

Linking Graduate Trainee Programmes to Succession Planning: An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

This article explored the nexus between GTPs and succession planning and leadership continuity. Adopting a desktop research strategy, available literature was reviewed to gain some understanding of how GTPs develop and prepare aspiring leaders. It was determined that sound recruitment and selection policies, proper training, mentoring, job rotation, and experiential learning, together with the right performance appraisal tools, were essential for building a strong talent pool. However, the study had a number of limitations, such as over-reliance on academic qualifications during recruitment, inconsistent mentorship practices, poorly aligned job rotations, and the use of evaluation tools that lack leadership-oriented metrics were identified. Further a key literature gap exists regarding the empirical linkage between graduate trainee programmes and succession planning in Kenya. The conclusion highlights that while GTPs play a significant role in supporting succession planning, their effectiveness depends on the extent to which they are systematically designed and aligned with organizational leadership development goals. Strengthening competency-based recruitment, standardizing mentorship structures, aligning job rotations to succession needs, and refining performance evaluations to include leadership-focused indicators were recommended.

Key Words: Graduate Trainee Programme (GTP), Succession Planning, Structured Training, Mentoring, Experiential Learning, Job Rotation, Performance Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Organizations consider its human capital as essential assets and emphasize the importance of developing a strong internal talent pipeline for leadership continuity. Graduate Trainee Programs (GTPs) have gained popularity in the recent past and these are being implemented in most organizations as part of its strategy to prepare future leaders. These initiatives aim to attract, nurture, support, and retain talented young professionals, preparing them for key roles within the organization in the future.

Succession planning is a crucial HR approach that ensures employees are ready to step into key roles when needed. Seniwoliba (2015) explains that it includes specific efforts to identify, develop, and retain talented personnel over time across all levels. When a company believes its future HR needs are secured, it sees the strategy as successful. Overall, succession planning enables organizations to remain prepared for changes within the organization.

Many organizations struggle to align their graduate trainee programs with succession planning, often treating them as separate efforts rather than essential components of a comprehensive talent management strategy. These programs are vital for early identification of high-potential employees and for providing targeted training, mentorship, and rotational roles to develop the skills needed for future leadership, as outlined in succession plans.

Sharma, Upadhyay, Pandey, Shukla, and Tripathi (2025) emphasize that succession planning is essential for maintaining a steady supply of key leaders in senior positions. As organizations expand and encounter new challenges, having a solid plan to develop future leaders becomes increasingly crucial. The Graduate Trainee

Program helps prepare potential successors by equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to assume leadership roles confidently.

This study aims to examine the connection between graduate trainee programs and succession planning, exploring how structured trainee initiatives can act as a meaningful, intentional, and efficient pathway for identifying and developing future leaders.

Problem Statement

Succession planning is increasingly recognized as a strategic human resource practice that enables organizations to ensure leadership continuity, retain institutional knowledge, and sustain long-term organizational performance (Seniwoliba, 2015; Sharma et al., 2025). Organizations that lack effective succession planning frameworks often experience leadership gaps, delayed filling of critical positions, and overdependence on external recruitment, which may disrupt strategic stability and weaken organizational culture (Kamali et al., 2024). Despite its importance, succession planning remains inadequately institutionalized in many organizations, particularly in emerging economies, where leadership transitions are frequently reactive rather than planned.

Graduate Trainee Programmes (GTPs) have been widely adopted by organizations as a mechanism for attracting and developing high-potential graduates who can form a future leadership pool. In principle, GTPs are expected to serve as structured entry points into succession pipelines by systematically identifying potential successors, developing leadership competencies, and preparing trainees for future managerial and leadership roles (Clark-Ambrosini et al., 2022). However, evidence from the literature suggests that many organizations implement GTPs as stand-alone training or induction initiatives, with limited integration into formal succession planning frameworks (Gama, 2020; Sharma et al., 2025). This disconnect undermines the strategic contribution of GTPs to leadership continuity.

Studies further indicate that key components of GTPs such as recruitment and selection, structured training and mentoring, job rotation, experiential learning, and performance evaluation are often not deliberately aligned with succession planning objectives. Recruitment practices frequently emphasize academic credentials while paying insufficient attention to leadership potential and behavioral competencies required for future leadership roles (Clark-Ambrosini et al., 2022). In addition, mentoring and training structures are inconsistently applied, job rotations are sometimes uncoordinated, and experiential learning opportunities lack clear succession-oriented outcomes, limiting their effectiveness in preparing trainees for leadership responsibilities (Matsuo, 2015; Johnson et al., 2023).

Performance evaluation systems, which are critical for identifying high-potential employees and guiding succession decisions, also present notable gaps. Existing evaluation tools tend to focus on short-term task performance rather than leadership readiness, strategic thinking, and long-term potential, thereby weakening their role in succession planning (Hıdıroğlu, 2021; Kakkayi et al., 2025). Without leadership-focused evaluation metrics, organizations struggle to objectively identify and groom graduate trainees as future successors.

In the Kenyan context, both public and private sector organizations—including the Kenya Revenue Authority, Judiciary Service Commission, Kenya Ports Authority, Kenya Pipeline Company, and Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research and Analysis—have implemented Graduate Trainee Programmes over extended periods. Despite the widespread adoption of these programmes, there is limited empirical evidence examining the extent to which GTPs are intentionally aligned with succession planning and leadership pipeline development within Kenyan organizations. This lack of empirical clarity constrains organizations from fully leveraging GTPs as strategic tools for leadership continuity and succession preparedness.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the limited empirical understanding of how Graduate Trainee Programmes are aligned with and contribute to succession planning, particularly within the Kenyan organizational context. Addressing this gap is essential for informing policy and practice on how GTPs can be systematically designed and integrated into succession planning frameworks to enhance leadership continuity, talent retention, and organizational sustainability.

General Objective

This study aims to examine the relationship between graduate trainee programs and succession planning in organizations, with an emphasis on aspects recruitment and selection, structured training and mentoring and the development of competencies, job rotation and experiential learning, and performance evaluation of graduate trainees, and how these aspects promote succession planning and leadership continuity

Specific Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives:

- i. To examine how recruitment and selection practices within Graduate Trainee Programmes contribute to the identification of potential successors for critical and future leadership positions in organizations.
- ii. To assess the influence of structured training and mentoring in Graduate Trainee Programmes on building leadership competencies necessary for effective succession planning and leadership continuity.
- iii. To determine the extent to which job rotation and experiential learning within Graduate Trainee Programmes prepare graduate trainees for succession into managerial and leadership roles.
- iv. To evaluate how performance evaluation practices in Graduate Trainee Programmes support succession planning by identifying, tracking, and developing graduate trainees for future leadership positions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

This study is grounded on four interrelated theories that explain how Graduate Trainee Programmes can be strategically leveraged to support succession planning and leadership continuity in organizations. The theories provide a strong conceptual basis for understanding how recruitment, training, mentoring, experiential learning, and performance evaluation within GTPs contribute to the identification and preparation of future organizational leaders.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, advanced by Becker (1964), conceptualizes education, training, skills, and experience as forms of capital that enhance individual productivity and generate long-term organizational value. The theory argues that investments in human capital yield future returns through improved performance, innovation, and leadership capability. Organizations that deliberately invest in developing employees are therefore more likely to achieve sustained competitiveness and organizational effectiveness (Becker, 1964; Wuttaphan, 2017).

In relation to this study, Graduate Trainee Programmes represent a strategic investment in human capital aimed at developing future leaders. Through structured recruitment, training, mentoring, job rotation, and performance evaluation, organizations accumulate leadership-oriented competencies among graduate trainees over time. This accumulation of human capital directly supports succession planning by ensuring the availability of qualified internal candidates who can assume leadership roles when vacancies arise. Human Capital Theory thus provides a foundational explanation of how early investment in graduate trainees strengthens internal succession pipelines and reduces leadership gaps (Becker, 1964).

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura, posits that individuals learn new behaviors, skills, and attitudes through observation, imitation, and interaction within social environments. According to the theory, learning occurs through four key processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, as cited in Kretchmar, 2024). The theory emphasizes that learning is not limited to formal instruction but is strongly influenced by role models, mentors, and organizational context.

This theory is particularly relevant to Graduate Trainee Programmes, where mentoring, coaching, and experiential exposure are central development mechanisms. Graduate trainees learn leadership behaviors, decision-making skills, and organizational values by observing senior managers and mentors during training, job rotations, and real work assignments. Through these interactions, trainees internalize leadership norms and practices that prepare them for future leadership roles. Social Learning Theory therefore explains how mentoring and experiential learning within GTPs facilitate leadership development and support succession planning by enabling trainees to learn directly from existing leaders (Johnson et al., 2023; Kretchmar, 2024).

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory argues that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by possessing resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and well-organized (Armstrong, 2014). While tangible resources can be easily replicated by competitors, intangible resources such as human capital, leadership capability, and organizational knowledge are more difficult to imitate and therefore strategically significant.

In the context of this study, graduate trainees developed through well-structured GTPs constitute a critical internal resource. By aligning graduate development initiatives with succession planning objectives, organizations create leadership capabilities that are deeply embedded in organizational culture, systems, and processes. These internally developed leaders are more likely to fit organizational values and strategic direction compared to externally recruited managers. RBV theory therefore supports the argument that linking GTPs to succession planning enhances organizational sustainability by building an inimitable internal leadership pipeline (Armstrong, 2014).

Talent Management Theory

Talent Management Theory focuses on the systematic processes through which organizations attract, develop, retain, and deploy high-potential employees to meet current and future strategic needs (Armstrong, 2020). The theory emphasizes proactive identification of critical roles, early identification of high-potential individuals, and targeted development interventions aligned with long-term organizational objectives.

Graduate Trainee Programmes are a key component of talent management systems, serving as entry-level mechanisms for identifying and nurturing future leaders. When integrated with succession planning, GTPs enable organizations to monitor trainee performance, assess leadership readiness, and align individual development with anticipated leadership vacancies (Clark-Ambrosini et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2025). Talent Management Theory therefore provides a direct conceptual link between GTPs and succession planning by framing graduate development as a deliberate strategy for ensuring leadership continuity and minimizing succession risk.

Empirical Literature Review

This section reviews empirical studies related to Graduate Trainee Programmes and succession planning, with specific attention to how graduate recruitment, training, mentoring, experiential learning, and performance evaluation contribute to leadership pipeline development. Each reviewed study is summarized in terms of its focus, sector, variables, key findings, and identified gaps, and is then related to the current study.

Recruitment and Selection Practices and Succession Planning

Clark-Ambrosini, Ashleigh, Higgs, and Baruch (2022) conducted a study in the corporate and professional services sector in the United Kingdom, examining graduate development programmes as part of broader talent management strategies. The study focused on variables such as graduate recruitment practices, psychological contracts, talent development, and leadership pipeline outcomes. Using a qualitative research design, the authors found that organizations use Graduate Trainee Programmes to attract high-potential graduates who are perceived as future leaders. However, the study revealed that many organizations lack explicit mechanisms linking graduate recruitment outcomes to formal succession planning decisions.

While the study supports the idea that GTPs contribute to leadership pipeline development, it differs from the current study in that it does not explicitly examine succession planning as a dependent variable. Conceptually, the study treats succession planning as an implicit outcome rather than a deliberate organizational process. Empirically, it is based on a UK context, limiting its applicability to the Kenyan organizational environment. The current study addresses this gap by explicitly examining how recruitment and selection within GTPs contribute to succession planning in Kenyan organizations.

Structured Training, Mentoring, and Succession Planning

Johnson, Long, Smith, and Griffin (2023) examined the role of mentoring cultures within higher education and professional training institutions in the United States. The study focused on mentoring structures, organizational learning, leadership development, and trainee performance. Using a mixed-methods approach, the findings demonstrated that structured mentoring significantly enhances leadership identity formation, professional confidence, and long-term career development among trainees.

Although the study strongly supports the link between structured mentoring and leadership development, it does not directly measure succession planning outcomes. The dependent variable was leadership development rather than succession readiness. Additionally, the sectoral focus on academic and professional training institutions differs from the broader organizational and public-sector context of the current study. This presents a conceptual gap regarding how mentoring within GTPs translates into succession planning decisions, which the current study seeks to address.

Job Rotation, Experiential Learning, and Leadership Readiness

Matsuo (2015) conducted a case study in the corporate technology sector in Japan, focusing on experiential learning practices at Yahoo Japan. The study examined job rotation, coaching, real-task exposure, and workplace learning as independent variables, with leadership capability development as the outcome variable. Using qualitative methods, the study found that structured experiential learning enhances problem-solving ability, cross-functional understanding, and leadership competence among employees.

While the findings support the idea that experiential learning strengthens leadership capability, the study does not explicitly connect these outcomes to succession planning. The dependent variable was leadership capability rather than leadership succession. Contextually, the study focused on an advanced corporate environment in Japan, which differs significantly from the Kenyan organizational context. The current study addresses this empirical gap by examining experiential learning within GTPs as a deliberate mechanism for succession planning rather than general leadership development.

Dillard, Sisco, and Collins (2024) examined experiential learning within adult education and workplace learning environments, focusing on technology-enabled learning, real-world problem solving, and reflective practice. The study found that experiential learning enhances engagement and skill transfer but highlighted challenges in assessing long-term leadership outcomes. Although the study acknowledges leadership development, it does not address succession planning, creating an empirical gap that the current study seeks to fill by linking experiential learning directly to succession outcomes.

Performance Evaluation and Succession Planning

Hıdıroğlu (2021) studied performance evaluation systems in corporate organizations across Europe, focusing on leadership effectiveness, employee motivation, and organizational performance. Using survey data, the study found that objective and well-structured performance evaluation systems support leadership development and employee motivation. However, succession planning was not explicitly examined as an outcome variable.

This study differs from the current research in that performance evaluation is treated as a leadership and performance tool rather than a succession planning mechanism. Conceptually, the study does not explain how evaluation outcomes feed into leadership succession decisions. The current study addresses this gap by

examining performance evaluation within GTPs as a critical process for identifying and preparing future successors.

Kakkayi, Mwazuna, Agaba, and Munyambonera (2025) examined talent development and employee performance in public universities in East Africa, focusing on training, appraisal systems, and career progression. The study found that continuous performance evaluation supports employee development and readiness for higher responsibilities. However, the study was limited to the higher education sector and did not explicitly investigate succession planning or graduate trainee programmes. The contextual limitation of the university sector and the absence of GTP-specific analysis create both empirical and contextual gaps, which the current study seeks to address by focusing on organizational GTPs and succession planning in Kenya.

Graduate Trainee Programmes and Succession Planning in the African Context

Gama (2020) examined Graduate Trainee Programmes in corporate organizations in Eswatini, focusing on talent management, retention, and skill development. Using a quantitative approach, the study found that GTPs positively influence employee retention and competency development. However, succession planning was not included as a dependent variable, and leadership continuity was discussed only implicitly.

Similarly, Kamali et al. (2024) studied succession planning in the healthcare sector, focusing on talent identification, competency assessment, and leadership readiness among nursing unit managers. Although the study provides strong evidence linking structured development to succession planning, it is sector-specific and does not examine Graduate Trainee Programmes as entry-level succession mechanisms.

These studies support the idea that structured development initiatives contribute to succession planning but reveal a significant gap in explicitly examining GTPs as intentional succession planning tools within African organizations. The current study responds to this gap by empirically examining how Graduate Trainee Programmes contribute to succession planning in the Kenyan context.

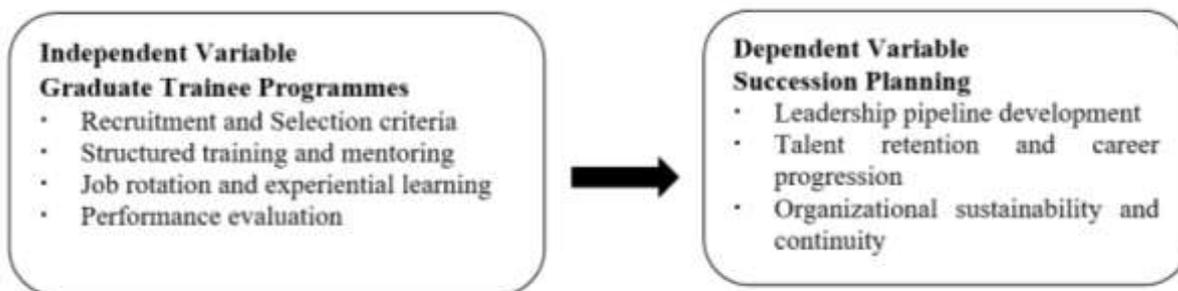


Figure 1 : Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher (2025)

Table 2.1 : Summary of Research Gaps

Author(s)	Focus / Relevance to Graduate Trainee Programmes and Succession Planning (Sector & Variables)	Key Findings	Research Gaps Identified
Becker (1964)	Human Capital Theory applied across sectors; variables included education, training, skills, and productivity	Investment in training enhances productivity and long-term performance; human capital development supports leadership capacity	Conceptual gap: Does not explain how training outcomes translate into succession planning or leadership pipeline decisions

Clark-Ambrosini et al. (2022)	Corporate and professional services sector (UK); variables: graduate recruitment, talent management, leadership pipeline development	Graduate Trainee Programmes attract high-potential graduates and support future leadership development	Conceptual & contextual gap: Succession planning treated implicitly; no focus on African or Kenyan context
Gama (2020)	Corporate organizations in Eswatini; variables: GTPs, talent management, retention, skill development	GTPs positively influence talent retention and competency development	Empirical gap: Succession planning not examined as a dependent variable; leadership continuity not measured
Johnson et al. (2023)	Higher education and professional training institutions (USA); variables: mentoring culture, leadership development, trainee performance	Structured mentoring enhances leadership identity and professional growth	Conceptual gap: Mentoring outcomes not linked to succession planning decisions or leadership replacement
Matsuo (2015)	Technology sector (Japan); variables: job rotation, experiential learning, leadership capability	Experiential learning enhances cross-functional understanding and leadership capability	Empirical & contextual gap: Leadership development examined, but not succession planning; non-African context
Dillard et al. (2024)	Adult education and workplace learning (cross-sector); variables: experiential learning, engagement, skill transfer	Experiential learning improves engagement and problem-solving capacity	Methodological gap: Limited assessment of long-term leadership or succession outcomes
Hidroğlu (2021)	Corporate organizations (Europe); variables: performance evaluation, leadership effectiveness	Objective appraisal systems support leadership effectiveness and motivation	Conceptual gap: Performance evaluation not linked to succession planning or leadership readiness
Kakkayi et al. (2025)	Public universities (East Africa); variables: training, appraisal, employee performance	Performance evaluation enhances readiness for higher responsibilities	Contextual gap: University setting differs from corporate and public-sector GTP environments
Kamali et al. (2024)	Healthcare sector (Iran); variables: talent identification, competency assessment, succession planning	Structured talent support pipelines effective succession planning	Contextual & empirical gap: Sector-specific; does not examine Graduate Trainee Programmes
Seniwoliba (2015)	Higher education sector (Ghana); variables: succession planning, leadership continuity	Succession planning improves leadership continuity	Contextual gap: University-focused; does not address GTPs or early-career leadership pipelines
Sharma et al. (2025)	Listed firms (India); variables: talent management, succession planning	Strong alignment between talent management and succession planning	Empirical gap: Limited analysis of how entry-level programmes (GTPs) feed into succession pipelines

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a desktop review research design, which involves the collection, analysis, and synthesis of existing literature, theories, and concepts to gain insights into the relationship between graduate trainee programs and succession planning. Relevant sources were identified through academic databases such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, EBSCOhost, and peer-reviewed journals within the fields of Human Resource Management and Human Resource Development. The content was analyzed and comparisons made across studies, and it allowed the researcher to conclude a wide range of credible secondary sources. No primary data collection was conducted.

Justification for the Desktop Review Design

Although primary empirical research would provide direct measurement of the relationship between Graduate Trainee Programmes (GTPs) and succession planning, the desktop review design was adopted for both conceptual and practical reasons. First, the study sought to synthesize and critically integrate existing theoretical and empirical evidence across multiple sectors to clarify how GTP components contribute to leadership pipeline development. By reviewing established literature, the study was able to identify recurring patterns, structural weaknesses, and conceptual gaps in the alignment between graduate trainee initiatives and succession planning frameworks. This approach allowed for a broad analytical perspective and theoretical consolidation across different organizational contexts.

Second, succession planning processes are often strategic and confidential in nature, making access to internal succession data difficult without organizational authorization. As such, the desktop review provided a feasible foundation for theory development and conceptual modeling. However, it is acknowledged that reliance on secondary data limits the ability to empirically validate the proposed linkages. The absence of statistical testing or field-based evidence constrains causal inference and generalizability. Future research employing surveys, interviews, case studies, or longitudinal human resource data would strengthen empirical validation and provide measurable evidence of how GTP components influence succession readiness and leadership continuity.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

Recruitment and Selection of Graduate Trainees

The literature that was reviewed reveals that recruitment and selection form the foundation of an effective graduate trainee program. Authors such as Clark-Ambrosini et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of relying on rigorous selection mechanisms to identify high-potential graduates who can be prepared for future leadership roles. In addition, Sharma et al. (2025) indicates that talent identification at entry-level is essential for building a sustainable succession pipeline.

It was noted that Seniwoliba (2015) and Kakkayi et al. (2025) highlight a lack of structured assessments that accurately predict leadership potential. During recruitment, the desired potential may not be adequately forecasted or identified. Also, many organizations still prioritize academic qualifications over behavioral competencies, which may weaken succession outcomes.

Structured Training and Mentoring

The study revealed that structured training and mentoring are key components of successful GTPs. Johnson et al. (2023) indicates that that strong mentorship cultures in organizations significantly improve trainee learning, confidence and professional identity.

Experiential training models, as discussed by Matsuo (2015) and Dillard et al (2024) strengthen graduates' ability to apply theoretical knowledge acquired through the academic process to real-life organizational contexts. Clark-Ambrosini et al. (2022) further opine that structured training which is part of the talent management frameworks accelerates readiness for leadership roles.

It is therefore evident that structured training and mentoring significantly contributes to leadership grooming. However, mentorship inconsistencies across organizations limit long-term succession outcomes.

Job rotation and experiential learning

Armstrong, (2012) and Dillard, et al (2024) discussed experiential learning models. Job rotation allows trainees to interact with diverse functions, enabling them to appreciate organizational systems and develop leadership skills that cut across most organizational functions.

Experiential learning, as discussed by Matsuo (2015) shows that organizations that integrate well-structured job rotations tend to report stronger internal leadership pipelines. However, some of the studies (Seniwoliba, 2015; Kamali et al., 2024) note that job rotations are sometimes uncoordinated, thus lacking strategic alignment with succession goals.

While job rotation and experiential learning may significantly strengthen leadership capacity, they are often implemented inconsistently.

Evaluating the performance of Graduate Trainees

According Hıdıroğlu (2021), performance evaluation systems are critical for identifying leadership potential. The scholar opines that that well-structured evaluation systems allow organizations to track progress, reward competency growth, and identify talent for upward career mobility.

Kakkayi et al. (2025) further indicates that performance feedback enhances motivation and supports career progression. However, other scholars highlight gaps and state that performance evaluation tools are often general, lacking leadership-oriented indicators. Overall, performance evaluation enhances succession decision-making, but many organizations lack leadership-focused evaluation metrics tailored to for the graduate trainees Programme.

Proposed GTP–Succession Planning Integration Framework

The synthesis of theoretical and empirical findings suggests that Graduate Trainee Programmes should not function as isolated talent development initiatives but rather as structured entry-level succession mechanisms embedded within formal organizational succession frameworks. Based on this analysis, the study proposes an integrated GTP–Succession Planning framework in which each component of the graduate trainee programme directly supports leadership pipeline development and organizational continuity.

Within this framework, recruitment and selection processes operate as succession screening mechanisms designed to identify individuals with demonstrated leadership potential, strategic thinking capacity, and behavioral competencies aligned with future leadership roles. Structured training and mentoring function as leadership capability accelerators by embedding organizational culture, values, and strategic competencies into trainee development. Job rotation and experiential learning serve as cross-functional exposure tools, enhancing system-wide understanding and decision-making competence required for leadership effectiveness. Performance evaluation acts as a succession readiness assessment mechanism by incorporating leadership-focused metrics that guide promotion decisions and long-term leadership tracking.

By deliberately aligning these four components, organizations can transform Graduate Trainee Programmes into intentional leadership pipelines that reduce succession risk, enhance internal promotion rates, and promote organizational sustainability. This integrative model strengthens the strategic value of GTPs and addresses the structural disconnect between talent development initiatives and formal succession planning systems.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The objective of this independent study was to examine the link between graduate trainee programmes (GTPs) and succession planning, and how the former contributes to the latter, with a focus on recruitment and selection, structured training and mentoring, experiential learning through job rotation, and performance evaluation. Based on the reviewed literature, several conclusions can be drawn:-

First, recruitment and selection remains a critical base for an effective GTP. Scholars such as Clark-Ambrosini et al. (2022) and Sharma et al. (2025) note that identifying high-potential graduates early creates a strong leadership pipeline. However, many organizations still rely heavily on academic qualifications and lack structured assessments for evaluating leadership potential. This eventually reduces the reliability of early talent predictions and weakens succession outcomes.

Second, the study concludes that a structured training and mentoring programme are essential drivers of leadership development. Johnson et al. (2023), Matsuo (2015) were able to demonstrate that mentoring cultures in organizations enhance confidence, competence and professional identity, while structured training accelerates leadership readiness. Despite this, mentorship practices vary widely across organizations, which in effect creates inconsistencies in long-term leadership development.

Third, job rotation and experiential learning contribute significantly in preparing trainees for future leadership roles. Well-planned and structured rotation programmes expose trainees to multiple organizational functions, helping them gain a holistic understanding of operations and cross-functional leadership skills. Yet, in some organizations, job rotations are implemented without alignment to succession goals, reducing their strategic value.

Fourth, the review shows that performance evaluation of graduate trainees is important for identifying those with a potential for leadership, guiding career progression, and supporting succession decisions. While performance evaluations are widely used, many organizations lack leadership-focused valuation metrics tailored specifically for graduate trainees. This gap limits the ability of organizations to accurately assess readiness for leadership succession.

Lastly, the study determined that graduate trainee programmes are actively implemented across a number of Kenyan organisations, particularly in the public sector. Institutions such as KRA, JSC, KPA, KPC, and KIPPRA, who all advertised structured trainee programmes in 2025. This gives an indication of a strong and purposeful commitment to nurturing young talent. Albeit this practical, focused and deliberate recruitment, there appears to be very limited empirical research with the aim of determining the extent to which these programmes are aligned with organizational-wide succession planning. This suggests that while organizations are investing in GTPs, their strategic effectiveness in producing successors or leadership-ready employees in Kenya remains largely unexplored.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that GTPs have strong potential to support succession planning. However, its effectiveness depends on how systematically each component is designed and aligned to successor and leadership continuity goals.

Recommendations

Based on the above conclusions above, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role of GTPs in succession planning:

Enhance Recruitment and Selection Practices

- a. Adoption of competency-based assessments, personality assessments, and leadership potential tools by organizations, rather than relying mainly on academic qualifications.
- b. Implementation of structured interviews, assessment centers, and behavioral simulations. These should be integrated to identify trainees with leadership capabilities.

Embed Structured Training and Mentorship in the Organization

- a. Organizations should mainstream standardized mentorship frameworks. This ensures that all trainees receive consistent and meaningful guidance.

- b. Training of mentors on coaching, giving feedback, and developmental support should be prioritized. This will improve mentorship quality.
- c. Desired leadership competencies required by the organization should be part and parcel of the curriculum for training graduate trainees.

Implement Job Rotation and Experiential Learning, and align it with the Organizational Succession Plan

- a. Job rotations should be implemented, with clear learning objectives. This will enhance leadership development.
- b. Expose trainees to key departments that are critical to succession pipelines.
- c. Deliberately designed opportunities for experiential learning. These include providing leaders in projects, taking up acting roles for higher roles, and encountering problem-solving assignments

Strengthen Performance Evaluation Systems

- a. There is need to develop leadership-oriented evaluation metrics tailored for graduate trainees programmes.
- b. Implementation of 360-degree feedback systems, which are essential in obtaining holistic feedback on performance and competency assessments
- c. Trainings should be afforded the opportunity to obtain regular feedback from their superiors. This will not only enhance motivation, growth, but also boost career progression.

Provide organizational visibility to the Graduate Trainee Programmed by integrating it with the Talent Management and Succession Planning Strategy

- a. Ensure GTPs are not stand-alone initiatives but fully integrated into succession planning frameworks.
- b. Recruitment, training, rotation, and evaluation initiatives should be consolidated to guide leadership succession decisions.

Industry-Specific Adaptation of GTP–Succession Alignment

While the recommendations provided in this study are broadly applicable across organizational contexts, effective implementation requires industry-specific adaptation. Different sectors operate under distinct regulatory, structural, and strategic conditions that shape succession planning priorities. In public sector institutions, succession planning must align with statutory regulations, governance frameworks, and civil service policies, which may influence leadership mobility and appointment processes. In financial institutions, leadership succession may prioritize risk management, regulatory compliance, and strategic competitiveness. In educational institutions, leadership continuity may emphasize academic governance, research management, and institutional sustainability.

Therefore, organizations should tailor Graduate Trainee Programme structures to sector-specific leadership competency frameworks while maintaining alignment with broader succession planning objectives. By contextualizing GTP components within industry demands, organizations can enhance practical applicability and ensure that trainee development directly responds to future leadership requirements within their respective sectors.

Recommendations based on the Research Gaps

With the limited empirical studies on the strategic link between graduate trainee programmes and succession planning in Kenya, organizations should urgently and purposefully review, re-evaluate and or redesign the GT programmes to have them operate as intentional leadership pipelines. This includes embedding and

institutionalizing competency-based / experiential assessments, regular and planned rotational leadership and job exposure, as well as structured progress tracking and evaluation that is linked to future roles. Additionally, HR practitioners should integrate GT Programme outcomes into long-term succession plans to ensure leadership continuity. Future researchers are encouraged to explore sector-specific like the public sector dynamics to build evidence on effective GT–succession alignment in the Kenyan or African context.

Study Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations. The reliance on a desktop review design limits empirical validation of the proposed relationship between Graduate Trainee Programmes and succession planning. Without primary data, the findings remain conceptual and inferential rather than statistically tested. This restricts generalizability across organizations and sectors. Additionally, while the study integrates well-established human resource concepts such as mentoring, experiential learning, and performance evaluation, these themes are widely discussed in existing literature, which may limit perceived originality.

Furthermore, the study does not incorporate longitudinal tracking of graduate trainees to determine the actual progression of participants into leadership roles. Such tracking would provide stronger evidence of succession planning effectiveness. These limitations highlight the need for further empirical investigation to strengthen theoretical and practical conclusions.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should move beyond conceptual analysis and adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to empirically examine how Graduate Trainee cohorts transition into leadership roles over time. Quantitative studies measuring succession readiness indices, internal promotion rates, retention patterns, and leadership pipeline sustainability would provide measurable validation of the GTP–succession linkage. Additionally, qualitative case studies exploring internal HR records and executive decision-making processes would deepen understanding of how succession decisions are operationalized in practice.

Comparative studies across sectors within Kenya and other African economies would also enhance contextual understanding and strengthen generalizability. Investigating moderating variables such as organizational culture, governance structures, and leadership support would further clarify conditions under which GTPs most effectively contribute to succession planning. Such empirical expansion would bridge the gap between conceptual recommendations and measurable succession outcomes, thereby strengthening both academic rigor and practical relevance.

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