Australian National University

Succession planning for academic leaders:
Some key findings from ALTC project

Toni Makkai, DASSH National Secretary
Pal Ahluwalia, Project Leader

DASSH Conference

14 September 2012

Outline

- Background and context
- Overview of the project
- Results
- Key findings
- Implementation

What is succession planning?

"Succession planning is a strategic, systematic and deliberate activity to ensure an organisation's future capability to fill vacancies consistent with the merit principle. It specifically focuses on ensuring the availability and sustainability of a supply of capable staff that are ready to assume key or critical organisational roles as they become available." (QUT 2011)

Challenging

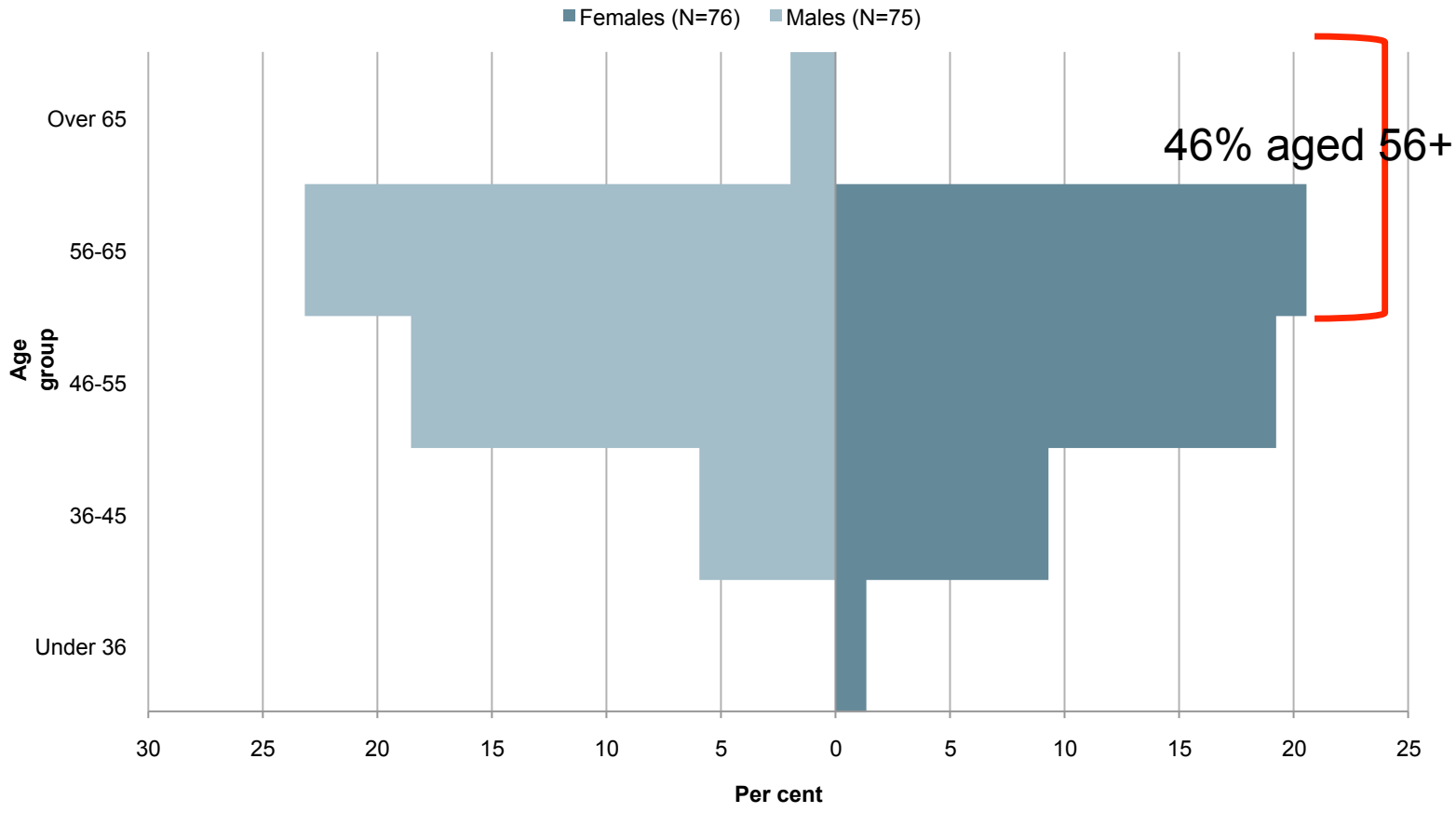
- Academic career is not always seen as an attractive option
- Ageing workforce marked by a gender imbalance
- But…how do you plan for the unknown?

The project: mixed method

- Focus group discussions (FGDs)
  - Participants invited to participate via direct invitation
  - Three FGDs (N=52) were conducted each running for approx. 1 hour
  - Topics included: attitudes, operationalisation, processes, challenges and decision making relating to leadership succession planning in the higher education sector
- Online survey
  - Respondents (N=152) recruited via email using snowballing technique
  - Five modules (26 questions): demography, role, institution, general info. on leadership succession planning, and personal experience with succession planning

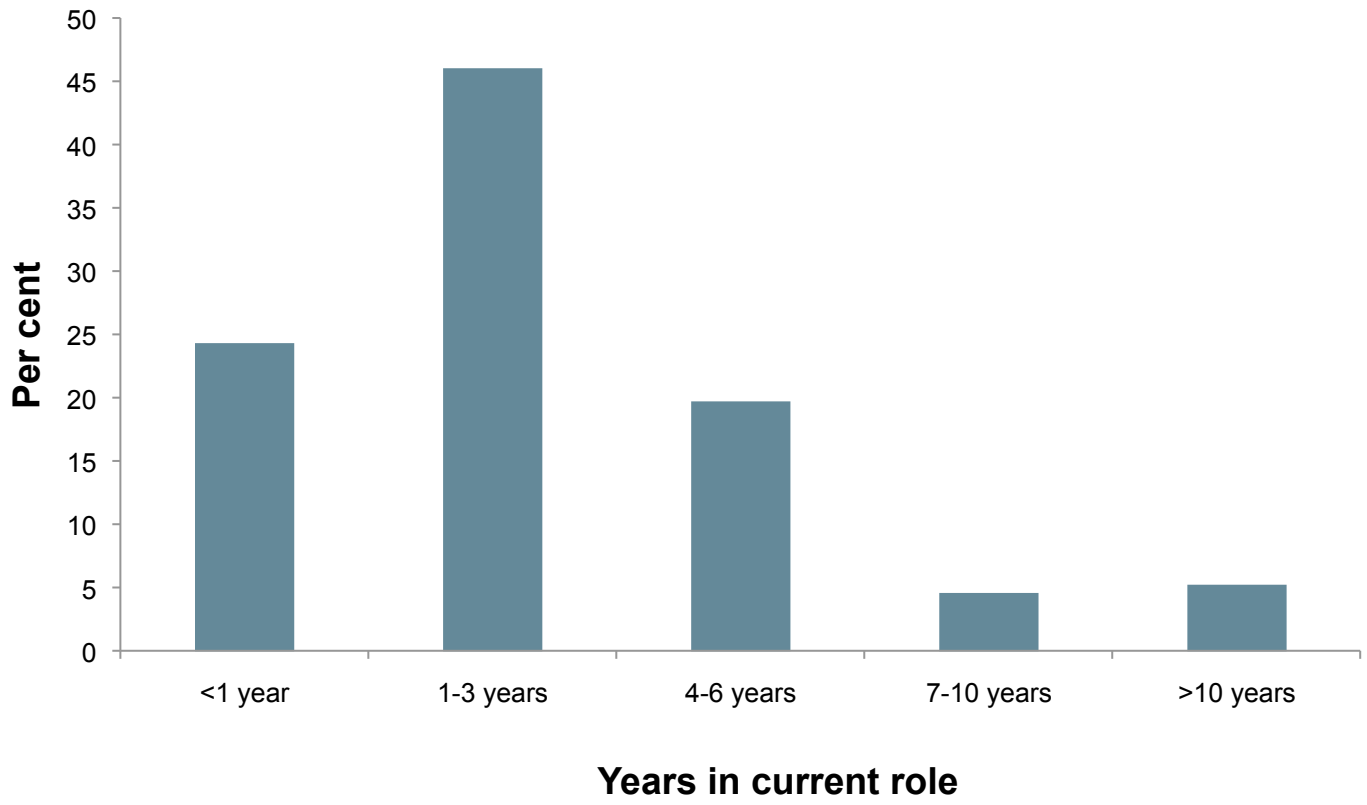
We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of participants

Age-sex distribution



Data source: DASSH/ALTC Survey 2011.

Length of time in current role



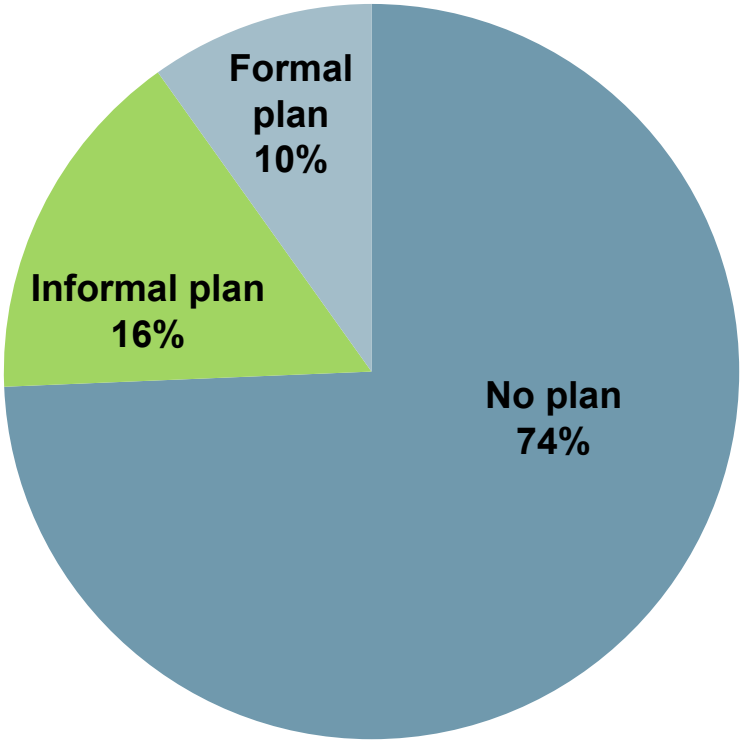
Data source: DASSH/ALTC Survey 2011.

Respondent characteristics

	N	%
Role		
PVC/Executive Dean/Dean	32	21.0
Associate Dean	62	40.8
Head of School	58	38.2
Discipline		
Creative Arts	13	8.6
Education	51	33.8
Humanities	73	48.3
Social Sciences	14	9.3
Held leadership role outside of higher education sector	37	24.8

Data source: DASSH/ALTC Survey 2011.

Formal/informal succession plan



Data source: DASSH/ALTC Survey 2011.

Why no formal succession plan?

- No time or resources – difficult to plan when juggling the day-to-day duties of the role or do not have necessary administrative support.
- Ambivalence to succession planning – concerns about transparency, uncertainty of staff turnover/exits, and the 'unknowns' of career pathways.
- Informal succession planning – identification of a suitable successor and prepare them for the position (e.g. mentoring, shadowing, appoint as deputy).

Data source: DASSH / ALTC Survey 2011.

"Succession planning for academic leadership is affected by competing demands of the standard academic career profile (teaching and particularly research), by mobility of academic workforce and by rewards structure more orientated to academic values/goals than to management goals…[T]here are too many leadership roles and too few able people interested in these..."

- Respondent DASSH/ALTC survey

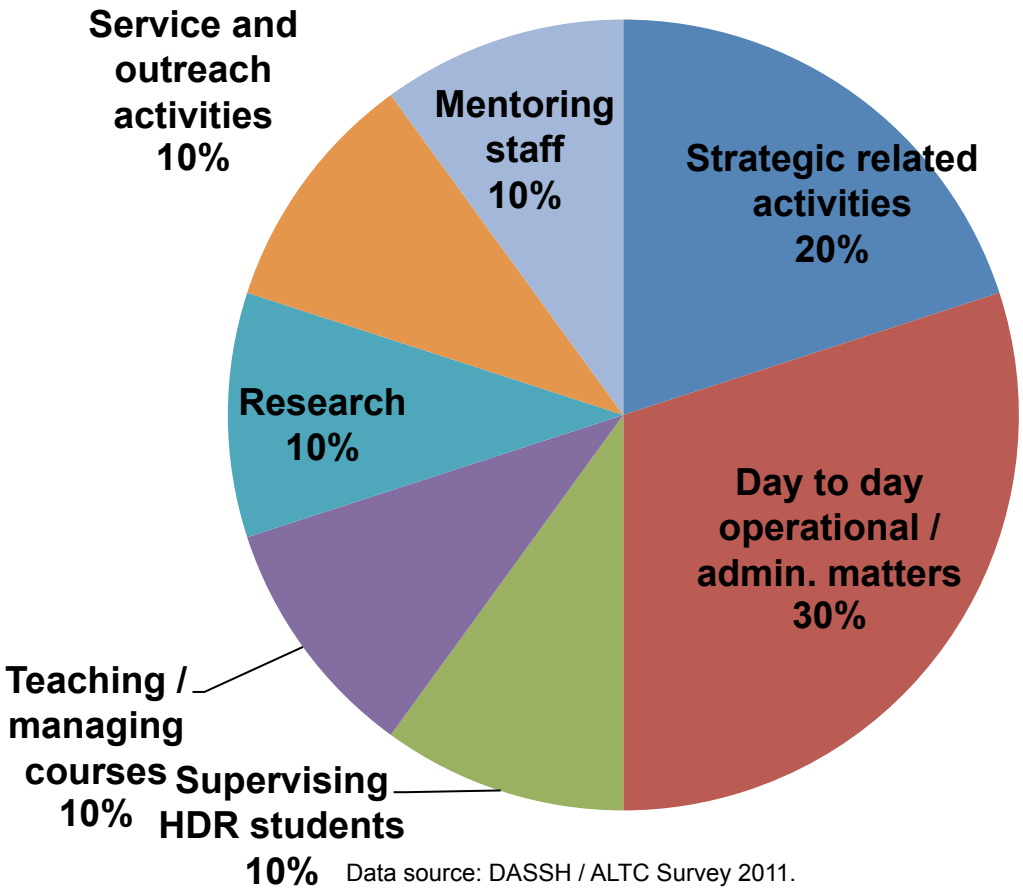
Competing demands

Largely around:

- Time management – balancing various roles/tasks and competing demands. No time for research or teaching.
- Management of staff – responding to staff needs and acting as "firefighters" managing conflict.
- Complex institutional structures – pressure to meet university and government reporting ("paperwork") and compliance with insufficient administrative support to do so.
- Budgetary constraints – working effectively with financial and other resource limitations.

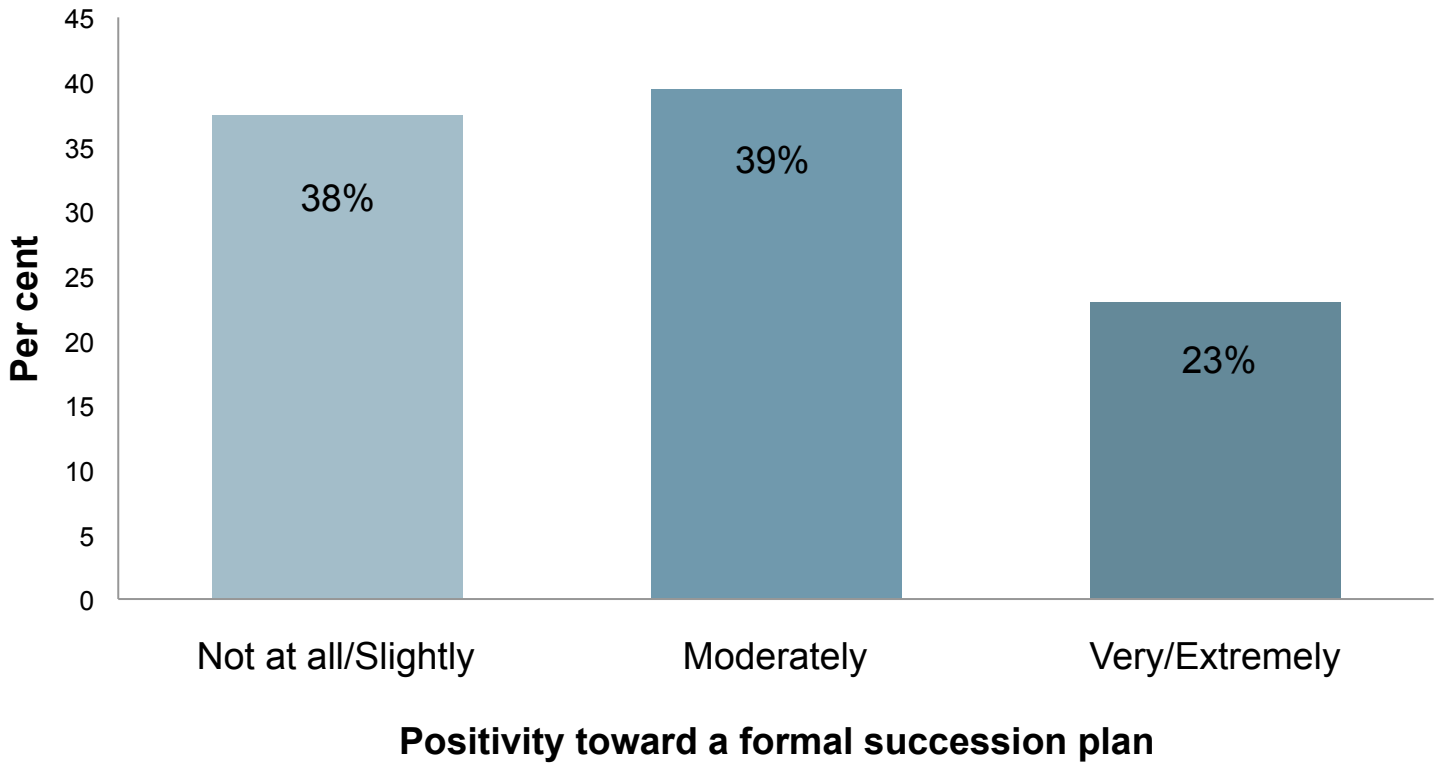
Data source: DASSH / ALTC Survey 2011.

Available time -- Time spent in various activities



Data source: DASSH / ALTC Survey 2011.

Mixed attitudes toward formal succession planning



Data source: DASSH/ALTC 2011.

Important factors around succession planning

Staff profile/infrastructure	%[a]	Structural framework	%[a]
Demographic profile of academics	**71**	**University funding model**	**68**
Staff's career expectations	**67**	**University senior management strategies**	**66**
University staffing policy	**60**	**Impact of ERA process**	**60**
Age profile of staff in area	36	Government policy framework	39
Gender profile of staff in area	30	Wider economy	36
Changes to discipline areas	29		
Flexible delivery of courses	22		
Ethnic diversity of staff in area	16		
Indigenous diversity of staff in area	14		
Current technology	16		

Note: a. Proportion of respondents reporting 'Very' or 'Extremely important'.

Data source: DASSH/ALTC Survey 2011.

Hurdles to succession planning

Effective succession planning needs to overcome some hurdles:

Institutional culture

- Disinterest in pursuing academic leadership roles
- Barriers to pursuing leadership roles – for example, gender, background, support for promotion

Capability and capacity

- Need for relevant and targeted training, guidelines and guidance
- Support or mentoring from senior staff

Data source: DASSH / ALTC Survey 2011.

Key challenges to succession planning

- Staff intentions are not always known, difficult to plan for the future
- Difficult plan for succession when dealing with restructuring/change
- The need for / importance of mentoring is not fully recognised
- Some leadership roles do not have a clear career path, e.g. Associate Deans who do not often gain staff management experience in their role.
- Time is demanded elsewhere, so not much time to focus on succession planning
- Complex institutional structures (particularly relating to human resources) make it hard to manage change and plan for succession
- Performance outcomes are hard to define and measure.
- Need for change in leadership style in some cases to more adaptive leadership.
- Loss of research output and the financial and reputational impact of these on the individual in an academic leadership position.

Data source: DASSH / ALTC Focus group discussions 2011.

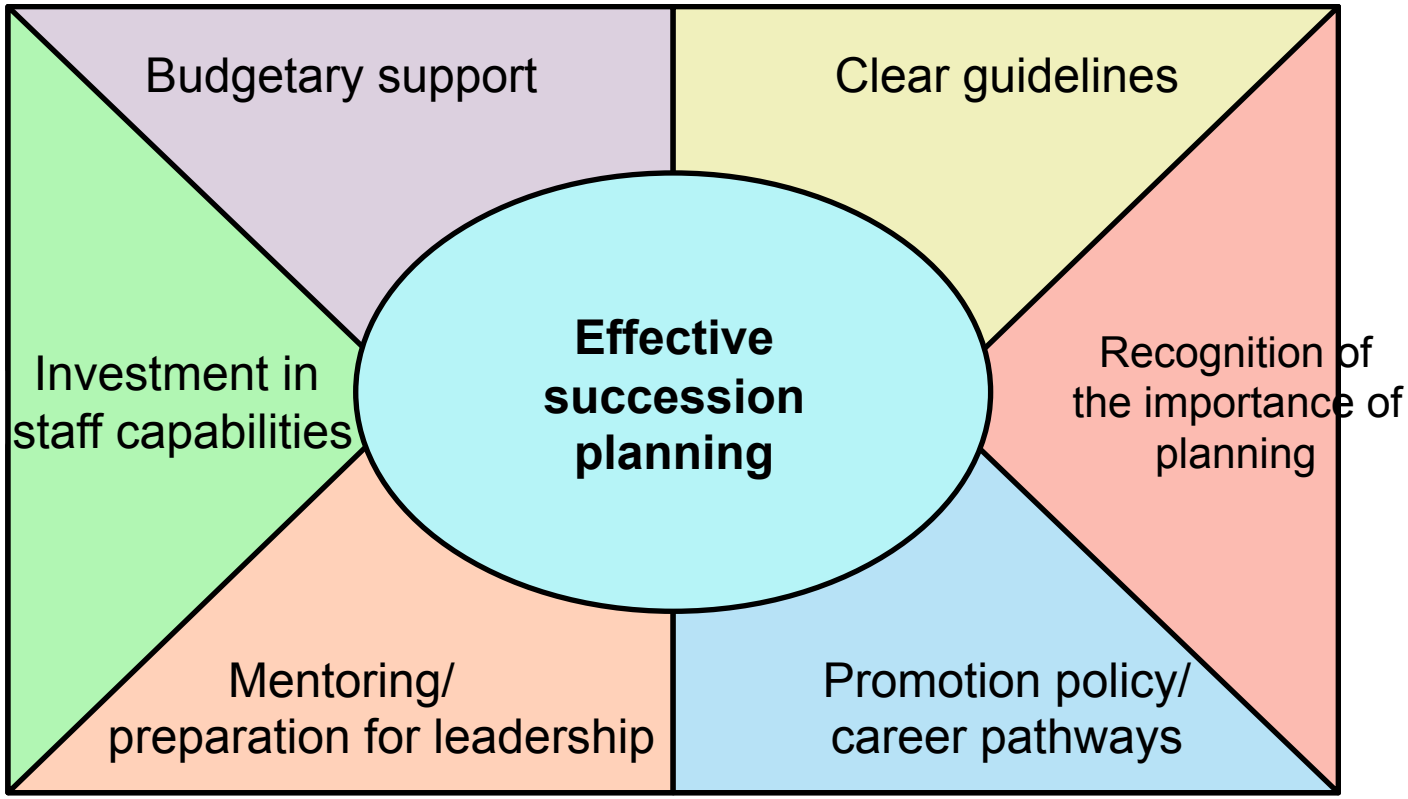
"(M)any academics may be willing to undertake academic leadership but not willing to take on management roles… (there's) a distinction between the two."

- Respondent DASSH/ALTC survey

"Academic roles incorporate research and many leaders want to retain their research capacity – indeed, within our institution, a lack of ability to combine administrative leadership with research has contributed to staff reluctance to take on leadership roles."

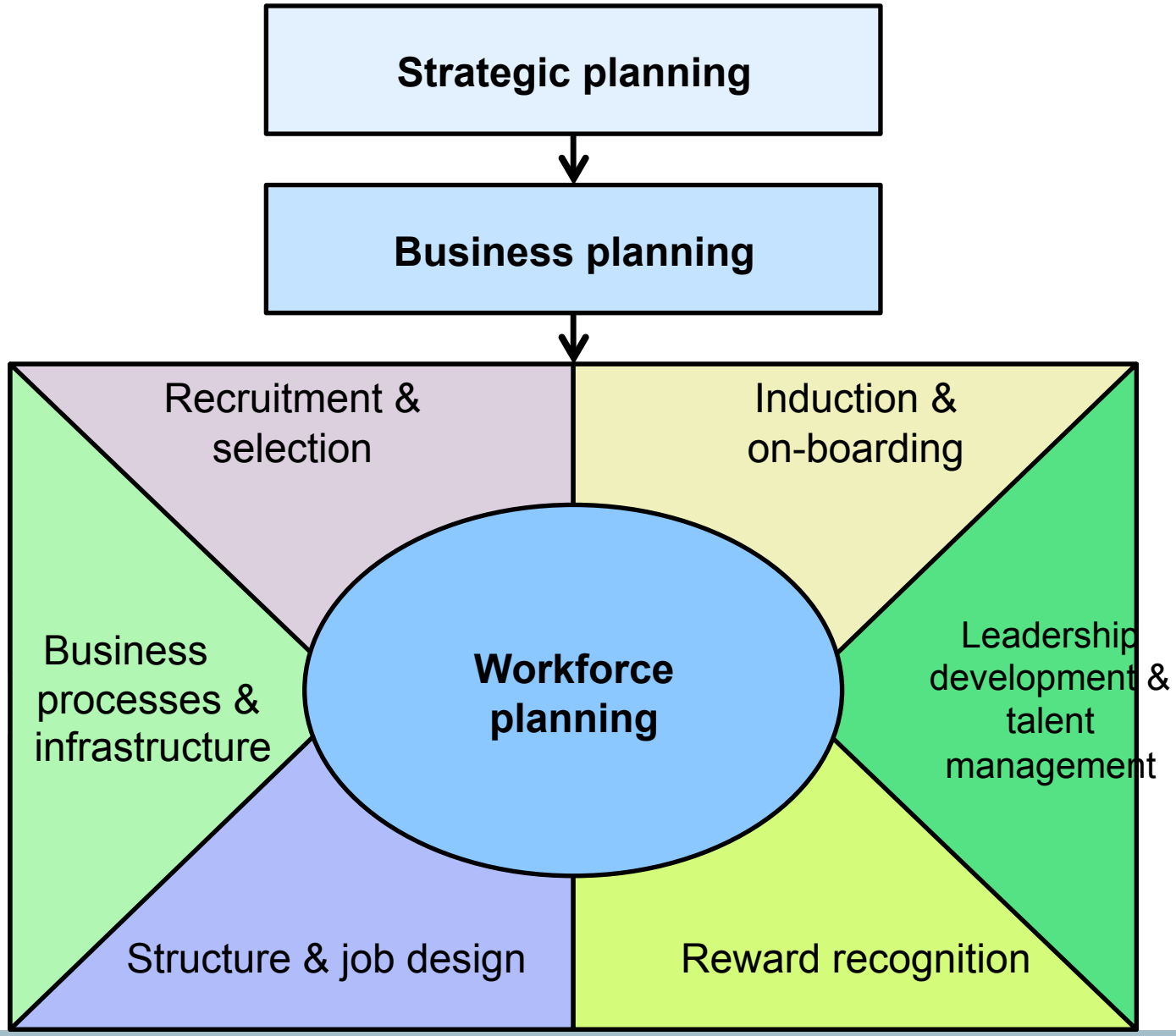
- Respondent DASSH/ALTC survey

Support strategies for effective succession planning



Data source: DASSH / ALTC Survey 2011.

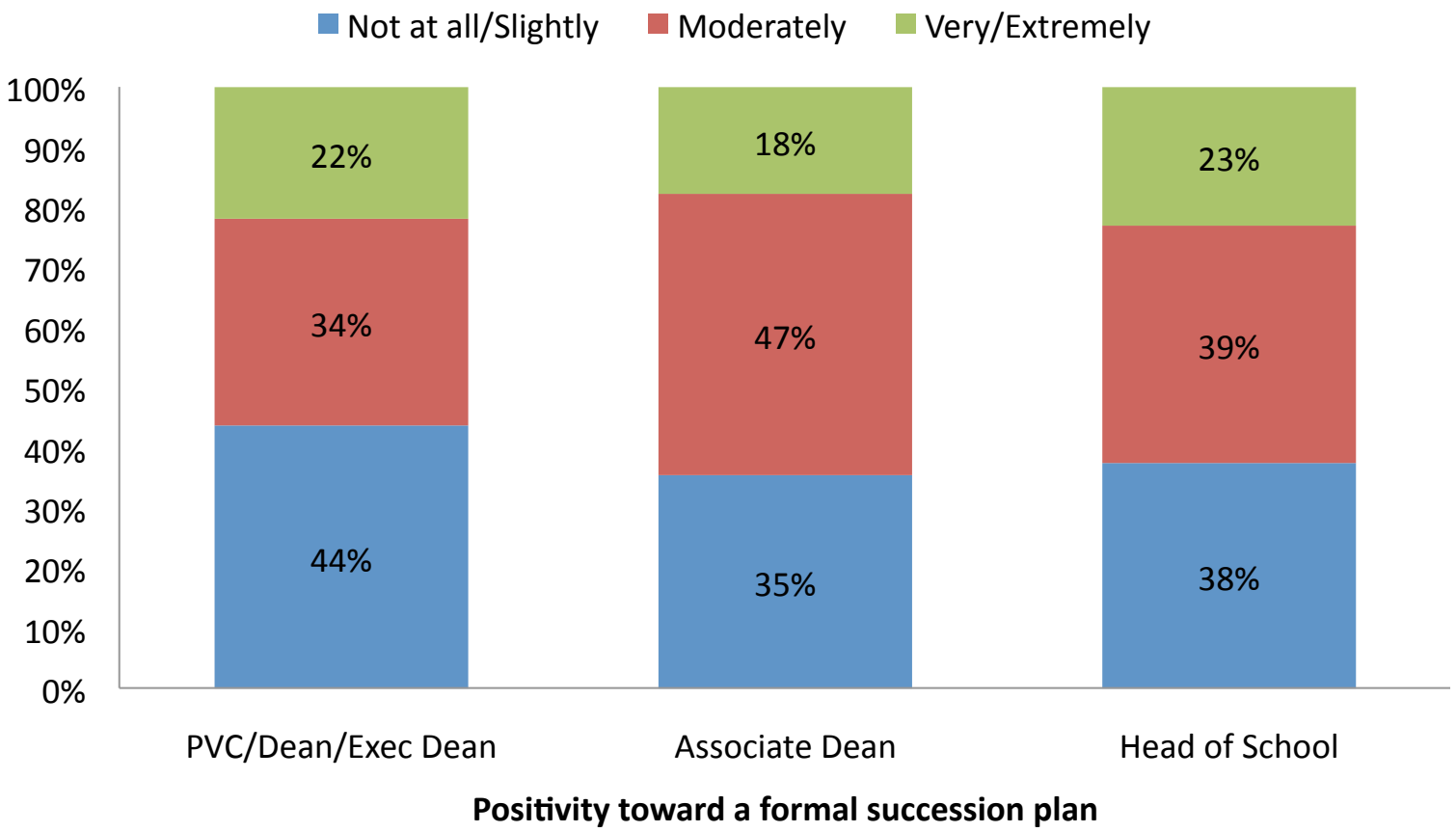
Embedding Succession planning



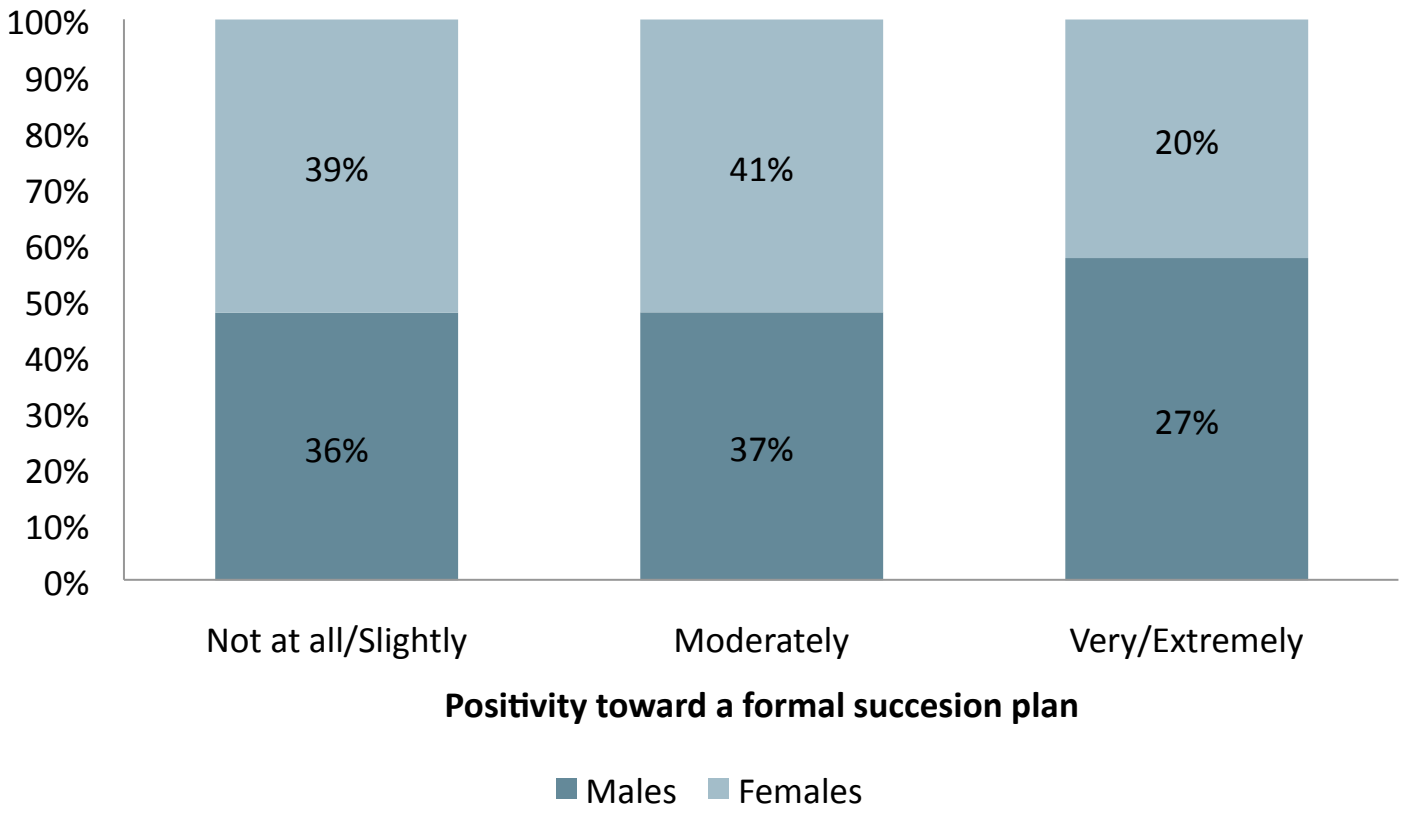
Next steps…

- Draft report available for comment on the DASSH website by mid-November
- Draft consultation period closes end-November
- Final report by mid-December

Attitude to succession planning differs by role



Attitude to succession planning differs by gender



Data source: DASSH/ALTC 2011.