Succession Planning and Sustainability of Church Affiliated Social Enterprises within Karen Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese

Onyiego Bernard Obino*[1], Muiruri Zipporah Karimi[1], Jeketule Soko[1].

[1]Tangaza University, Nairobi, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

Church-affiliated social enterprises combine commercial activities with social and religious missions, making leadership continuity important to their long-term sustainability. However, limited empirical evidence explains how specific succession-planning practices relate to sustainability in Catholic Church-affiliated enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa. This study examined the relationships between knowledge transfer, communication practices, talent identification, leadership development and organizational sustainability, while assessing the moderating role of organizational culture. Guided by the Resource-Based View, Leader–Member Exchange theory and Institutional theory, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods design. The quantitative component targeted 100 leaders and managers across 20 church-affiliated social enterprises in Karen Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese, yielding 81 usable questionnaires, an 81% response rate. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 21, while qualitative interview data were analysed thematically using NVivo. Pearson correlation analysis revealed positive associations between sustainability and leadership development ($r = .725$, $p < .001$), knowledge transfer ($r = .424$, $p < .001$), communication practices ($r = .374$, $p = .002$), talent identification ($r = .340$, $p < .001$) and organizational culture ($r = .326$, $p = .003$). Interview findings highlighted mentorship, documentation, staff communication, performance-based talent identification, training, delegation and practical leadership assignments. The moderation analysis also indicated a negative interaction between succession planning and organizational culture ($B = -0.064$, $p = .010$). The study recommends institutionalized succession procedures, structured knowledge transfer, transparent leadership selection and adequately resourced leadership development. The findings contribute context-specific evidence to research on leadership continuity and sustainability in faith-based social enterprises.

Keywords: Succession planning, social enterprise, organizational sustainability, leadership development, knowledge transfer, faith-based organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Social enterprises organize economic activity around an explicit social purpose. Their management therefore requires attention to both the resources needed to sustain operations and the social value those operations produce. Mair and Martí (2006) frame social entrepreneurship around the use of resources to pursue social change, while Defourny and Nyssens (2010) show that social enterprise takes different forms across institutional settings. These differences matter when assessing sustainability because governance, accountability and the relationship between income generation and service provision vary between enterprises.

The combination of social and commercial objectives creates distinctive management demands. Battilana and Lee (2014) conceptualize hybrid organizing as the activities, structures and processes through which organizations combine different organizational forms. Doherty et al. (2014) identify the management of this hybridity as a central concern for social enterprise research. Empirical work on work integration social enterprises further shows that commitment to social objectives can interact with economic productivity in

ways that complicate organizational performance (Battilana et al., 2015). Sustainability consequently requires management arrangements that preserve the social mission while maintaining the capabilities and income needed to continue operating.

African research locates these challenges within specific resource and institutional conditions. Ciambotti and Pedrini (2021) examine how Kenyan social enterprises use their hybrid character to respond to resource constraints. Their findings direct attention to how organizations mobilize and combine resources, rather than treating scarcity as a financial problem alone. Drawing on social enterprises in Kenya and Uganda, Ciambotti et al. (2023) also show that strategies for extending social impact generate different tensions between social and financial objectives. These studies establish the importance of organizational capabilities, although their principal focus is resource mobilization and impact scaling rather than the preparation of leadership successors.

Faith-based enterprises add religious commitments and sponsoring institutions to this management context. Ndemo (2006), in a qualitative investigation of 11 faith-based social enterprise programmes in Kenya, examined sustainability measures and the support structures through which faith-based organizations assist enterprise development. This work provides an early Kenyan foundation for understanding sustainability beyond immediate financial returns. The normative connection between management and social purpose is also developed in Management for Social Transformation by Soko et al. (2012). The publisher presents the book as an account of practical management and ethical responsibilities integrated with faith to improve project effectiveness and human wellbeing. It supplies a relevant management perspective, rather than empirical evidence that particular succession practices cause sustainability.

Recent evidence makes the organizational capacity question more specific. Mathuva et al. (2026), studying social enterprises run by Catholic nuns in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, identify communication, managerial and leadership skills, business knowledge, commercial understanding and financial analysis as important competencies. Syengo et al. (2026), in their systematic review of post-donor sustainability among Catholic Women Religious Congregations, emphasize institutionalized leadership, governance, financial management, human resource capacity and organizational learning. Their synthesis concerns continuity after donor withdrawal, which differs from leadership succession but draws attention to capabilities that institutions need to preserve. Together, these sources suggest that sustainability depends partly on whether management competencies become established organizational practices that continue when personnel or funding arrangements change.

Succession planning addresses the continuity of critical responsibilities by identifying potential successors and preparing them to assume leadership. Nonprofit research has examined the extent of succession preparation and the organizational conditions associated with it (Froelich et al., 2011). Santora and Bozer (2015) connect succession planning with stability and sustainability, while Johnson (2022) discusses its relationship with leadership development. Jules et al. (2026) examine why nonprofit organizations may lack succession planning. This literature establishes succession as an ongoing management concern, but it does not justify assuming that every succession policy is implemented effectively or produces the same outcomes across settings.

The present study examines four practices through which succession preparation may support continuity. Knowledge transfer concerns the sharing and preservation of experience, procedures and institutional memory. Argote (2024) reviews the mechanisms and motivations through which knowledge moves within organizations, providing a basis for examining mentorship, documentation and learning during transitions. Communication concerns how staff understand responsibilities, transition procedures and organizational priorities. Talent identification concerns the recognition of employees with potential to assume future responsibilities, whereas leadership development concerns the experience and support through which that potential is developed (Johnson, 2022). Treating these practices separately permits an assessment of their respective associations with sustainability without assuming that they are interchangeable.

Organizational context may also shape succession outcomes. Li (2019) shows that nonprofit post-succession performance must be considered in relation to governance, professionalization and other contextual

conditions. In the Kenyan Catholic context, Njeri et al. (2019) examine human resource planning, career development, selection procedures and a regulatory moderator in faith-based educational organizations within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi. Their study provides directly relevant local evidence. It also means that the present research cannot claim that succession planning in Nairobi's Catholic institutions has never been studied. Its contribution must instead be located in the combination of enterprise types, succession practices, sustainability outcome and organizational-culture moderator examined here.

Problem Statement

Catholic Church-affiliated social enterprises require continuity in leadership and institutional knowledge to maintain viable operations and fulfil their social missions. The practical management problem is how to preserve these capabilities when key personnel leave or responsibilities change. Nonprofit succession research documents the need for systematic preparation, while research on faith-based sustainability highlights the importance of governance and human resource capacity (Froelich et al., 2011; Jules et al., 2026; Syengo et al., 2026). Without adequate preparation, enterprises may become vulnerable to losses of knowledge, interruptions in decision-making and dependence on individual officeholders. Their relevance to Karen Parish requires empirical investigation; evidence from other settings cannot establish the local prevalence of transition difficulties or resulting service disruptions.

Existing scholarship explains important parts of this problem but does not settle the specific relationship investigated here. Kenyan faith-based enterprise research addresses sustainability measures and support structures (Ndemo, 2006), while East African research identifies competencies needed to sustain enterprises run by Catholic nuns (Mathuva et al., 2026). The review by Syengo et al. (2026) connects post-donor continuity with institutional leadership and human resource systems. These contributions concern sustainability and organizational capability, but they do not directly estimate the associations between the four succession practices and enterprise sustainability in the Karen Parish setting. Evidence on resource constraints and impact scaling similarly illuminates enterprise management without directly testing this succession model (Ciambotti & Pedrini, 2021; Ciambotti et al., 2023).

The closest local succession study, Njeri et al. (2019), examines faith-based educational organizations within the same archdiocese. Its focus on human resource planning, career development, selection procedures and regulatory conditions provides a foundation for further inquiry, but it does not answer the present study's question across a wider range of Catholic-affiliated enterprises. International nonprofit studies also caution against treating leadership replacement as sufficient evidence of organizational continuity because outcomes depend on the circumstances of succession (Li, 2019). Administrators therefore need context-specific evidence on how knowledge transfer, communication, talent identification and leadership development relate to sustainability, and whether organizational culture changes those relationships.

Research Gap and Study Objectives

The literature reviewed identifies a bounded empirical gap at the intersection of succession practice and Catholic enterprise sustainability. Research on hybrid enterprises explains competing social and financial demands (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014); nonprofit studies address succession preparation and transition outcomes (Froelich et al., 2011; Li, 2019); and recent Catholic-focused studies address entrepreneurial competencies and post-donor sustainability (Mathuva et al., 2026; Syengo et al., 2026). The present study connects these strands by examining four specified succession practices across educational, healthcare and other church-affiliated enterprises in Karen Parish. Its contribution is contextual and analytical; it does not depend on a claim that no related research exists.

A further question concerns organizational culture. Its direct association with sustainability is different from its possible moderation of the relationship between succession planning and sustainability. Context-sensitive succession research supports examining organizational conditions, but does not itself establish a culture interaction in Catholic enterprises (Li, 2019; Njeri et al., 2019). Combining quantitative associations with qualitative accounts can help explain how succession practices are experienced, although a cross-sectional mixed-methods design cannot establish temporal causation.

Accordingly, this study examined the relationship between succession planning and sustainability among Catholic Church-affiliated social enterprises within Karen Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese. Specifically, it assessed the associations of knowledge transfer, communication practices, talent identification and leadership development with sustainability, and tested whether organizational culture moderated the relationship between overall succession planning and sustainability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theoretical perspectives provide complementary explanations of these relationships. The Resource-Based View (RBV) conceptualizes organizational resources and capabilities as potential foundations of sustained performance, particularly when valuable resources are developed and effectively deployed (Barney, 1991; Barney et al., 2021). Applied to church-affiliated social enterprises, the RBV explains why institutional knowledge, experienced personnel and leadership competencies warrant deliberate preservation and development. However, the RBV alone does not fully explain how these resources are transferred through interpersonal relationships or how religious norms and institutional expectations shape leadership selection. Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) theory addresses the relational dimension by emphasizing the quality of exchanges between leaders and their followers. Trust, mutual respect and supportive relationships can create opportunities for mentoring, feedback and the gradual transfer of responsibility (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Nevertheless, LMX is primarily concerned with leader–follower relationships and offers a more limited explanation of the wider institutional expectations governing leadership in a hierarchical religious organization. Institutional theory complements these perspectives by explaining how organizational practices are shaped by norms, values, rules and legitimacy requirements (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014). Within Catholic Church-affiliated enterprises, these influences may affect which individuals are considered suitable successors, how authority is exercised and how organizational continuity is understood. No single theory is sufficient because the research problem simultaneously concerns the preservation of internal resources, the interpersonal processes through which leadership capacity develops, and the institutional environment in which succession decisions occur. Their integration therefore offers a more comprehensive analytical framework.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Setting

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed to provide complementary perspectives on succession planning and organizational sustainability. The research was conducted in Karen Parish within the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The study covered 20 church-affiliated social enterprises, including educational institutions, healthcare facilities, children's homes, hostels, agricultural enterprises and retreat centres.

Population, Sampling and Data Collection

The quantitative component targeted 100 leaders and managers associated with the participating enterprises. A total of 81 usable questionnaires were returned, representing an 81% response rate. The questionnaire examined knowledge transfer, communication practices, talent identification, leadership development, organizational culture and sustainability.

Qualitative data were collected through interviews to obtain explanations of how succession-planning practices operated within the participating organizations. The study received the relevant research permissions, and ethical procedures included informed consent and the protection of participant information.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while Pearson product–moment correlations examined the associations between the study constructs and sustainability. Regression-based moderation analysis was used to examine the interaction between

succession planning and organizational culture. Qualitative interview data were coded and analysed thematically using NVivo. Quantitative and qualitative findings were subsequently interpreted together to identify areas of convergence and provide contextual explanations for the observed relationships.

The manuscript reports low internal consistency for several measurement scales and potential overlap between predictor and outcome items. These concerns, together with respondents being clustered within enterprises, limit confidence in the statistical estimates. The absence of the scale coefficients and full model output from the manuscript prevents independent assessment of these limitations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge Transfer and Organizational Sustainability

Knowledge transfer was positively and significantly associated with organizational sustainability ($r = .424$, $p < .001$). The result suggests that respondents who reported stronger knowledge-transfer practices also tended to report higher sustainability scores. Qualitative findings identified three principal mechanisms: knowledge sharing through meetings, training and peer learning; mentorship and experiential learning; and documentation and preservation of institutional knowledge.

Mentorship enabled experienced employees to guide colleagues and communicate practical knowledge that may not be fully captured in written procedures. Training and peer learning also created opportunities for employees to acquire skills and become familiar with organizational operations. Documentation was important for retaining institutional memory beyond the tenure of particular employees or leaders.

Taken together, the findings suggest that knowledge transfer is an important component of continuity within the participating enterprises. The relationship is consistent with the RBV's emphasis on organizational knowledge as a resource that can support continued functioning. However, the correlation does not establish that knowledge transfer independently causes sustainability or quantify its contribution relative to the other succession-planning practices.

This association is consistent with Argote's (2024) review, which identifies opportunities, transfer mechanisms and motivation as conditions affecting whether organizational knowledge is successfully shared. The interviews in Karen Parish give this general argument a specific organizational form through mentorship, peer learning and documentation. These practices could help preserve working knowledge when responsibilities change. However, the present study measured reported practices and sustainability at one point in time; it did not directly track knowledge retention across a leadership transition.

Syengo et al. (2026) similarly identify organizational learning and human resource capacity as elements of post-donor sustainability in Catholic Women Religious Congregations. The agreement concerns the importance of retaining capabilities, although their review examines donor withdrawal rather than personnel succession. The present findings therefore provide complementary evidence from Catholic-affiliated enterprises rather than a replication of their review.

Communication Practices and Organizational Sustainability

Communication practices had a positive and statistically significant association with sustainability ($r = .374$, $p = .002$). Interview findings indicated that communication occurred through organizational meetings and internal channels, communication about succession planning, and opportunities for employee participation in organizational decisions.

The qualitative evidence suggests that communication served more than an informational function. It also helped employees understand organizational expectations, leadership transitions and the responsibilities associated with continuity. Where employees had opportunities to raise questions and participate in discussions, communication could support shared understanding of organizational priorities.

These findings indicate that succession planning involves a process of organizational engagement rather than solely a decision made by senior leaders. The result is consistent with LMX theory insofar as communication and supportive leadership relationships may facilitate knowledge sharing and employee involvement.

The communication finding agrees with Mathuva et al. (2026), who identify effective communication among the competencies relevant to sustainable social enterprises run by Catholic nuns in East Africa. The present interviews suggest how communication may operate during succession preparation: staff discuss responsibilities, receive information about transitions and participate in organizational decisions. This interpretation also fits the relational emphasis of Leader–Member Exchange theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Nevertheless, the study did not measure exchange quality separately, so this theoretical connection should not be treated as a tested mediating mechanism.

Talent Identification and Organizational Sustainability

Talent identification demonstrated a positive and statistically significant association with sustainability ($r = .340$, $p < .001$). Interview findings showed that potential future leaders were recognized through characteristics such as work performance, commitment, communication, teamwork, initiative, reliability, professional conduct and problem-solving ability.

The findings suggest that talent identification in the participating enterprises involved attention to both current performance and perceived potential for future leadership. These characteristics may help organizations recognize employees who can assume additional responsibilities and preserve familiarity with institutional operations and values.

From an RBV perspective, identifying capable employees provides a basis for developing internal organizational capabilities. However, identification alone does not ensure succession readiness. Employees also require training, mentorship, experience and appropriate opportunities to exercise responsibility. The findings therefore support treating talent identification as one component of a broader succession-planning process rather than as a sufficient condition for sustainability.

The talent-identification result is broadly consistent with Njeri et al. (2019), whose study of faith-based educational organizations in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi examines selection procedures and career development within succession planning. Both studies direct attention to how organizations recognize and prepare people for future responsibility, although their constructs and outcome measures differ. In the present study, the interview criteria include professional conduct, reliability and teamwork alongside performance. This detail indicates that participants understood succession potential in terms of both competence and organizational relationships.

Barney's (1991) Resource-Based View provides a theoretical explanation for developing the capabilities of identified staff. It does not establish that any particular selection criterion produces sustainability. The positive association observed here supports further examination of talent identification, while the absence of longitudinal evidence prevents a conclusion that the employees identified subsequently became effective successors.

Leadership Development and Organizational Sustainability

Leadership development had the strongest observed bivariate association with sustainability among the four succession-planning practices ($r = .725$, $p < .001$). This indicates a strong positive relationship within the study sample, although it does not establish that leadership development has the greatest independent predictive contribution when other variables are controlled.

Qualitative findings identified eight leadership-development practices: training, mentorship, delegation, job rotation, assignment of additional responsibilities, project leadership, supervision and participation in

management. These practices provided employees with opportunities to develop technical competence, decision-making ability and practical leadership experience.

Training helped employees acquire relevant knowledge, while mentorship enabled them to learn from experienced personnel. Delegation and project leadership created opportunities to apply knowledge and assume responsibility. Job rotation and participation in management also exposed employees to different aspects of organizational operations.

Despite these practices, respondents identified staff shortages, heavy workloads, limited financial resources, inadequate training opportunities and staff turnover as constraints on leadership development. The findings therefore highlight a tension between recognizing the importance of developing future leaders and having sufficient organizational capacity to provide sustained development opportunities.

The strong observed association makes leadership development a priority for further investigation.

The leadership-development finding is consistent with Johnson's (2022) discussion linking leadership development and nonprofit succession planning. It also complements Mathuva et al. (2026), who identify managerial and leadership skills among the competencies needed by Catholic-run social enterprises in East Africa. The interviews add practical detail through delegation, job rotation, project leadership and participation in management. These accounts suggest that preparation involves opportunities to exercise responsibility as well as formal instruction. The comparatively large correlation identifies a strong association in this sample, but does not establish a larger independent effect than the other practices.

The reported financial and staffing constraints can be interpreted alongside Ciambotti and Pedrini's (2021) study of resource constraints in Kenyan social enterprises. Their research concerns resource strategies rather than leadership training specifically; it helps explain why enterprises may value development while lacking the means to sustain it. Soko et al. (2012) supply a complementary normative perspective by connecting practical management and ethical responsibility with social transformation. On that basis, preparing successors can be understood as stewardship of the enterprise's social mission, while its effectiveness remains an empirical question.

Organizational Culture and Sustainability

Organizational culture was positively and significantly associated with sustainability ($r = .326$, $p = .003$). Qualitative findings identified teamwork, employee support, professionalism, service orientation and knowledge sharing as important organizational characteristics.

These findings suggest that organizational culture provides a context in which succession-planning practices are implemented. A supportive environment may encourage employees to share knowledge, participate in development opportunities and work collaboratively towards organizational objectives. At the same time, cultural expectations and established ways of working may influence how leadership transitions are approached.

The moderation analysis reported a negative interaction between succession planning and organizational culture ($B = -0.064$, $SE = 0.024$, $p = .010$). In the fitted model, this coefficient indicates that the slope relating succession planning to sustainability decreased as the organizational-culture score increased. Succession planning ($B = 1.088$, $p = .001$) and organizational culture ($B = 0.896$, $p = .009$) also had positive coefficients. In an interaction model, these coefficients are conditional on the other predictor being zero or at its centring reference, rather than unconditional overall effects.

The study therefore provides preliminary evidence of a moderating relationship, rather than a definitive explanation of how organizational culture changes the relationship between succession planning and sustainability. The coefficient alone does not show that the association remained positive throughout the observed range; conditional slopes and their confidence intervals are needed.

The positive culture association is compatible with Syengo et al.'s (2026) emphasis on participatory governance and institutionalized organizational capacity. The interaction result addresses a different question. A supportive culture being associated with sustainability does not require it to strengthen the succession–sustainability slope. Li (2019) shows that nonprofit succession outcomes depend on combinations of governance and contextual conditions, which supports interpreting succession in context. However, Li's study does not test the same culture interaction and cannot independently validate the negative coefficient reported here.

One possible explanation is that established cultural practices partly overlap with the continuity functions provided by formal succession arrangements, leaving a smaller association with additional succession activity at higher culture scores. Another possibility is measurement overlap or model instability. These are alternative interpretations, not findings established by the interviews or regression. The available evidence does not justify attributing the interaction to religious hierarchy, resistance to change or a particular cultural trait. Conditional slopes, confidence intervals, reliable measures and checks for respondent clustering are needed before drawing operational conclusions.

Summary of Findings across the Research Objectives

The results show that all four succession-planning practices were positively associated with sustainability, while organizational culture also demonstrated a positive direct association. Leadership development had the strongest observed bivariate correlation, followed by knowledge transfer, communication practices and talent identification. Qualitative findings helped explain these relationships through mentorship, documentation, communication, transparent assessment of potential leaders, training and practical leadership assignments.

The combined findings support understanding succession planning as a multidimensional organizational process. They also indicate that resource constraints and the institutional context may influence how succession practices are implemented.

Across the objectives, the findings complement nonprofit scholarship that treats succession preparation as an organizational responsibility (Froelich et al., 2011; Santora & Bozer, 2015). They also connect that literature to research on managing social and financial commitments in hybrid enterprises (Battilana & Lee, 2014; Doherty et al., 2014). The contribution is evidence about reported succession practices across the participating Catholic-affiliated enterprises. Because both succession and sustainability were assessed through a cross-sectional design, the results support context-specific associations and proposed explanations rather than proof of sustained service delivery after an actual leadership transition.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between succession planning and sustainability in Catholic Church-affiliated social enterprises within Karen Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese. The findings indicate positive associations between sustainability and knowledge transfer, communication practices, talent identification and leadership development. Organizational culture was also positively associated with sustainability, while the reported interaction analysis suggested a negative moderating relationship.

The results highlight the importance of preparing employees for future leadership responsibilities, preserving institutional knowledge and maintaining communication throughout organizational transitions. They also demonstrate that succession planning involves more than selecting replacements for departing leaders. It requires sustained investment in human capabilities, knowledge-sharing practices and organizational procedures that preserve continuity while supporting the mission of the enterprise.

The study contributes to the literature by examining these relationships in a context that combines entrepreneurial activities, religious governance and social-service objectives. Its mixed-methods approach provides both statistical evidence of associations and qualitative explanations of the practices through which succession planning is experienced. However, the cross-sectional design, limited number of participating

enterprises, measurement-reliability concerns and potential dependence among respondents restrict the strength of the conclusions. Future research should employ more robust measurement instruments, longitudinal designs and larger multisite samples to determine whether the observed relationships persist across different organizational contexts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, church-affiliated social enterprises should institutionalize succession planning through written policies that identify critical leadership positions, establish transparent selection criteria and specify procedures for preparing successors. These policies should be integrated into organizational governance rather than activated only when a vacancy occurs.

Second, enterprises should strengthen knowledge transfer through structured handover procedures, documented operating processes, mentorship and systematic preservation of institutional records. These measures can reduce dependence on individual employees and help maintain continuity when personnel leave.

Third, talent identification should use transparent and consistent criteria that consider professional competence, performance, ethical conduct, communication, teamwork and leadership potential. Identified employees should have equitable access to leadership-development opportunities.

Fourth, leadership development should combine formal training with practical experience. Mentorship, delegation, job rotation, project leadership and participation in management should be incorporated into development plans, with adequate resources allocated to their implementation.

Fifth, organizational communication should include regular staff meetings, clear explanations of succession procedures and opportunities for employees to participate in relevant decisions. Church administrators should encourage a culture of collaboration, professionalism and knowledge sharing while ensuring that established institutional values do not prevent appropriate organizational learning and adaptation.

Finally, future research should replicate the study across multiple dioceses and faith-based organizations, use validated measurement scales, account for respondents clustered within enterprises and test moderation effects using clearly specified models. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable in establishing whether succession-planning practices precede improvements in organizational sustainability.

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