

Succession Planning Strategies of Faith-Based, Nonprofit Leaders of the Boomer Generation

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Abstract

Succession planning for retiring Baby Boomer generation of leaders in nonprofit organizations (NPOs) is limited. Transferring their knowledge and experience mitigates the effects of the departure to organizational sustainability and mission. Using the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer, this study supplies a description of succession planning strategies used in 3 faith-based organizations. An inductive analysis of the data revealed that (a) key leaders were the initiators for succession planning, (b) boards of directors were critical to the process, and (c) leadership transition required preparation and regularly reviewed policies

Problem

In 2011, the first Boomer business leaders entered into retirement and this trend continues every 8 seconds.

In a global survey of 381 NPOs, 74% of NPOs did not have a leadership succession plan.

The general business problem

Faith-based NPOs may manifest **financial instability**, **missional drift**, and **threats to sustainability** if their leaders are unable to establish succession plans.

The specific business problem

Some Boomer generation, faith-based NPO leaders lack **succession planning strategies**.

Purpose

The purpose of this multiple case study was to understand succession planning strategies of Boomer generation leaders in faith-based NPOs located in the Florida counties of Miami-Dade and Broward.

The business impact

Improving of business practices in faith-based nonprofits.

The social impact

Mission fulfillment of NPOs in their communities via continuity of leadership.

Relevant Literature

Generational Cohorts

A generational cohort has shared qualities manifested in work attitudes and practices and proved important to understand in human resource management (Amayah & Gedro, 2014)

Conceptual Framework: Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge transfer theory is grounded in understanding how the human mind learns and improves in an activity (Woodworth & Thorndike, 1901).

A key concept of knowledge transfer theory is Nonaka and von Krogh's (2009) knowledge creation theory that included explanations of tacit and explicit knowledge conversion.

Succession Planning

The majority of nonprofits do not have a succession plan and this leadership deficit is a serious concern (Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011; Santora, Sarros, Bozer, Esposito, & Bassi, 2015).

Over the decades, the literature on leadership succession reflected affects to organizational stability and organizational stakeholders regardless of whether the succession was internal or external (Grusky, 1960).

Lack of succession planning can affect sustainability, especially in smaller organizations (Santora et al, 2015).

Departing Boomer leaders demonstrated positive knowledge transfer attitudes and activities toward successors in younger cohorts (Appelbaum et al., 2012).

Case Study Research

Yin (2014) suggested establishing a rapport with the participants based on commonalities of religious beliefs, professional connections, and making an effort to conduct the interviews at the convenience of the participants

Research Question

What succession planning strategies do faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation use?

Procedures

Interviewed three Boomer generational leaders from my professional network who lead faith-based NPOs.

Interviews conducted at participants' workplaces.

Reviewed codified succession plans, employee handbooks, bylaws, and records of leadership development activities.

Data Analysis

Matched and clustered similar expressions to identify themes.

Identified and explored themes through the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer in the context of succession planning.

Findings

Four themes were developed:

1. Timing of succession planning strategy
2. Reasons for succession planning
3. Preparation efforts for succession
4. Descriptions of succession plans for each organization

The conceptual framework of knowledge transfer elucidated

- Leaders' views of succession planning efforts
- Leadership development efforts

Limitations

Transparency

Participants may have chosen not to share relevant information.

Perceptions

Unknown male participant perceptions about a female researcher affecting interview transparency.

Generalizability

Succession planning strategies may not apply to secular, for-profit, or nonprofit settings that do not adhere to a Christian worldview.

Environment

Office interruptions during the interview affecting the flow of information.

Conclusions

When succession plans are a part of organizational strategy, faith-based NPOs can anticipate a **sustainable future**.

Key leaders are the driving force behind developing a strategic plan for succession.

Boards of directors are critical to the process.

Preparing the organization for a leadership transition requires **preparation and documented policies** reviewed at regular intervals.

Social Change Implications

Society benefits when community members receive faith-based NPO services and programs.

Social change manifests when community members receive the support necessary to deal with spiritual, emotional, educational, or physical needs.

Succession planning preserves the necessary leadership to continue to meet existing and future needs.

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