

Barriers to Implementing Succession Planning in Government Organizations with a Structural Interpretive Approach

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Nowadays, an effective management system in government organizations leads to vibrant life and the growth and development of the country. To benefit from such a system, competent and suitable managers must exist within the organization's lifecycle, and in their absence, the organization should have access to alternative human resources. The purpose of this study is to investigate the barriers to implementing succession planning in government organizations using a structural interpretive approach.

Methodology: This research is practical and falls within the category of descriptive surveys. Data analysis is performed using a structural interpretive approach, specifically the cross-impact matrix multiplication method, with the help of MICMAC software.

Findings: The findings include 84 indicators or variables that have been identified and categorized into 14 categories across seven levels as barriers to implementing succession planning. The research also shows that legal barriers are the most significant, while individual barriers are the most impacted by other influential factors in implementing succession planning.

Conclusion: Based on the research findings regarding human resources barriers, it is recommended that managers focus on identifying and nurturing internal talents, paying sufficient attention to talent management, and understanding the importance of planning for optimal talent management.

Keywords: Succession planning, talent management, barriers to succession planning

1 Introduction

In the era of increasing effort and environmental changes, organizations today are striving to attract, retain, and maintain the most qualified managers and employees. In this context, programs for their training and development are also considered by organizational leaders, as competent

employees are considered a source of competitive advantage for an organization. Some believe optimal use of valuable human resources is crucial for an organization's success. Organizations are more welcoming than ever to ensure the efficient use of their human resources (Jadesola Ololade et al., 2023; Keikhosravi et al., 2023).

Retaining managers and employees in organizations is one of the vital variables in the employment lifecycle. The need to retain employees in an organization has surpassed the need to hire new ones. Retaining skilled employees has become a significant responsibility as it is a factor in optimizing sustainable productivity (Janahmadigol et al., 2023). Kheykhosravi and colleagues (2021) also believe that human resource development is one of the most important tasks, or rather the most crucial task of human resource management in organizations, which plays a vital role in the survival of organizations by focusing on training and aiding employee advancement (Keikhosravi et al., 2023; Keykhosravi et al., 2023). One of the best ways to develop employees and organizations is to use succession planning in the career development path. In this regard, succession planning is a systematic approach to ensure that employees in organizations are sufficiently competent for development (Davoudi et al., 2018; Janahmadigol et al., 2023). On the other hand, as mentioned, the world is changing faster than ever, and these changes are also visible in generational transitions, but the issue here is that along with these environmental changes on a macro scale, organizations are also facing continuous problems in knowledge transfer, human resource issues, and the need for change in human resources and economic difficulties in recent years, making senior managers wonder whether the time and cost of nurturing successors are worth it (Bano et al., 2022; Davoudi et al., 2018; Naderian, 2017).

Research has shown that in recent years, due to changes in the demographic composition in Iran and an increase in the number of elderly people approaching retirement age, many capable human resources have left government organizations, which, if not properly managed in terms of the right mix of managers, will cause significant problems in the organization. Identifying individuals who have the necessary skills and required characteristics to lead the organization in the future places a lot of pressure on organizations and is very costly (Azar & Soliemani, 2017; Nasabi et al., 2019). Also, research has shown that departures from the organization happen for various reasons. Therefore, the emergence of a gap and departure of human resources in the organization gradually creates problems in organizational processes. Thus, many organizations employ plans to prevent disruption in their development process by providing capable forces for various jobs from within the organization or, in other words, through succession planning (Rothwell, 2010). In this regard, Azar and Soleimani (2017) believe that given the significant role of government

organizations in society and the diversity of their services and activities, it is essential that vast human resources be available to this system; however, these resources are usually not selected competently or used effectively and efficiently (Azar & Soliemani, 2017).

Therefore, the issue of succession planning in government organizations is of double importance, as the output of government organizations is used as the input for other organizations. Regarding the importance and necessity of research from a practical perspective, it is mentioned that succession planning is a valuable mechanism for the progress and improvement of organizations (Bano et al., 2022; Simkhada, 2023). It plans the nurturing of managers in such a way that the ability and competence of the managers align with environmental developments and also the progress of the organization. Also, succession planning allows the organization to prepare for absences, departures, death, retirement, or transfers and relocations (Tootian, 2019).

The practical importance of examining the barriers to succession planning will become increasingly important in the future due to growing competitive challenges for managers and organizations. As McKee and Froelich (2016) suggest, examining the barriers to succession management considers the barriers to nurturing internal successors for key positions and also ensures the quality of candidates by creating competencies and covering skill gaps (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Another reason for the necessity of research on examining the barriers to succession planning is that in government organizations, usually due to the short tenure of management and often senior and middle managers changing with the government cabinet, addressing this important issue and considering the barriers to using skilled and experienced human resources in the organization is of great importance. Therefore, in Iran, the importance of succession planning should be considered by managers and organizational planners. Managers, by understanding the importance of the barriers to succession planning, will be able to identify the barriers and challenges in time, preventing the wastage of human and organizational resources. Thus, from the results of this research, managers of government agencies and human resource planners can recognize the barriers to implementing succession planning and use the research results.

Succession planning is a priority in organizations because it helps in the development of potential candidates for organizational sustainability and continuity of optimal performance. Every organization faces or will face

challenges with future successors and the right people. Senior management can create an environment that, with the help of internal succession planning, enables the development of leadership. Succession planning is an organizational approach that is given attention by all organizations due to the high demand for retaining knowledge and the shortage of skilled labor (Bano et al., 2022). Succession planning is a process in which suitable employees to hold various positions in an organization are selected from among qualified, interested, and talented individuals, and through a training and development program, they are prepared to take on these jobs when needed. This definition, in addition to the discussion of selecting successors, also emphasizes developmental activities and describes the entire process of succession planning (Jeong et al., 2022).

Theories of succession planning emphasize three diverse viewpoints: first, a resource-based approach is preferred for aligning human resources through resources, capabilities, and competence deployment. Second, the assumption that specific human resource management practices can enhance organizational performance when they are aligned with each other and the strategic goals of the organization. Third, the focus on using internal organizational resources for succession planning is important (Siambi, 2022). Succession planning involves creating an environment that also enables internal leadership development. Since understanding the aspects of the organizational environment is a challenge, companies must consider the succession planning process as strategic, and all stages must be well monitored (Barros and colleagues, 2021). In this context, succession planning and management should not be confused with replacement planning, although they often overlap and coincide. The evident need for replacement planning will be a driving force for efforts in planning and managing succession planning. Succession planning goes a step further than replacement planning. Succession planning is an active effort to ensure continuity of leadership through nurturing internal talents using planned development activities. This plan should be considered an important tool in implementing strategic plans (Brito Barros et al., 2021).

The following discussion on the research background states that while many studies have been conducted on succession planning, no specific research has explored the barriers to implementing succession planning with a structural interpretive approach that categorizes factors by levels (Abbasi et al., 2017; Nasr & Ghasemizad, 2019; Simkhada, 2023; Taleghani et al., 2023). Additionally,

research (Ahmad et al., 2016; Darshani & Wijeyerathne, 2017; Porfirio et al., 2020; Schepker et al., 2017) examined succession planning, succession planning strategies, and influencing factors but, like the domestic studies, none explored the barriers to succession planning with a structural interpretive approach or clarified the relationships between variables. Given the domestic and international research mentioned in relation to the barriers affecting succession planning management in various organizations, it can be inferred that despite the emphasis on succession planning, unfortunately, the influential barriers with a structural interpretive approach and the impact of variables on each other and their leveling have not been clarified.

In this regard, the present article aims to fill this research gap by reviewing and analyzing previous studies and categorizing the most significant barriers based on a structural interpretive approach. Therefore, the current research is of great importance and necessity in various aspects; theoretically, the convergence of this research's results with previous studies can validate the research conducted before it, and the divergence of this research's results with past studies can also help to mend the theoretical gap in the field of barriers to succession planning. Practically, the results of this research will be fully applicable to government organizations and will assist in devising strategies for succession planning. Consequently, the research questions are as follows:

What are the most significant barriers affecting succession planning in organizations in Iran? In other words, what levels are these effective barriers placed at with a structural interpretive approach? How are the impacts of the barriers ranked both directly and indirectly?

2 Methods and Materials

The present research is applied in terms of its objectives and falls under the category of descriptive survey studies in terms of data collection methodology. The sampling method in the interpretive-structural modeling approach requires that information be collected and analyzed from experts and specialists. For selecting the structural interpretive team, purposive sampling has been used. The selection criteria for experts include theoretical proficiency, practical experience, willingness and ability to participate in the research, and accessibility. An important consideration in determining the number of experts is to ensure a comprehensive range of different perspectives in the research. Typically, the number

of experts participating in the structural interpretive approach is selected between 14 to 20 people.

Taking into account the mentioned criteria, ultimately, 25 experts and specialists in the field of human resources and managers of government organizations have been selected from among the managers of the Management and Planning Organization of Khorasan Razavi province. In the research implementation process, all barriers that have been effective in succession planning were sent to the experts for their opinions. Based on the experts' opinions and the literature, the variables were categorized into 14 components. For data analysis, MICMAC software has been used to perform complex calculations of the cross-impact matrix and the degree of relationships between these variables. Variables in the rows impact the variables in the columns.

The data obtained are summarized based on the method of interpretive-structural modeling and the final self-interacting structural matrix is formed. After forming the initial accessibility matrix of the barriers to the implementation of succession planning by incorporating the

transferability in the relationships of variables, the final accessibility matrix is formed to align with the initial accessibility matrix. At this stage, all secondary relationships between the variables are reviewed, and the final accessibility matrix is obtained. To determine the levels of variables in the final model, three sets of outputs, inputs, and shared are formed for each of them. Variables that share one set of outputs and inputs are considered as a shared set in the hierarchy process, such that these variables are not effective in creating any other variable. Those variables are then set aside after identifying the highest level from the list of other variables. In this research, seven levels of variables have been obtained in fourteen factors table.

3 Findings and Results

Initially, 78 indicators were extracted from the research literature, after which 9 more indicators were added following expert review. The categorization that took place is shown in Table 1 which includes all barriers gathered.

Table 1

Barriers to the Implementation of Succession Planning

Category	Barriers
Individual Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resistance to change - Dishonesty in providing information - Ineffective learning - Lack of general motivation - Behavioral barriers
Interpersonal Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jealousy among colleagues - Mistrust among individuals - Lack of proper communication between individuals
Managerial Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of attention and importance by top management - Lack of systemic thinking by managers - Instant decision-making style - Avoidant decision-making style - Lack of commitment by managers and staff - Instability of senior management - Lack of delegation of authority - Lack of focus on crisis management - Traditional viewpoint of managers - Managers not utilizing collective wisdom - Cost-oriented viewpoint of managers
Strategic Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short-term organizational view - Failure to recognize organizational expectations - Organizational immaturity - Weakness in policies - Lack of vision - Lack of alignment with organizational strategies
Job Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overwhelming tasks - High job pressure - Lack of job understanding by employees - Job insecurity - Lack of job description transparency

Environmental Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political factors - Family factors - Social factors
Legal Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restrictive employment laws - Lack of protection from political pressure - Lack of effective laws and regulations - Internal procedures
Educational Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of proper training for employees - Lack of training needs assessment - Short-term training for employees - Lack of development of managerial capabilities
Technological Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of e-knowledge force - Lack of systematic knowledge among employees
Organizational Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak organizational culture - Structural barriers - Rapid organizational changes - Lack of organizational support - Lack of departmental collaboration - Lack of inclination towards merit-based selection
Human Resource Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inability to find suitable successors - Lack of succession planning - Failure to create and store potential successors - Insufficient number of qualified candidates - Lack of rotation of employees under supervision - Limited human resources - Selection and recruitment - Appointment and promotion - Performance evaluation - Talent crisis - Lack of a high-quality HR unit - Failure to identify key operational, expert, and managerial positions - Failure to draft job descriptions for key positions - Organization's adaptability to current conditions - Organization's effort to maintain the status quo
Implementation Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of cost-benefit calculation - Lack of evaluation of the succession planning system - Lack of transparency in implementation - Lack of a dedicated unit for managing succession planning - Lack of pilot implementation before full roll-out - Lack of implementation flexibility - Lack of introductory sessions on succession planning - Delayed returns from succession planning - Lack of communication to stakeholders - Misalignment of succession planning with strategic planning - Lack of review and feedback
Cultural Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural factors of society - Lack of a supportive organizational culture - Weak organizational culture
Bureaucratic Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time-consuming knowledge transfer to others - Excessive documentation - Necessity to document all stages of knowledge transfer

After identifying the barriers to the implementation of succession planning, experts were asked to determine the dyadic relationships of factors. After determining the relationships and levels of variables, they can be modeled graphically. For determining the levels of variables in the final model, three sets of outputs, inputs, and shared are formed for each of them. In the first table, variables that

share one set of outputs and inputs are considered as a shared set in the hierarchy process, such that these variables are not effective in creating any other variable. These variables are then set aside after identifying the highest level from the list of other variables. These repetitions continue until the level of all variables is determined. In this research, six levels of variables have been obtained in fourteen factors table.

Table 2 shows the leveling of barriers to the implementation of succession planning.

Figure 1

Final Model

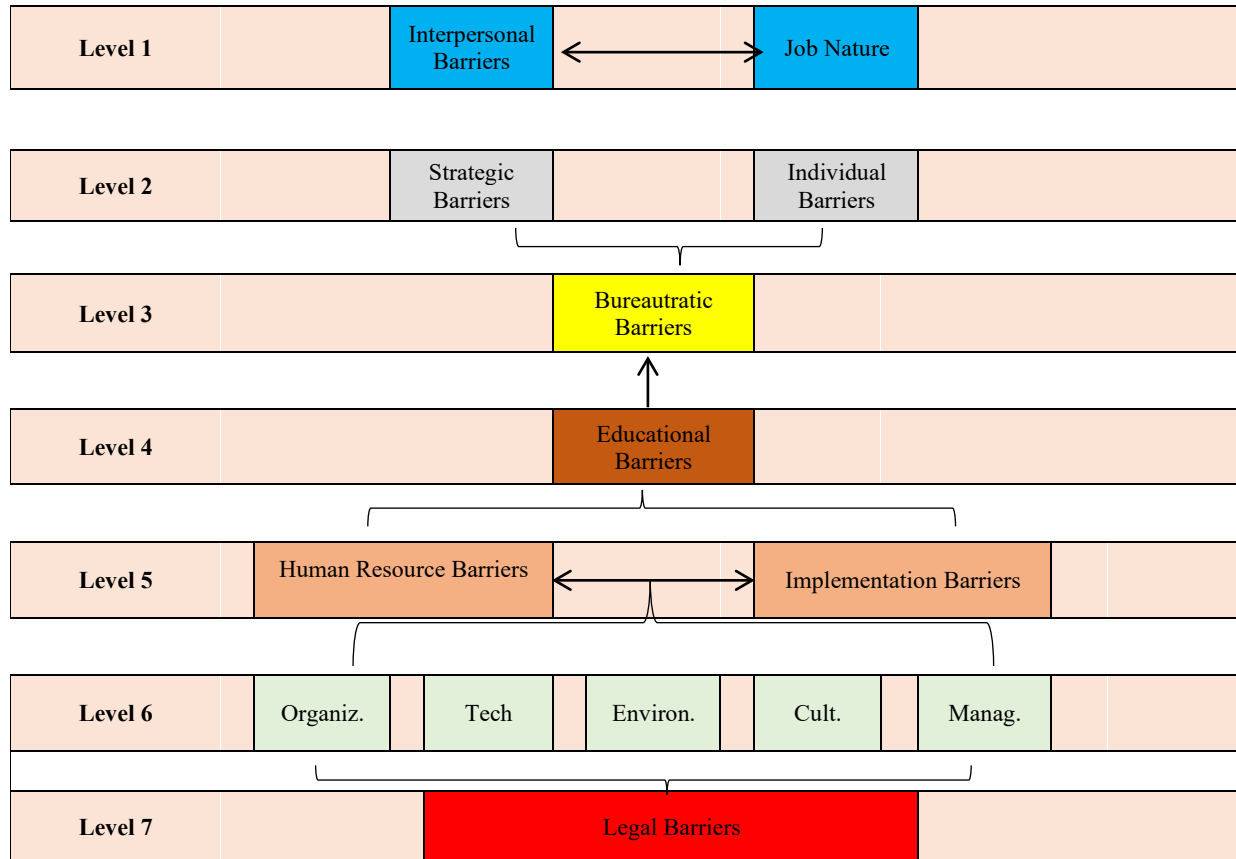


Table 2

Leveling of Barriers to Succession Planning Implementation

Level	Common and Output Frequency	Common Set	Input Set (Affected) Columns	Output Set (Impact) Rows	Factors	Code
2	5	7-10	3-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14	2-7-10	Individual Barriers	A01
1	2	11	1-3-4-6-8-9-11-12	11	Interpersonal Barriers	A02
6	12	4-6-11-12-14	4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-13-14	1-2-4-6-11-12-14	Managerial Barriers	A03
6	12	3-5-6-10-14	3-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-13-14	2-3-5-6-7-10-14	Organizational Barriers	A04
2	5	4	4-8-9-10-11-12-13-14	1-3-4-6	Strategic Barriers	A05
5	11	3-4-10	3-4-5-8-9-10-11-14	1-2-3-4-7-10-12-13	Human Resource Barriers	A06
1	2	1	1-4-6-9-10-12-14	1	Job Nature	A07
6	12	11	9-11	1-2-3-4-5-6-10-11-12-13-14	Environmental Factors	A08
7	13	0	0	1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-13-14	Legal Barriers	A09
5	11	1-4-6-11	1-4-6-8-9-11-12-13-14	1-3-4-5-6-7-11	Implementation Barriers	A10
6	12	2-3-8-10	2-3-8-9-10-12-13-14	1-2-3-4-5-6-8-10	Cultural Barriers	A11
4	9	3	3-6-8-9-13-14	1-2-3-4-5-7-10-11	Educational Barriers	A12
3	6	0	6-8-9-14	3-4-5-10-11-12	Bureaucratic Barriers	A13
6	12	3-4	3-4-8-9	1-3-4-5-6-7-10-11-12-13	Technological Barriers	A14

In this phase, using the MICMAC method, the types of variables have been determined based on their impact and affectedness by other variables. After determining the power of influence or impact and the power of dependence of factors, all effective barriers to succession planning can be

classified into one of the four clusters of the variable impact matrix method. The influence power and dependence level of each of the influential factors on succession planning are shown in the table below.

Table 3

Degree of Driving Power and Dependence of Variables

Factor	Driving Power	Dependence
Individual Barriers	3	10
Interpersonal Barriers	1	8
Managerial Barriers	7	10
Organizational Barriers	7	10
Strategic Barriers	4	8
Human Resource Barriers	8	8
Job Nature	1	7
Environmental Factors	11	2
Legal Barriers	13	0
Implementation Barriers	7	9
Cultural Barriers	8	8
Educational Barriers	6	8
Bureaucratic Barriers	6	4
Technological Barriers	10	4

As shown in the table above, driving power represents the extent to which each factor influences other factors, and dependence represents how much they are affected. The results indicate that legal, environmental, and technological barriers with driving powers of 13, 11, and 10, respectively,

have the most significant influence, and individual, managerial, and organizational barriers with a dependence of 10 each are the most affected. Further tables show the direct and indirect influence and affectedness of barriers to succession planning implementation.

Table 4

Direct Influence and Affectedness of Barriers to Succession Planning Implementation

Rank	Variable	Direct Influence	Variable	Direct Affectedness
1	Legal	1382	Individual	1063
2	Environmental	1170	Managerial	1063
3	Technological	1063	Organizational	1063
4	Human Resources	851	Implementation	957
5	Cultural	851	Interpersonal	851
6	Educational	851	Strategic	851
7	Managerial	744	Human Resources	851
8	Organizational	744	Cultural	851
9	Implementation	744	Job Nature	744
10	Bureaucratic	638	Educational	638
11	Strategic	425	Bureaucratic	425
12	Individual	319	Technological	425
13	Interpersonal	106	Environmental	212
14	Job Nature	106	Legal	0

As shown in the table above, legal barriers have the highest direct influence on succession planning implementation, with a score of 1382. Individual barriers are

the most directly affected, with a score of 1063. This table illustrates how different barriers directly impact or are impacted by the implementation of succession planning.

Table 5*Indirect Influence and Affectedness of Barriers to Succession Planning Implementation*

Rank	Variable	Indirect Influence	Variable	Indirect Affectedness
1	Legal	1528	Individual	1170
2	Environmental	1289	Managerial	1060
3	Technological	1077	Organizational	1060
4	Cultural	901	Interpersonal	1027
5	Managerial	795	Implementation	951
6	Bureaucratic	768	Human Resources	947
7	Human Resources	729	Job Nature	908
8	Organizational	722	Cultural	785
9	Educational	709	Strategic	749
10	Implementation	689	Educational	510
11	Strategic	437	Technological	417
12	Individual	162	Bureaucratic	268
13	Interpersonal	159	Environmental	142
14	Job Nature	29	Legal	0

As indicated in the table above, legal barriers also have the highest indirect influence on the implementation of succession planning, with an indirect influence score of 1528. Individual barriers are most indirectly affected, with a score of 1170. This table highlights the impact of each barrier not just directly, but also through their influence on other factors within the system.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

As the research findings have indicated, barriers to the implementation of succession planning have been identified at seven levels. At the seventh level, legal barriers are placed at the lowest level, acting like a foundational stone in the model. Therefore, the implementation of succession planning should start with these variables and be generalized to other variables. In other words, barriers such as restrictive employment laws, internal procedures, and the absence of effective laws and regulations in the organization prevent succession planning from being properly implemented. These barriers influence the sixth level barriers. In other words, the lack of regulations in an organization affects organizational and managerial variables and topics. This result aligns with the prior findings (Nasr & Ghasemizad, 2019), that examined the legal factors affecting succession planning.

At the sixth level, organizational, managerial, cultural, technological, and environmental barriers are present, which are indeed influenced by the previous level's legal barriers. Organizational barriers such as the organization's lack of inclination towards merit-based selection, structural barriers, or organizational changes impact the human resources of the

organization and the lack of specialized force in electronic knowledge management prevents the human resources system of succession planning from being properly implemented. When the organization does not disseminate information through professional social networks, thus, the organization's communication with the external environment weakens, and therefore, human resource management is unable to properly select suitable forces from outside the organization. According to Montazeri et al. (2016), information and communication technologies and their extensive applications in the current century have had significant cultural, social, and economic effects for organizations (Montazeri et al., 2017). Organizations' interest in using this approach for economic growth and development has faced them with new challenges that require deeper understanding.

The results obtained from this section are consistent with the prior research (Cameron, 2017; Shum et al., 2008; Turner, 2019). At the fifth level, human resource and implementation barriers exist, which, as mentioned, are influenced by the previous barriers. The lack of succession planning or talent crisis, the failure to identify key jobs in operational, expert, and managerial positions cause the training system to be affected as well. In other words, when key jobs are not identified by human resource management in the organization, training is not efficiently needs-assessed. The research findings in this section are consistent with the previous studies (Almasi et al., 2015; Gill, 2013; Mohammadi & Sharafi, 2016). At the fourth level, educational barriers exist that impact the third-level barriers. The lack of training needs assessment or the lack of training

and development of managerial capabilities causes excessive bureaucratic formalities to form. This is because some managers in the organization request and needs assess training courses as requiring extensive administrative permissions, thus contributing to the creation of administrative bureaucracy.

In line with these findings, Nasabi and colleagues (2019) stated that managerial training and skills, specialized training and teaching methods, and evaluation methods of skills are the main dimensions of succession planning for managers (Nasabi et al., 2019). At the third level, bureaucratic barriers exist that impact individual barriers. Excessive bureaucracy in the organization causes people to lack honesty in providing information due to their fear or lose motivation for learning due to the time consumed in completing administrative bureaucracy.

At the second level, individual and strategic barriers exist. Individual barriers at this level, such as a lack of inclination towards effective learning, prevent succession planning from being efficiently implemented in the organization. A lack of inclination towards effective learning encourages managers to promote this characteristic during interactions. Additionally, the absence of vision as well as weaknesses in policies and guidelines cause the nature of the job or job characteristics to be affected. For example, organizational policies and guidelines ensure that job descriptions are not efficiently available for managers, or due to political reasons in the organization, the workload of managers is high, and thus they cannot afford enough time to disseminate their knowledge to their successors in the organization. Schepker et al. (2017) also validated in their research the impact of strategic and strategic barriers on job performance (Schepker et al., 2017). At the first level, interpersonal barriers and the nature of the job exist. Jealousy among colleagues causes individuals to be reluctant to share their knowledge with others, thus a worthy individual is always faced with challenges.

In light of the research results regarding human resource barriers, it is recommended that managers in the discussion of talent management pay sufficient attention to identifying and nurturing internal talents and understand the importance of planning for optimal talent management. Managers can ensure by implementing talent management in the organization that through the creation of a necessary talent pool, they will not need replacements for key employees at times of need and can access qualified and efficient forces whenever needed, thus the organization will not face a crisis. Regarding managerial barriers, it is recommended that

managers support the use of scientific and effective methods and styles in the selection of applicants entering the organization and participate impartially in the selection and promotion at key and sensitive positions. Regarding educational barriers, it is recommended that structured and expert programs in the field of training managers for capability and responsibility under the conditions of key positions and preparing managers to hold these positions be designed and drafted. Regarding implementation barriers, it is recommended that barriers that have caused the implementation of succession planning management be evaluated by senior managers and that the succession planning management program be implemented on a pilot basis. Regarding strategic barriers, it is suggested that precise policies appropriate for job duties be defined and communicated to employees in each organization. If a department is responsible for planning succession, it should have criteria aligned with the goals and visions of the organization. Regarding organizational barriers, it is also suggested that all organizational activities be based on the laws and policies of the organization. As it is evident, both long-term and short-term planning of the organization is based on and according to existing laws. Regarding job nature barriers, it is suggested that suitable job rotation for trainees take place, which will cause them to learn various managerial duties and increase their managerial awareness.

Regarding bureaucratic barriers, it is recommended that excessive administrative formalities be eliminated and an appropriate organizational structure be adopted, in such a way that administrative bureaucracy is reduced and horizontal arrangement is added to the organizational structure to broaden the scope of the target group.

Regarding legal barriers, it is worth mentioning that strengthening the political environment of the organization based on the fact that nurturing successor managers poses no risk to current managers is very effective. Regarding individual barriers, it is suggested that attention be paid to the psychological characteristics of managers who are the target of succession planning processes and to develop their trust in the organization and its policies, as well as striving to enhance the aforementioned factors both at management levels in the form of strategic measures and in the field of human resources in the form of conducting training workshops and orientation classes, can be effective.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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