agree the areas that need to be improved.

> *'Training is based on the individual's strength and weaknesses to suit the individual and not to be so general'* (Participant C)

> *'The individual works with the specialist to develop agreed upon areas'* (Participant F)

Participant H highlighted the benefit of this approach and the support received from senior management as the participant developed.

> *'Personally, a gap was identified, and I was encouraged to undertake further education and I was coached through this by the organisation'* (Participant H)

When questioned if the organisation had a process of identifying potential employees for development, all participants agreed that this was essential and undertaken on an annual basis with input of the individual supervisor and managers.

> *'Yes, we have an extensive training matrix and review this on a regular basis to identify the needs of the organisation. The review would be to look for a skills gap or an opportunity to encourage personnel development'* (Participant E)

At a level below management within the organisation, the participants identified the operatives are trained and developed to a high standard, particularly due to the high risk of working on live motorways. In the operation and maintenance sector, there is a high emphasis on health and safety, but management also viewed their team development as a mechanism to incentivise staff loyalty and job satisfaction.

> *'The economy is on the up and development employs job satisfaction and loyalty'* (Participant A)

> *'An opportunity to encourage personal development and incentives staff'* (Participant E)

Participant C, identified that the organisation encourages staff development through bonuses, partially based on the company's performance and the employees. Bonuses are not paid to employees for doing their day today job, but for taking on activities or duties outside of their normal scope of works. In this way the employee grows and develops a broader knowledge base and are encouraged through bonuses. Additional objectives are linked through assignment letters.

'We always have to tell people that you don't get a bonus or whatever for doing your job, you get your salary for doing your job, you're going to get bonuses. And assignment letters or whatever, if you think outside the box' (Participant C)
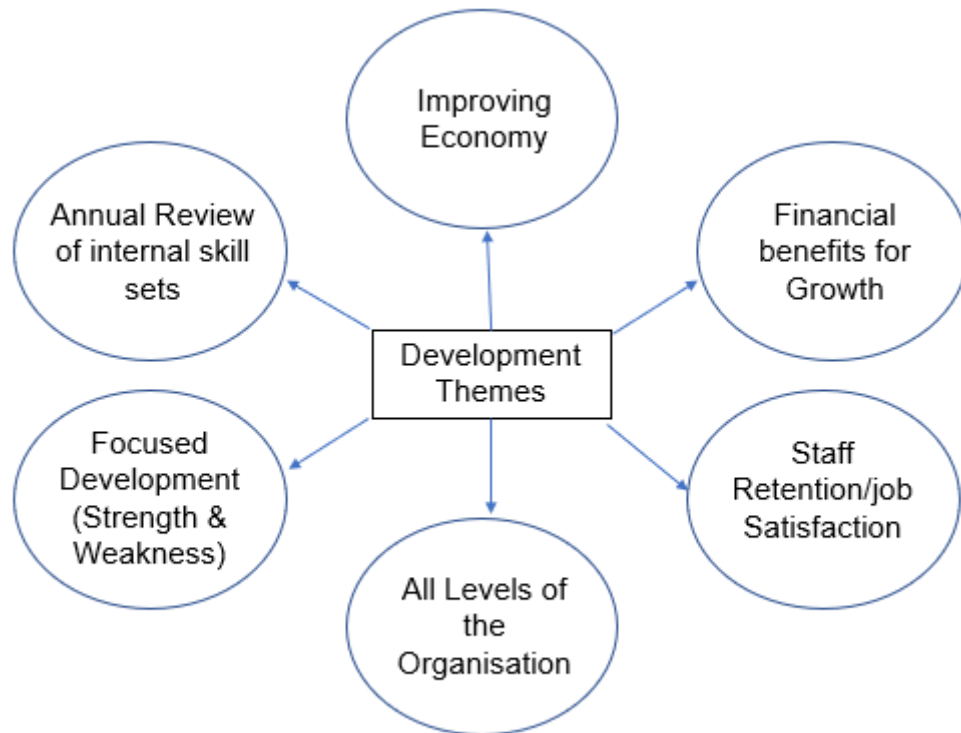

Figure 3: Summary of Development Themes

5.2.4 Objective 3

Objective 3 was to identify if management actively engage in obtaining knowledge within the individual subsidiaries and if the knowledge is shared within the greater organisation.

When questioned if knowledge management fitted into the organisation strategy, all participants agreed that knowledge management played an essential role in the operation of the organisation. Participants A, B, E, F and H identified that each subsidiary was responsible for producing their own documentation system. This Project Management System (PMS) is subjected to annual reviews as part of both internal organisational audits and as part of their ISO requirements (3rd party independent auditor).

> *'We have a dedicated project management system that covers all of our processes and procedures for routine operation' (Participant F)*

> *'We operate to a high health and safety culture due to the high risk of the operation. So, our processes and procedures are heavily documented and reviewed on a regular basis' (Participant E)*

Participant A highlighted that this was part of the organisation risk matrix and was reviewed on a regular basis. But also fed into their knowledge bank when tendering for new contracts.

Four of the participants (C, E, F and H), believed that the organisation valued the creation of knowledge and invested significant capital in the creation and sharing of information through "Working Groups and Operators Clubs". These were identified as specific groups with individual managers and engineers who specialised in a field, joined and shared knowledge.

> *'The company invest heavily in the operator's Language and Culture club with the goal of sharing knowledge and creating synergies within the organisation' (Participant C)*

> *'As we operator over multiple sites/depots, we hold regular meetings (working groups); this allows us to share best practices, new methods employed and any new near miss health and safety issues' (Participant E)*

> *'As I said we are very good at documenting the routine activities and the working groups help us share best practices and lessoned learnt' (Participant F)*

The forth participant suggested that working groups were beneficial, but that each member could do more to help knowledge creation.

> *"I think sometimes we are a little to independent and could do more to share information within the group, specifically technical knowledge. Maybe put more effort into the working groups' (Participant H)*

The participants also identified that it was the department heads responsibility to ensure the documentation system was maintained but acknowledge that time constraints generally meant the system was updated prior to an upcoming audit.

'The company is lean, and time can be an issue to ensuring documents are updated regularly' (Participant B)

'We are set up with the minimum resource to operate the company, so when the extra work comes on board, we tend to get stretched and that's when the documentation can fall behind' (Participant F)

'We have a very good project management system and tend to find our processes and procedures are up to date, particularly when it comes to ISO certificates, but time can create gaps' (Participant A)

A common view amongst the interviewees was the biggest challenge facing the sharing knowledge within the organisation was both language and the culture amongst the different countries. As the organisation is multinational, information can be lost in translation.

'We are a multinational organisation, so a challenge can be language' (Participant F)

'We have a very good project management system and tend to find our processes and procedures are up to date, particularly when it comes to ISO certification, but time can create gaps' (Participant A)

'The biggest challenge faced is with the language and cultural difference. The message can get lost' (Participant C)

The point of views expressed above is from an international prospective, but an interesting point identified by many of the participants highlighted a disadvantage caused by both the autonomy of the individual managers and senior engineers on site. As the operations are lean, managers and senior staff are offered significant autonomy over their roles and responsibilities. As such a significant knowledge gap can be created if senior staff leave the subsidiaries or the organisation.

'Autonomy is encouraged and there is a lot of on the job learning gained through experience, which is not documented due to a lack of time and resources. Certain experience would not be easily documented or transferable without working closely with another person' (Participant A)

'I think sometimes we are a little to independent' (Participant H)

Two of the interviewees identified a recent departure that created issues with knowledge within their companies.

> *'There is also a lot of knowledge built up in experience within the company and if that person leaves, suddenly you realise there is a gap in the knowledge bank' (Participant A)*

> *'One of the key challenges faced is when a manager or engineer leaves. Much of their responsibility is not well documented and you only realise what they did when they left' (Participant E)*

Participant E suggested that this independence not only affected individuals within the organisation, but that the subsidiaries can develop 'tunnel vision' in their activities.
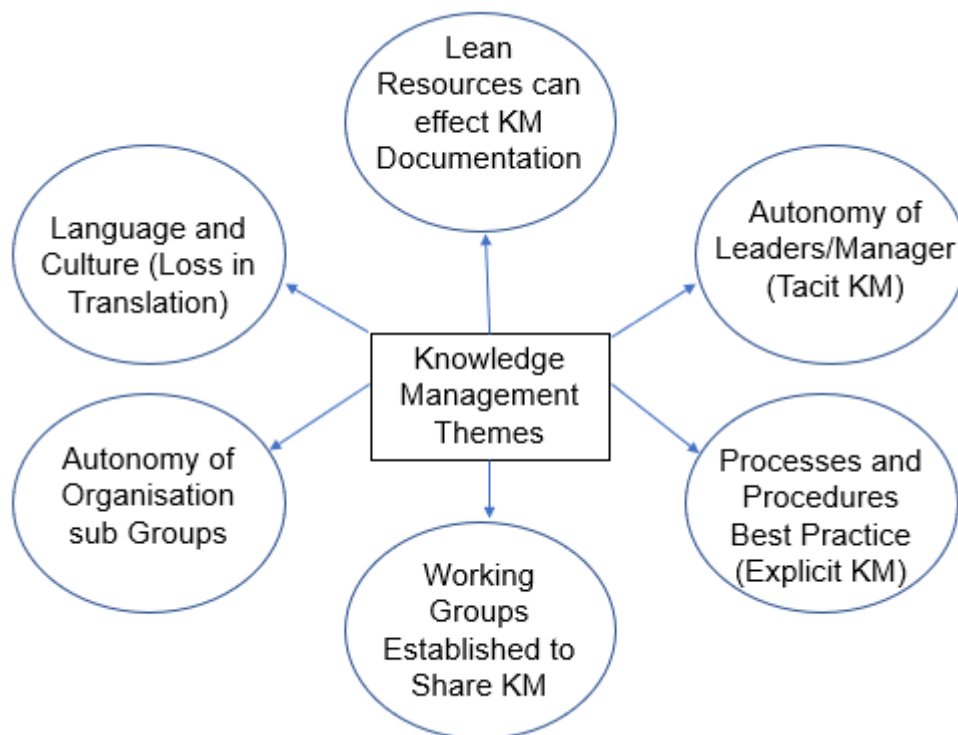

Figure 4: Summary of Knowledge Management Themes

5.3   Summary of Findings

The single biggest challenge with implementing succession planning strategies within organisation Y was identified as a low staff turnover rate at management level. Thus, a reduction in the amount of promotional opportunities available within the organisation. Although the participants did highlight that the organisation looked inwards for opportunities to develop and promote staff, the findings identified that the organisation invests significantly in the development of staff at all levels, both with an eye on future expansion opportunities and as a form of encouraging staff retentions.

Leadership development within the organisation focuses on the strength and weaknesses of the individuals, but the manager selects the area of improvement required with a development specialist, thus getting the person to buy into the process. Individual growth and the expansion of their role is incentivised with financial benefits (percentage of bonus).

Knowledge creation is highly valued due to the environment in which the organisation operates (high speed motorways) and the organisation invest significant resources in the creation and sharing of information through working groups. Tacit knowledge plays a significant part in the operations due to the autonomy offered by the organisation and the efficient way the operations are run. Sudden departures can create disruption due to knowledge built up through on the job experience.

A repetitive theme that continued to be identified was the effect of an improving economy on the organisation's ability to retain and attract a skilled workforce. One participant emphasises his experience of recruitment "*that during a 2013 start up, there was an abundance of skilled labour available on the market, but a recent recruitment drive did not yield similar results*" *(Participant E, 2018)*. This was echoed by other participants who identified challenges in replacing key staff as of late.

6 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The discussion section provides an overview of a comparison between the literature findings and the case study research. The gathering of data through a qualitative method of semi structured interviews identified several themes that provide insight based on the operational experience of midlevel management within organisation Y.

- The improving economy is creating challenges for the organisation to replace talented engineers, managers and operatives.

- The structure of the organisation and a low turnover rate makes it difficult to implement succession planning strategies from midlevel to general manager positions within the organisation.

- The organisation culture is recognised at encouraging individual growth and development of staff at all levels.

- Succession management and the development of staff at all levels of the organisation is identified as not just a mechanism for creating job satisfaction and retention, but also a process to allow management to have broad understanding of the organisation and to ensure management can step in to a range of positions at short notice.

- A significant effort and investment have been placed on the leadership development of managers at all level within the last three years as the organisation continues to grow, develop and to remain competitive.

- Due to the health and safety culture of the organisation and the environment in which the individual companies operate (high speed motorways), knowledge management within the organisation is highly valued and a significant effort is placed on both the capturing and sharing of information. However, there is also a high degree of tacit knowledge that is not captured or shared. This is identified as a combination of a lean operation and the degree of autonomy afforded to the individual sites and managers. The difficulty is this is also what makes the organisation competitive and efficient, but also increase the gap between explicit and tacit knowledge within the organisation.

- The key difficulty with effectively implementing succession planning at an operational level within the organisation is the relatively low turnover of managers/staff.

6.2   Primary Research Question

To evaluate if the experience of management within organisation Y within the operation and maintenance sector supports the view that succession planning is critical to organisational success.

The literature review identified that managers build up a wealth of knowledge through experience, but a sudden departure from the organisation can create a disadvantage if the organisation needs to implement and ad-hoc replacement strategy (Berns and Klarner, 2017; Durst and Wilhelm, 2012; Rothwell, 2002). An organisation that ensures a continuity of leadership will remain competitive (Garman and Glawe, 2004b). However, additional research raised that succession planning is more effective if not focused solely at executive positions, but on the development of leaders at all levels of the organisation. In this way leaders are developed for a broad range of positions and acquire a greater knowledge of the organisations inner workings (Guinn, 2009; Groves, 2007; Rothwell, 2005b; Conger and Fulmer, 2003).

In general terms the findings from the research into organisation Y supports that of the literature review. The participants identified the structure of the organisation makes it difficult for succession planning at all levels of the organisation, particularly up to general manager level. As such the organisation develops staff with a broad range of experience and knowledge of the organisation. That is, they develop staff for the future needs of the organisation, as opposed to a position within the structure (Stadler, 2011). The interview data identified that in the last five years the organisation has appointed three new general managers within the four companies. Two of these appointments came from within the greater organisation and one appointment was external. As participant H pointed out.

> *'It is difficult to plan for every position within the organisation, external appointment will always be required at some stage' (Participant H)*

But the approach of the organisation is more in line with a succession management strategy, in that the organisation should develop staff for the organisational needs and not designated positions (Stadler, 2011; Pennell, 2010; Rothwell, 2005b). The findings also identified that the organisation culture is progressive and encourages role expansion and individual development.

6.3   Objective 1

Does organisation Y align its succession planning and succession management activities.

Pennell (2010) and Rothwell (2005) argue that succession planning and management activities should be aligned to ensure a continuity of leadership in key positions within an organisation. However, the findings did not identify if these activities are aligned within organisation Y. The participants acknowledge the importance of each but were not able to clearly identify if they were aligned.

Several participants suggested this may occur at a very senior level within the organisation but were unable to provide a clear insight into this strategy from an operational point of view. The researcher is of the opinion following an analysis of the interviews that the two components are in alignment, but neither is the researcher convinced that this creates a disadvantage for the organisation either. The structure of the individual companies did not facilitate the alignment of succession planning and management at operational level. This is also possibly a downside to the sample pool and the focus may have provided further insight by focusses on more senior management within the organisation.

What is clear from the findings is the organisation has a development strategy in place and talented works force that can fill the void of a sudden departure in the short term. The culture of the organisation encourages individual development and a focus on a broad range of knowledge.

6.4   Objective 2

Research by Guinn (2009), Rothwell (2005) and Grove (2007) identifies that succession planning should focus on developing talent within the organisation, as opposed to focusing on certain positions or job titles to be effective. Objective 2 was to identify if this practice is followed within organisation Y.

The research findings highlighted that the organisation has invested a significant amount of resources and capital in leadership development programmes over the last three years, both through group and individual development. The participants identified this was in response to firstly, an expansion of the organisation and a need to prepare leaders for future opportunities within the wider organisation, but also as the economy continues to improve. Both employees and potential employees are getting greater opportunities in the market. Leadership development not only benefits the organisation but allows the employees to grow and experience a greater sense of fulfilment. This can create job satisfaction and increase employee retentions. Participants also acknowledge that if the organisation failed to invest in the development of employees, there is a fear that employees would move on for a more progressive organisation.

The findings were also in line with the literature key points, in that development programmes are developed with the employees' input and concentrated on their strengths and weaknesses. But also, there is also a monetary value (bonus) attributed to an employees continued development (Rothwell, 2002) and expansion of their roles and responsibility.

In summary the analysis of the interview data gathered from the participants of organisation Y, identified commonalties with the recommendations from the literature review. Namely:

- Develop employees with a broad range of experience of the organisation.
- Add a monitory value to incentivise development.
- Align talent development with Succession management strategies.
- Tailor development to not just the organisation, but to the individual strengths and weakness.
- Encourage staff to develop by taking on additional responsibility and thus gaining experience.

It was not clear from the findings if a formal mentoring programme was in place to help employees in development. But the participants did identify a culture that encourages learning and progression. One participant highlighted that they received informal guidance when completing a further education programme.

6.5   Objective 3

The Literature indicates that knowledge management is essential to organisational success within a competitive environment, objective 3 was to identify if organisation Y was effective at the collection and distribution of knowledge within its organisation.

In summary the findings obtained from the interviews identified that organisation places a high degree of emphasis on the collection and sharing of knowledge within the companies and the wider organisation, both through working groups, operator clubs and the sharing of best practices. Due to the nature of the operation and the risks associated with working on high speed motorways, the day to day procedures and process are heavily documented within each company. Each of the companies is then subjected to annual audit from a central head office to ensure documents are up to date and fully maintained. Additional audits are also undertaken by an independent company as part of the organisation ISO accreditation. However, it was noted during an interview with one participant that many of the documents are updated prior to the audits taking place due to time and resource limitations. Participant F also highlighted that additional works outside of the day to day can stretch resources on site. While participant C noted that extensive knowledge built up through the operation is utilised when tendering for additional contracts. This is also true of the tacit knowledge built up by operational staff through experience and the broad knowledge reference throughout the interviewees. This is in line with the literature findings that highlights the importance and competitiveness created by a knowledge management system.

Experience and a comprehensive knowledge bank allow an organisation to respond to a changing environment at a much faster rate. This can be a primary source of competitive advantage when competing on global market (Porter, 1990; Si Xue, 2017).

However, the findings also identified that management through both experience and a high degree of autonomy have built up a considerable amount of tacit knowledge within the organisation. This includes as participant A highlighted, a significant knowledge of the contractual requirements and an awareness of the more informal agreement with clients. This is an area that could benefit from further research and examination by the organisation itself.

6.6   Discussion summary

In summary, the findings from the primary data gathered through semi structured interviewees provided a deep insight into succession planning, management, development and knowledge management strategies within organisation Y.

Several communalities were identified between the primary research and literature review. However, the participants involved in the interviewees were unable to provide a clear insight into objective one (Does the organisation align succession planning and management strategies). Further research is required to conclude this objective, but it does appear unlikely that these initiatives are aligned at an operations level within organisation Y.

A common theme identified with succession planning was the difficulty to implement effectively at an operational level. Firstly, due to a low staff turnover and thus available promotion opportunities available, secondly, a fear of over developing staff that may become frustrated with their current role and seek alternative avenues for promotion. But also, an organisational awareness that without continued investment in development, a similar issue may arise with staff looking for increased challenges elsewhere and organisation not being prepared for new opportunities. The findings identified that succession management strategies were favoured by the organisation at an operational level, with operational staff gaining a broad knowledge of the organisation. This provides a benefit to staff (opportunities to progress within the wider organisation) and the organisation (staff have a broad knowledge and can move into a variety of positions).

Johennesse and Chou (2017), identified that throughout the economic downturn organisation cut back in numbers to operate lean and efficient organisation, with

workloads spread across existing staff. This process results in existing staff obtaining a high degree of experience through on the job learning. The findings highlighted a significant amount of tacit knowledge that is not easily transferable or documented within the organisation. As the economy continues to improve will this become a significant challenge for the organisation? Two managers identified that they had lost experienced staff for other opportunities in the last twelve months and had found it increasingly difficult to find appropriate replacements. Durst and Williams (2012) argue this can be source of considerable loss in competitive advantage to an organisation.

7   Limitation of Study

According to Grbich (2013), primary data collected from semi structured interviews is based on the observation and the interpretation of the data from transcripts. Hence the researcher's point of view may be subjective. Saunders .et al. (2005) identify that the researcher needs to be acutely aware of not only what the interviewee response is, but also the way in which the response was said. This is also down to interpretation by the researcher.

A second limitation identified is the fact that the primary data was collected not only from a small sample of six participants, but also from an organisation the researcher was employed by and has the potential to cause bias.

The third limitation was identified as the direct access some of the participants had to senior managers, the sample was taken from a sample of midlevel managements based on the researcher's direct access. But several participants had a greater knowledge of the internal working of the organisation due to their direct access to senior managers. The study could have also been expanded to include senior managers which would have provided a greater overview of the organisation long terms strategy for succession planning.

A fourth limitation was that the four companies were all under the umbrella of a single organisation. The study could be expanded to include competitive companies working in the same sector to gain a more insightful industry prospective.

The interview questions were developed from the literature reviewed, but a quantitative survey undertaken first, may have identified themes early that could allow the interview to be guided to gain a greater insight.

8 Recommendation for further Study

The researcher identified that succession management was implemented at an operational level due to the structure of the individual four companies under review. The researcher could expand the analysis to senior managers within the organisation to gain a higher level prospective within the organisation. This would be further enhanced by including senior members of the human resource department.

An interesting point identified during the study was that the organisation has a high degree of tacit knowledge, that both management and employees had built up through experience on the job. This degree of autonomy offered to each site and managers has allowed the operations to run in an efficient manner, as well as allowing the company to provide a competitive service. But has directly increased the level of tacit knowledge. Further research would be beneficial into the long-term effects of tacit knowledge through both experience and autonomy within organisation on succession management and planning strategies.

The research was based on one organisation operating within the Irish operation and maintenance sector. The researcher could further expand the research to include other organisations operating with this sector to undertake a comparison of succession planning to gain a greater understanding from an industry prospective.

9   Conclusion

Rothwell (2005) defines succession planning as:

"a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership
continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital
for the future, and encourage individual advancement"

The researcher explored the concept of succession planning by undertaken a literature review and collecting primary data through semi structured interviews with six participants from organisation Y. In general terms the research findings were in line with the literature findings. In conclusion, the researcher was adequately able to answer the primary research question and two of the three objectives. But the participants were unable to provide a clear insight into the organisation alignment of succession planning and management strategies. However, two of the six participants thought this may occur at a more senior level within the organisation. Participant H believed this to be the case.

> *'We have a senior manager's meeting once per year. The aim is to identify*
> *the needs of the organisation and look at our people in terms of their strength*
> *and weakness. A panel is then developed with a view of future vacancies'*
> *(Participant H)*

An interesting finding from the data analysis identified that succession management, as opposed to succession planning strategies are implemented at an operational level within the organisation. This is primarily due to the lean management structure of the four companies under review and limited internal promotional opportunities available. Implementing a succession management strategy at this level allows staff to be developed and provides other avenues for promotion within the greater organisation, thus keeping staff engaged and challenged. This has resulted in a low staff turnover as the economy continues to improve through employee loyalty.

However, to be efficient and provide a competitive service, each of the four companies is set up with lean resources and a minimum management structure. There is a high emphasis on the capturing of explicit knowledge and the sharing of knowledge (explicit and Tacit) through working groups to create synergies and

utilise best practice procedures. But an indirect consequence of this structure is the creation of a high degree of tacit knowledge due to the autonomy of management and other key staff. As this is a relatively young industry sector within Ireland, it cannot be clearly defined if this strategy will have long term benefits for the organisation or turn to a disadvantage. But it is clear this practice allows the organisation to be highly competitive today.

Durst and Wilhelm (2012) and Smith (2001) suggest that an organisation failure to prepare for a sudden departure can result in a loss of competitive advantage. One of the key findings was the significant level of tacit knowledge built up by operational managers through on the job experience. However, as the economy continues to improve could this become a disadvantage to a lean operation in the future!

One of the main themes and supported by the literature, was to develop staff at all levels of the organisation and not just at a very senior level or towards a senior level position. All participants agreed that the organisation had shifted to a development focus in the last three years due to an improving economy and the need to remain competitive and be prepared for future opportunities of growth (Guinn, 2009; Groves, 2007b; Rothwell, 2005a; Fulmer and Conger). But also, that development is focused within the organisation and based on the employee's strength and weaknesses. This includes buy in from the employee who is engaged in the development process to ensure its success.

The current study found that leadership development has moved to the forefront of the organisation focus in recent years. Groves (2007) identifies that this is essential to organisational success and to maintain a competitive organisation in the event of a loss of leaders. Another important finding was that the culture of the organisation supports the continued development of leaders, managers and operational staff. This is a measure to ensure the organisation remains competitive and ready for future opportunities, but also, as a method to increase employee satisfaction and loyalty within the organisation.

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Appendix A

Introduction

Interview question were developed based on the literature findings with the aim to answer the primary research question and objectives. Garman and Glawe (2004) summaries the common themes identified in their succession planning research was used as the framework to develop the interview questions.

Interview Question

Succession Planning and Management

Succession planning as "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement".

Where succession planning is essential to preparing the organisation for the departures of personnel from key positions through retirement or loss, succession management prepares the overall organisation for the needs in the future.

Succession management is defined as a process of identifying competent personnel within the organisation and developing the employee to enable them to acquire the appropriate experience, skills and knowledge to meet both the existing and future needs of the organisation

1. What are your own thoughts on succession planning and succession management and do you feel they are necessary?
2. Have succession planning initiatives been implemented within your organisation?
3. What do you think are the key challenges faced with implementing this strategy?

4. Research indicates that succession management and planning should be aligned to be effective. Does your organisation align these activities, and do you feel it's important?

5. How does the organisation culture affect the implementation of succession planning or succession management?

6. From your own experience would you feel succession planning and management play a key role with appointments throughout the organisation?

Leadership Development

7. Does your organisation have a leadership development strategy and does this involve a mentoring programme (formally or informally)?

8. Does the organisation have a process for identifying potential employees for development?

9. Are development plans tailored to individual needs and succession opportunities or based on the future expected needs of the organisation?

Knowledge Management

Knowledge Management is widely viewed in industry as an essential resource to an organisation competitiveness. Both in terms of documented procedures and processes (Explicit), as well as knowledge transferred through on the job experience (Tacit)

10. Does knowledge management fit into your organisation strategy?

11. What do you think is the main challenges faced with knowledge management strategies and the sharing of knowledge within a multinational organisation?

12. Do you feel there is anything else to add that would be important to this study that has not been covered within this interview?

Appendix B

Interview Dates, Times and Locations

Interview Dates, Times and Locations:

Date & Time	Participant	Location
5th July 2018, 12:30	H	Participants Office
11th July 2018, 13:00	B	Participants Office
13th July 2018, 14:00	C	Participants Office
16th July 2018, 15:00	E	Participants place of work, Boardroom
20th July 2018, 13:30	F	Participants place of work, Boardroom
20th July 2018, 15:00	A	Participants place of work, Boardroom
NA	D	Participant unable to attend
NA	G	Participant unable to attend

Table 4: Interview Schedule

Appendix C

Letter of Consent and information to Participants

Succession Planning and Management importance in the Irish context of infrastructure operation and maintenance projects

Informed Consent Form for Individual Interviews

Dear _____

As part of two-year part time master's in management (MSc) programme with the National College of Ireland (NCIRL). I am undertaken a research dissertation in partial fulfilment of the programme on the value of Succession Planning and Management importance viewed within an Irish context of infrastructure operation and maintenance projects.

I am undertaken a deductive approach and aim to gather data form industry and compare with finding from my literature review. To complete my research and gather data I would like to invite you to participate in this research sections. The title of my dissertation is "Succession Planning and Management importance in the Irish context of infrastructure operation and maintenance projects". The finding will be used to answer my research questions and objectives.

I would appreciate your participation in this study and will ensure that information provided will only be used for the sole purpose of completing my studies. The interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes and will be based on your experience in the operation and maintenance sector. Any information gain will be treated with the strictest of confidence and your name will not be disclosed.

Please note that to gather data effectively, the interview will need to be recorded, but will be permanently deleted once the data has been extracted. During this stage the data will be securely stored. The interview recording will not be shared with any 3rd parties and will only be used for the purpose outline above. Any comments or

finding will not be linked to names of participants. However, at any stage following the interview you are concerned with any comment, please contact me on 086███████ and I will delete from the recording and any transcripts.

Please note that at any stage during the interview you wish to stop, skip questions or withdrawal fully from the process. I will fully support this decision without hesitation.

Your participation in the research study would be greatly appreciated and will add significant benefit to the study.

Just to Confirm:

This research is approved by the National College of Ireland, who has received an ethical review application form and approved the research proposal.

I (participant), have been informed of the research purpose of this study and expected duration of the interview.

I (participant), understand that at any stage I can refuse to answer question or redraw fully from the interview process. But I confirm that I wish to participate in the research.

I understand that the interview is to be recorded, but will not be shared with any 3rd parties, kept in secured place and will be permanently deleted once the research is completed.

I understand that at any stage following the interview, if I have concerns regarding comments made I may contact the researcher (Stephen Dunne 086███████) to have the comments deleted from the recording and any transcript.

I have read and fully understand the purpose of this research and consent tom participant.

Please sign below:

I CONSENT/AGREE to participate in this research project: _____

I DO NOT AGREE to participate in this research project: _____

Date: _____