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The Lived Experiences of Middle Management Leadership Development Succession Planning in Public Sector Organizations

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Linda Pounds-Adams

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

The Lived Experiences of Middle Management Leadership Development Succession

Planning in Public Sector Organizations

by

Linda Pounds-Adams

MA, University of Dallas, 1999

BS, Texas State University, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

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May 2022

Abstract

Senior directors in the public sector often lack viable succession plans for middle managers. Four conceptual elements from Burns' transformational leadership theory provided a framework to investigate the practices directors in the public sector use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. Succession planning is essential to retain highly skilled employees and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in today's competitive environment. The conceptual elements directly relate to succession planning and its components of career development and preparing future leaders. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the succession planning practices public sector directors use to prepare middle managers for director positions. Data collection was from semistructured interviews with 17 department directors in the public sector in South Central Texas with a minimum of 3 years of working experience and skills specific to implementing succession planning programs. Thematic coding resulted in three themes and six key findings concerning directors' practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. The key findings were (a) motivating, inspiring, and empowering managers, (b) building a strong relationship with the manager, (c) developing skill set, (d) delegating authority, (e) training opportunities, and (f) retention and recruitment strategies. The findings of this study could enable social change through the processes public sector directors use to promote middle managers and prepare them to fill key leadership positions. Public sector directors could also enhance a middle managers job performance and productivity, increasing the number of successful leaders in the public sector who can positively affect social change city communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The public sector has struggled with complicated and insecure environments that could cause unpredictability in organizational performance (Jarrel & Pewitt, 2007). Therefore, to adapt to the changes, organizations must have a proper approach to retain their employees (Earle, 2003). Most organizations have no internal candidates available for successor positions (Othman & Romle, 2015). It is important to choose employees who fit critical positions, especially when they require specific talents and capabilities (Singh, 2012). Succession planning is a crucial issue in human resources, one that will encourage the development of the employees' knowledge, skills, talents, and capabilities; solve problems in challenging environments (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2011); and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in today's environment (Seniwoliba, 2015). Without prioritizing grooming successors, top management will find it difficult to discover potential successors among middle managers (Shamsuddin et al., 2012).

Succession planning allows business leaders to capitalize on the opportunity to reset the future of an organization. To move forward, governments need robust methods and systems to create positive and powerful values, eliminating the old principles that did not align with achieving better goals (Zubedy, 2019). However, succession planning has been an approach largely overlooked in the public sector (Schultz & Dachapalli, 2016). Despite limited research among nursing professionals (Groves, 2017), nonprofit organizations (Froelich et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2013), police officers (Rowley, 2013), and librarians (Weare, 2015), there has been a lack of attention to leadership styles and succession planning in the public sector (Ahmad et al., 2017). This study was a

means to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between transformational leadership and succession planning for middle managers in the public sector.

Background of the Study

Public sector directors should embrace succession planning to appoint employees to fill critical positions. It can take months to fill a vacant senior-level position due to the scarcity of human resources with the competent managerial skills to succeed the departing individual Brzozowski, 2019). When high-performing employees do not receive promotion consideration, they often seek opportunities outside the public sector. Public sector firms would rather appoint people from outside the organization, leading to a loss of institutional memory and the added time and expense of familiarizing the new employee with the job, procedures, and protocol Ramsey, 2020). Hiring an external director can also lead to conflict and tension between the new hire and the middle manager not considered for the senior management position.

Succession planning practices in the public sector are often overlooked or inadequate (Pita et al., 2016), leading to the topic's increasingly frequent discussion. Strategic succession planning is essential for organizational survival, business continuity, competitive advantage, and profitability (Elliott et al., 2016; Motwani et al., 2006). It enables organizations to reach their goals by ensuring suitable talent to meet the challenges of turbulent business environments (Alvani et al., 2016). However, senior directors in the public sector often lack viable succession plans for middle managers and assistant directors.

Wiesman and Baker (2013) defined succession planning as a deliberate systemic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in critical roles to maintain and nurture intellectual capital and organizational knowledge. Merkus et al. (2019) suggested that organizations should ensure readiness to implement any new succession-planning strategy. Pila et al. (2016) found that public sector organizations often experienced an extensive loss of skilled talent and rarely had executive succession-planning programs. Pila et al. also showed that factors such as organization, managers, talent recruitment, and systems to manage performance significantly influenced executive succession planning. Few scholars have examined succession planning in the public sector and none specifically in South Central Texas. There is, therefore, a considerable gap in the conceptual and practical foundations for succession planning, particularly for practices public sector directors use to identify potential leaders in middle management for future leadership positions.

This qualitative phenomenological study was an exploration of the practices public sector directors use to identify potential leaders in middle management for future leadership positions. In preparing middle managers for leadership roles, public sector directors positively impact organizational management, individuals, and communities. Leadership succession planning can also benefit employee development and engagement, offering positions within the organization that increase employees' ambitions, supplementing them personally and professionally (Beheshtifar & Vazir-Panah, 2012). Interviewing public sector directors about their lived experiences of this phenomenon added to the limited existing body of knowledge on the subject. Dissemination of the

findings could result in public sector directors gaining new information that positively affects their insight and experience of middle managers interested in assuming future leadership roles (see Galbraith et al., 2012).

Problem Statement

About 15% of public sector employees are eligible for retirement (Katz, 2018), a number expected to double by 2023. Fourteen percent of public sector leaders are currently eligible to retire, a percentage that will more than double in the next 5 years. Amid increasing retirement rates from leadership positions, poor succession planning has led to a lack of skilled employees to replace departing leaders (Graham, 2020). In the public sector, these challenges result from the amount of time it takes to hire and train a new leader coupled with a lack of effective planning. Without adequate succession planning, an organization could experience poor performance, higher turnover, organizational instability, and a loss of institutional knowledge, all of which have a negative effect on the business (Elliott et al., 2016).

By employing succession-planning strategies, public sector organizations are more likely to have a well-groomed talent pipeline (Dobberowsky, 2016). The general problem was an increase in leader retirements coupled with a lack of skilled employees to advance into leadership roles. The specific problem was that department directors in the public sector in South Central Texas lack viable succession-planning methods to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. This lack of preparation will cause critical relationship losses, damaged reputations, rework, and regeneration, increasing the costs associated with these personnel losses twentyfold regarding recruitment and training

(Baker et al., 2019). There have been some department directors who have prepared a succession plan to transition employees into key leadership roles (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2012). The approach has allowed the directors to develop viable middle managers' managerial knowledge and skills in anticipation of replacing future leadership.

However, as Park and Cho (2014) elucidated, there is limited research on leadership succession planning in the public sector. In describing and understanding the lived experiences and practices public sector department directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions, this study will contribute to the knowledge gap. The findings may also enhance the understanding of the role of leadership in designing and implementing succession planning in public sector organizations in South Central Texas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the succession planning practices public sector department directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in South Central Texas. This approach was apt to obtain a rich and detailed understanding of the lived experiences of public sector department directors who consider themselves transformational leaders and their perspectives on succession planning programs that help middle managers prepare for future leadership positions. A hermeneutic phenomenological design was appropriate to describe the experiences of transformational directors and the practices used in succession planning (Laverty, 2003). A phenomenological approach elicited the meaning and understanding of the phenomenon of public sector directors' practices used to prepare middle managers for future leadership positions.

The findings of this study could advance social change by uncovering information that will enable public sector department directors to promote middle managers and prepare them to fill key leadership positions. The implications of positive social change include improvements to practices for succession planning by public sector department directors who use these findings. Public sector department directors could also enhance employees' job performance and productivity, which might increase the number of successful leaders in the public sector who can positively affect city communities.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was as follows:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of public sector department directors who use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector?

Two subquestions were also of interest to delve more deeply into the leaders' views of their succession planning experiences.

SQ1: How do you identify potential future directors to groom for leadership positions?

SQ2: What career development programs or methods do you recommend would help other department directors prepare middle managers in their organizations for leadership positions?

Conceptual Framework

Four conceptual elements were useful to examine the practices directors in public sector government use when preparing middle managers for leadership positions. The

elements—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation—have a direct relationship to succession planning and its components of career development and preparing for future leaders. The conceptual framework was an adaptation of Bass and Avolio (2004; see Figure 1).

The conceptual framework for this study was the transformational leadership theory along with Bass and Avolio's (2004) leadership model. Transformational leadership theory allows researchers to analyze leader–subordinate exchanges to determine what leaders do to (a) influence the behavior of subordinates and (b) provide guidance on successful strategies for advancing subordinates' behaviors (Smith et al., 2016). Transformational leadership developed from charismatic leadership in which subordinates depend on leaders who always protect their followers (Ramsey et al., 2017). Transformational leaders encourage and inspire their subordinates through attractive vision, promoting continuous interpersonal engagement and relationship development between themselves and their followers (Mencl et al., 2016).

Burns (1978) developed the transformational leadership theory, which Bass (1999) later formalized. Burns defined transformational leadership as a relationship, mutual stimulation, and elevations that convert followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. Scholars have shown that transformational leadership has a significantly positive impact on organizational performance and effectiveness (Avolio et al., 2009; Bass, 1985; Russell, 2013; Sosik & Jung, 2010). Public sector leaders have tried to adopt this leadership style in their approach to management. According to Bass and Avolio (2004) and earlier researchers, transformational leadership is a style in which charismatic

leaders provide intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and motivation to followers. The four leadership styles of transformational leaders are individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence.

Individualized consideration involves leaders offering support and encouragement to individual followers (Ahmad et al., 2019). To foster supportive relationships, transformational leaders maintain open lines of communication so that followers can share ideas and leaders can offer direct recognition of each person's unique contributions (Cherry, 2020; Junaida et al., 2011). A motivated leader can inspire followers to achieve organizational goals (Ali et al., 2013; Russell, 2013). Intellectual stimulation occurs when leaders challenge followers to be innovative and creative and achieve higher levels of performance (Cherry, 2020). Inspirational motivation combines with idealized influence, where the leader serves as a role model to followers; this is the source of a transformational leader's charisma. Understanding the practices of leaders in their interactions with employees, particularly in a situation of major change, can provide insights into which practices are most appropriate for managing change in the public sector.

The theory has a positive association with the implementation and management of change in organizations (Zubedy, 2019). Throughout the literature, transformational leadership has shown to be an important tool for change in the public sector (Kellis & Ran, 2015). Extensive research has taken place on contemporary leadership characteristics and their impact on different constructs; however, significant contributions on succession planning contextualized in South Central Texas public sector are limited.

Therefore, this research was an attempt to understand the influence of transformational leadership on the implementation of succession planning in the public sector in South Central Texas.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

<div align="center">

Transformational Leadership

| Individualized Consideration | Intellectual Stimulation | Inspirational Motivation | Idealized Influence |

Career Development

Future Leader

Succession Planning

</div>

<div align="center">
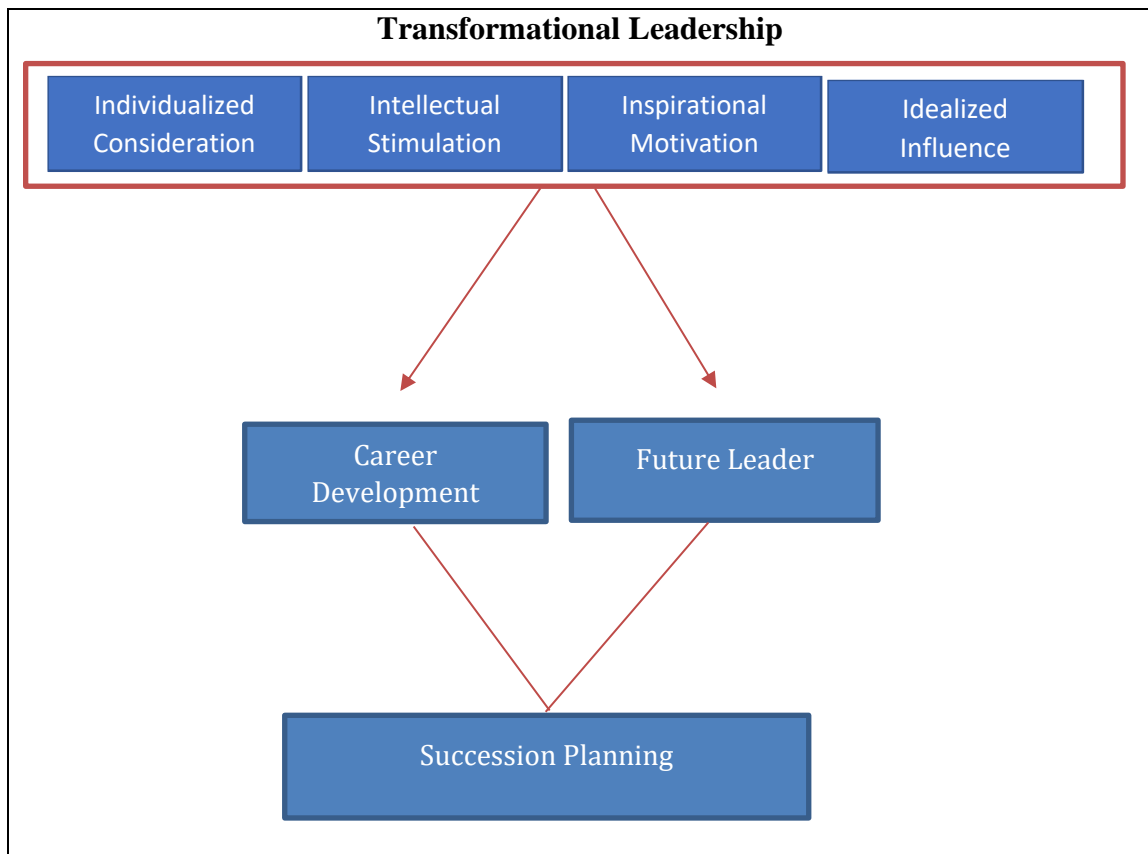
Nature of the Study

</div>

Qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design was appropriate to address the purpose of this study. With a qualitative approach, the researcher seeks to understand the perceptions of appropriate individuals (Hurt & McLaughlin, 2012). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of public sector department

directors; therefore, the appropriate method for this study is qualitative. Data collection

consisted of in-depth, face-to-face interviews, observations, and field notes. As Hurt and

McLaughlin (2012) explained, qualitative research allows an investigator to explore and

comprehend the significance of people or groups related to a social or human problem.

My intent in using a qualitative method was to understand the lived experiences of public

sector department directors in South Central Texas that use succession planning as a

strategy to align core business objectives and prepare employees for future leadership

positions. Quantitative and mixed methods were not appropriate for this study because of

their focus on statistical analysis and hypotheses (see Marshall & Rossman, 2014), which

do not fit the purpose of this research. I conducted and evaluated semistructured

interviews to develop an understanding of succession-planning strategies of leadership

development for potential leaders.

In qualitative research, data collection includes exploring how individuals attach

meaning, conduct events, or build programs in real-world settings, with each setting

having unique nuances, histories, cultures, and subcultures (Yin, 2012). Qualitative data

sources include interviews, observation, and written documents. I used semistructured

interviews to explore succession planning practices department directors use to prepare

middle managers for leadership positions. According to Yin (2012), the best way to

gather data in a qualitative study is through semistructured interviews, which enhance

flexibility and control during the data collection process and help the researcher explore

individuals' perceptions of events, actions, or processes. Therefore, semistructured, face-

to-face interviews were the best approach and primary data collection instrument to

explore the in-depth experiences of public sector leaders regarding preparing employees for leadership positions. I used an interview guide to stay on topic, audio recording the interviews for subsequent transcription and analysis. In keeping with the methodology, data analysis followed phenomenological and hermeneutic principles and systematic interpretation. Analyzing and interpreting the qualitative interview text followed the modified van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis (see Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology focuses on lived experiences and significant events of participants that require rich description, deep understanding, and interpretation of the meanings the participants attribute to those experiences (van Manen, 1990). This phenomenological study involved 17 organizational leaders in the public sector in South Central Texas. Recruitment occurred via snowball sampling. The exclusion criteria included employees who were not executive level or had no desire to move into leadership roles. The guiding principle for sample size is the concept of saturation (Yin, 2012). Sample sizes for qualitative studies are generally small because there is a point of diminishing return when additional data yield no new themes. The sample size for phenomenological studies must be sufficient to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research question and establish saturation. Morse (1994) suggested at least six participants for phenomenological one-on-one interviews; Fitzpatrick and Watkinson (2003) recommended 12 participants; and Polach (2004) and Papathanassolglou and Patiraki (2003) used eight participants. The phenomenological approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon to identify the themes from data analysis.

Definitions

This section contains key terms used in the study.

Leadership: Leadership refers to the positions of chief executive, director, assistant director, supervisor, founder, and administrator (Dorczak, 2012).

Public sector leader: A nonelected public sector leader is the highest-level officer of a state or governmental agency (Riccucci & Riccardelli, 2015).

Replacement planning: Leaders who engage in replacement planning recognize the temporary or long-standing help of having individuals to assume accountability from demanding personnel during a crisis (Rothwell, 2011).

Succession planning: Succession planning means developing a pool of individuals considering promotions or skill administration, focusing on enticing, growing, positioning, and maintaining the best people (Garg & Van Weele, 2012).

Transformational leadership: A transformational leader fosters individual, group, or organizational performance beyond expectation by virtue of the strong, emotional attachment with followers combined with the collective commitment to a higher moral cause (Warrick, 2011).

Assumptions

Several important assumptions were necessary to research department directors' leadership styles and their practices to prepare middle managers for future leadership positions within the organizations (see Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The first assumption was that I would learn from the combined past and present lived experiences public sector department directors bring to the interviews. Based on the conceptual framework, I

assumed that various changes to practices department directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions would emerge. I assumed that public sector organizations, particularly department directors in South Central Texas, were interested in understanding the leadership behaviors of their department directors and how these leaders drive succession planning for middle managers. I also assumed that public sector organizations would be receptive to the study and provide access to the qualified participants, as well as relevant documents and reports, if applicable. Another assumption was that public sector organizations' databases would not be accessible to people outside the organization, creating limited access to human resources data to determine the number of middle managers promoted to leadership positions through succession planning.

An assumption with the study design was that department directors with a transformational leadership style used succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for future leadership positions in the organization. I assumed department directors would respond truthfully to the interview questions. I also assumed that the participants would be honest, credible, and sincere about other concerns, such as the experiences of department directors, based on their understanding of the present reality. I bracketed all preconceived perceptions and set aside personal views to avoid asking leading questions during the department director interviews, jeopardizing the study's validity, or influencing the participants. I was aware that humans might not be capable of absolute objectivity due to being situated in a reality constructed by subjective experiences (see Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Scope and Delimitations

The population of this hermeneutic phenomenology study consisted of department directors in the public sector who considered themselves transformational leaders currently using practices to sustain organizational success by implementing middle management succession planning. The first delimitation was that nondirectors within the public sector were ineligible for this study. Interviewing only directors within the public sector represented a delimitation because I did meet with professionals in public sector leadership positions. Nondirectors might not know what practices are lacking in the effort to retain middle managers.

The study was focused on department directors in the public sector in South Central Texas. The sample population was limited to department directors in the public sector with direct responsibility for leading middle managers who oversee divisions within the organization. This study was confined to 17 participants delimited to South Central Texas. The study was an exploration of the leadership behaviors of public sector directors, with a sample of those identifying as transformative participating in interviews.

This study was not a means to draw causal conclusions about leadership in the public sector. Using a qualitative hermeneutic approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of public sector directors in South Central Texas. Regarding transferability, the study's findings were replicable and applicable to other public sector contexts with similar characteristics.

Limitations

This research depended heavily on the access to and agreement of department directors in the public sector to participate in the study. Department directors were the selected sample because of their position and role; as such, most of the data came from the participants (see Yin, 2014). One limitation was the generalizability of the findings. Because of small sample sizes in qualitative research, generalizability to the broader population is limited (Sim et al., 2018). Accordingly, the lived experiences of organizational leaders in the public sector in South Central Texas who participated in this study might not reflect those of individuals outside the sample.

Another limitation was the potential for bias or distortion of research outcomes due to unintended influences from the participants and the researcher (see Roller, 2013). In qualitative research, interviewers try to establish strong relationships with their interviewees to delve deeply into the subject matter. Because I had little research experience before this study, human error could have caused me to misinterpret the data. Reflexivity—specifically, maintaining a reflexive journal—is one way for qualitative researchers to address and mitigate any unintended distortions or preconceptions (Roller, 2013) . I used a reflexive journal to document potential influences on the interview results. Keeping a journal sensitizes the interviewer to prejudices and subjectivities to better understand the impact on research credibility (Roller, 2013). The reflexive journal was a key contributor to the final analysis, providing a first-hand account of interviewer bias and preconceptions that could negatively influence the findings.

Significance of the Study

According to the Pew Research Center, in the United States, 10,000 people turn 65 every day (Ibarra, 2016). Millennials now outnumber baby boomers in the workplace, where they will hold 75% percent of positions by 2026. Because of the rapidly aging workforce, government organizations are experiencing a knowledge gap in leadership and reaching a critical juncture in the need for experienced and seasoned leaders; as a result, public sector businesses must address the pressing need for succession planning. Small government organizations are particularly affected when an employee departs, as there might not be a natural successor within their workplace. Large organizations also face the challenge of replacing a sole incumbent who handles a breadth of responsibilities or possesses extensive, specialized knowledge, with this lack subsequently disrupting service delivery.

The significance of this study was that it could help public sector leaders find quality practices for succession planning, which could be a key differentiator in the organization. Proper talent management and succession planning ensure the organization has highly qualified and well-developed leaders in all mission-critical positions essential for the future of the organization. Leaders must take proactive steps to plan for future talent needs at all levels within the business, not only to fill the leadership pipeline but also to develop a pool of high-potential leaders prepared when mission-critical positions become vacant.

Succession planning is about ensuring the next line of leaders is in place and ready to advance in the organization when needed (Beaulieu, 2003/2018). Organizations

focused on this objective benefit from increased employee direction and motivation,

greater responsiveness to change, and more long-term effectiveness. Succession planning

also depends on having the right leadership succession tools and a robust talent

management process in place. Preparing employees for future leadership roles consists of

planning and development, which spreads throughout the organization and to the

individual. Succession planning also enables organizations to achieve their primary goal

of having employees ready to step into leadership roles and avoid the risk of bringing too

many outsiders into key high-level positions.

There is a gap in the literature related to understanding public sector leadership

and succession planning practices. Given the lack of research in this area, this study could

benefit the emerging academic literature aimed at analyzing public sector leadership. The

findings should help increase understanding of how leadership behaviors influence

effective succession planning in the specific context of public service. This gap further

indicates that middle managers might not have had the managerial skills, knowledge, or

support systems to prepare them for future leadership positions. This critical hole in

managerial skills and knowledge could cause a profound gap in organizational operations

as well as low motivation and dedication of middle managers who see no future growth

potential in public sector organizations. This underrepresentation in senior leadership in

public sector organizations could cause high employee turnover and low productivity.

Significance to Practice

The intent of this study was to explore the practices department directors use to

prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector and help middle

managers strive to become top-level leaders. The findings of this hermeneutic

phenomenological study could serve as an additional resource to assist department

directors in effectively developing middle managers for future leadership positions. The

findings provided insight into the methods for retaining critical institutional knowledge in

the public sector. Also illuminated was how succession planning contributes to the

effectiveness of public sector organizations with an aging workforce due to imminent

retirements. Findings also shed light on the need for public sector organizations to expand

succession planning efforts to identify a pool of talented leaders quickly and consistently

(see Dobberowsky, 2016).

Significance to Social Change

The findings from this hermeneutic phenomenological study could contribute to

positive social change by helping department directors promote qualified middle

managers into leadership positions. Additionally, this study could enable department

directors to open avenues for middle managers they deem to have the potential to enter

leadership roles. Hoobler et al. (2011) stated that organizations that continually invest in

employees for leadership positions might prevent future positional vacancies.

Furthermore, department directors implementing succession planning can improve

business practice by developing a larger pool of employees for leadership positions.

Developing this group of middle managers for leadership positions could also allow baby

boomers to retire without having to come out of retirement to help the organizations due

to a gap in leadership. Insight into how these unfilled positions could lead to decreased

government services could lessen citizens' suffering from the government's failure to protect their well-being.

The findings of this hermeneutic phenomenological study could serve as an additional resource to assist department directors in effectively developing middle managers for future leadership positions. The intent of this study was to explore the practices department directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector and to help middle managers strive to become top-level leaders.

Summary and Transition

This study was an exploration of the lived experiences of public sector department directors utilizing succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in South Central Texas. Rothwell (2011) and other authors suggested that implementing succession planning could help organizational leaders prepare middle managers for senior leadership positions. Succession planning consists of identifying and tracking high-potential employees who have the competencies to fill higher-level managerial positions (Juhdi et al., 2015). The benefit of department directors implementing succession planning is to provide development experiences, which middle managers must complete to obtain a managerial position.

This qualitative phenomenological study was an exploration of the practices that department directors use to prepare middle managers for future organizational leadership positions in the public sector. A qualitative phenomenology hermeneutic approach was appropriate to determine the findings and recommendations for revealing middle managers' lack of managerial knowledge and skills when advancing into leadership

positions. Department directors could use the findings of this study to identify practices

to maintain and recruit middle managers for future leadership positions within

organizations.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the research goals, including the significance

of the study, the research question, the nature of the study, and the conceptual framework.

Additionally, this chapter presented definitions of terms and an overview of the

assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study. Transformational leadership and

succession planning comprise the conceptual framework of the qualitative

phenomenological study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As introduced in Chapter 1, increased rates of retirement in leadership positions and poor planning related to succession have contributed to a lack of skilled individuals to replace departing leaders (see Rigoni & Adkins, 2015). Further complicating leaders' departure in the public sector are the challenges of hiring and training new leaders, contributing to a lack of effective succession planning. Inadequate succession planning has ties with poor performance, higher turnover rates, organizational instability, and loss of institutional knowledge, negatively impacting the organization (Leonard-Barton et al., 2014). Succession planning strategies can be helpful in combating this issue by increasing the likelihood of maintaining an appropriate talent pipeline in the public sector (Dobberowsky, 2016).

There were several studies conducted related to succession planning in the public sector specific to leadership. However, many of the researchers had a broad focus on leadership and succession planning in the public sector in general rather than on the specific practices useful in preparing middle managers for leadership positions. This study could help department directors in the public sector prepare middle managers for leadership positions. More specifically, this study contributed to the existing literature by providing findings specific to the public sector in South Central Texas.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review began with searches on Google Scholar, ResearchGate, SAGE Publications, Emerald Insights, and Springer Open. The search teams used were *succession planning in the public sector, succession planning and leadership in the*

public sector, public sector succession planning, strategies for succession planning in the public sector, executive succession planning, succession planning, leadership succession planning, succession planning strategies, succession planning in leadership, leadership development in public sector, leadership succession in public sector, leadership transition in public sector, workforce planning in public sector, and *transformational leadership theory*. Searching the databases for these keywords, individually and in combination, enabled the identification of relevant sources. Each article underwent review for content and relevancy, with those found relevant included in the literature review. To ensure the most current information, 85% of the articles used in this literature review had publications from 2015 to 2021.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study was Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory and Bass and Avolio's (2004) leadership model. These theories were appropriate to analyze leader–subordinate exchanges to understand what leaders do to influence the subordinates' behavior and provide guidance on succession practices (Bass, 1985; Hemsworth et al., 2013; Rowold, 2014; Smith et al., 2016). There has been extensive research conducted on contemporary leadership characteristics and their impact on different constructs; however, significant contributions on succession planning contextualized in the Texas public sector are unstudied. Therefore, this research was an attempt to understand the influence of transformational leadership on the implementation of succession planning in the public sector in South Central Texas.

Transformational leaders encourage and inspire their subordinates through employee autonomy (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a relationship, mutual stimulation, and advancements that convert followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. Transformational leadership theory was more appropriate than other leadership styles because there is more research and consideration from organizational researchers and academics (Awan et al., 2011; Mittal & Dhar, 2015; Rowold, 2014). Other studies have shown that transformational leadership has a significantly positive effect on organizational performance and effectiveness (e.g., Avolio et al., 2009; Bass, 1998; Russell, 2013; Sosik & Jung, 2010). Public sector leaders often adopt a transformational style in their management approach due to its influence on followers. Transformational leaders have been characterized by four separate components or characteristics denoted as the four Is of transformational leadership (Avolio et al., 1991). The transformational components of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation directly relate to succession planning, including career development and future leader preparation. In a meta-analysis, Wang et al. (2011) found that transformational leadership correlated positively with performance. Bass and Avolio (2004) stated that transformational leadership displayed behaviors associated with four leadership components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation.

Idealized influence is the leader's ability to model high performance and good ethics (Abdulla et al., 2011; Felfe et al., 2004; Riaz & Haider, 2010); therefore, these

leaders have distinctive qualities. Idealized influence is evident by exemplary leaders

trusted by their subordinates and striving to make decisions that benefit the organization.

The effect of idealized influence is "faith, trust and replicable model disciple" (Simić,

1998, p. 52; Stone et al., 2003). Charisma is a style associated with leaders who inspire

confidence in subordinates and facilitate organizational change (Gellis, 2001). A

motivated leader can invigorate followers to achieve organizational goals (Ali et al.,

2013; Russell, 2013). These leaders motivate and challenge their subordinates to strive

for higher standards and speak with enthusiasm and optimism and provide

encouragement to complete tasks (Boyett, 2006). Motivated leaders also encourage their

followers to be part of the organization (Boerner et al., 2007; Kelly, 2003).

     Transformational leaders have specific characteristics that allow them to commit

to organizational goals. Transformational leaders focus on leadership abilities, elevating

the level of management, including reshaping (transforming) organizations toward a new

course of action (Awan et al., 2011). Leaders provide personal attention, guidance, and

counseling for subordinates' career growth through individualized consideration.

Subordinates receive unique treatment according to their abilities and knowledge (Rasid,

2007; Shin & Zhou, 2003), allowing them to lead better lives (Junaida et al., 2011; Stone

et al., 2003). Leaders who exercise individualized consideration are good listeners,

advisers, and charismatic coaches. They support the work done by subordinates, practice

two-way communication, distribute power to subordinates with prejudice (Walumbwa et

al., 2008), and drive organizations to achieve objectives. Through intellectual stimulation

leaders encourage followers to question their own beliefs, assumptions, and values

(Elkins & Keller, 2003). Anjali and Anand (2015) confirm that intellectual stimulation leads to the development of employee commitment to the organization.

Related to the description of transformational leaders as brave, value-driven, and enduring learners by Tuckey et al. (2012), transformational leadership theory served as a guide for the present study. Effective succession planning and leadership development require individuals to have the leadership characteristics described by Tuckey et al., such as a willingness to acknowledge and put employees' needs first. The participants in this study were role models for their employees, encouraging workers to think for themselves and rise to the challenge of leadership (see Hyypia & Pekkola, 2011).

Hemsworth et al. (2013) conducted a review of the literature to develop an in-depth understanding of Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory as applied to the public sector. Hemsworth et al.'s findings are relevant to this study because they analyzed transformational leadership characteristics in public sector executives. Specifically, the researchers sought to understand the psychometric properties of transformational leadership theory and compare components of transformational leadership with other constructs and leadership dimensions. One comparison was Bycio et al. (1995), who suggested that that the structures related to transformational leadership might not always be stable due to correlation. Although this study did not have a specific focus on psychometric properties, the detailed understanding of the concepts of a transformational leader provided by Hemsworth et al. was relevant to this study.

Overall, the concepts of a transformational leader and succession planning were relevant to this study to determine which practices are effective for department directors

in succession planning with middle managers in the public sector. Specifically, the concepts related to succession planning were helpful to understand how department directors in the public sector can prepare middle managers for future leadership positions. Together, the concepts of a transformational leader and succession planning can strengthen executive managers' skills and organizational settings. For this reason, directors in the public sector who identify as transformational leaders could identify practices to improve the employees' job satisfaction and potential to ascend to leadership positions.

Succession planning entails identifying and developing new leaders to succeed current leaders. Leaders must create and address talent management strategies to develop the organization and people for the future (McCauley & Wakefield, 2006; Rothwell, 2010). A proactive and systematic investment, succession planning involves building a pipeline of leaders within an organization and identifying strong external candidates; therefore, when transitions are necessary, leaders at all levels are ready to act (Beever, 2008; Bjorkmen et al., 2013; Church et al., 2015; LaForest & Kubica, 2010).

Researchers have introduced many models of succession planning. Rothwell (2010) identified succession planning as comprising two dimensions: preparing for future leaders and career development. Preparing for future leaders is a means to ensure an organization can be well-managed, and career development is an important strategy to facilitate internal promotion. Succession planning is necessary for management positions that offer opportunity for growth in management moves. As individuals achieve greater seniority, their management skills focus on total organizational objectives rather than

purely departmental goals. Dessler (2004) equated succession planning to the process of seeking likely future leaders arising from firm strategic planning. Therefore, leaders can plan and execute subordinate career paths to fulfill organizational needs and subordinate aspirations for career success, including identifying potential nominees for the next leader (Dessler, 2004; Rothwell, 2005). Such planning can include career coaching, cross-training, and job enrichment and expansion (Kirk et al., 2000). Adnan and Mubarak (2010) found transformational leadership strongly associated with job success. Add summary/synthesis to fully conclude the paragraph. Therefore, the career paths of managers can be managed to fulfill organizational needs and also aspirations of the manager. Moreovere, the implementation of succession planning on managers is closely linked to a leader's leadership style.

There has been extensive research conducted on leaders' characteristics and their impact on different constructs; however, no scholars have explored contributions to succession planning in South Central Texas. This study was an attempt to determine the influence of transformational leadership on the implementation of succession planning practices in the South-Central Texas public sector.

Literature Review

The review of literature for this qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic study is a variety of journals, professional books, and government documents. In this qualitative hermeneutic study, I addressed public sector directors' succession planning practices used to prepare middle managers for future leadership positions. The literature review included studies from literature search that related to the purpose of study and the

created conceptual framework. The information for this review included succession

planning, leadership development, and leadership strategies, and transformational

leadership to address public sector directors' consistent setting of beneficial standards for

middle management succession planning while encouraging high-quality middle

managers to prepare for leadership positions. I used multiple databases to conduct an

extensive web-based review of the study. The literature review included material

associated with conceptual framework that served as the lens for this study.

   The organization of the review is a narrative explanation of executive succession

planning deploying practices and strategies to prepare middle managers for leadership

positions. The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to

explore succession planning to bolster director's momentum to improve middle managers

within public sector organizations in South Central Texas managerial skills and talent for

future leadership positions. For public sector organizations to be successful, innovation is

vital, and directors should keep an open mind and evaluate needed changes that will

improve succession planning with middle managers (Leavey, 2013). The literature review

highlighted the need to revisit practices for directors to implement succession plans that

sustain leadership positions within public sector organizations in South Central Texas to

enhance social change. The need to promote middle managers to senior leadership

positions extends directors' ability to determine practices to sustain middle managers' job

performance and job satisfaction.

I acquired most resources using Walden University's library to access databases such as Business Source Complete, ABI Inform Global, Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. The search terms included *succession planning in the public sector, succession planning and leadership in the public sector, public sector succession planning, strategies for succession planning in the public sector, executive succession planning, succession planning, leadership succession planning, succession planning strategies, succession planning in leadership, leadership development in public sector, leadership succession in public sector, leadership transition in public sector, workforce planning in public sector,* and *transformational leadership theory*. I also used additional sources including seminal books, scholarly articles, professional journals, governmental sites, and doctoral dissertations. The study includes 272 references; 86% are from peer-reviewed journals that are within 5 years of the expected completion of the study. The following section presents relevant literature organized into the sections described.

Human Capital, Leadership, and Organizational Structure and Performance

In the public and private sectors, organizations and leaders face challenges in human capital management. In the public sector there is a high turnover and intent to leave, in addition to a large number of aging staff members preparing for retirement (Bogaert et al., 2019; Leider et al., 2016; Saddozai et al., 2017; Serrat, 2017; Stewart, 2016; Streeter, 2014). Turnover in the public sector is a concern due to the loss of knowledge and skills when employees leave the organization (Sprague, 2019). These issues create challenges for human capital in the public sector, particularly in recruiting

and retaining staff, including leaders (Leider et al., 2016; Saddozai et al., 2017; Serrat, 2017; Stewart, 2016; Streeter, 2014). The changing fiscal environment in the public sector adds to the challenges faced by leaders and managers (Blake, 2016; Heald & Steel, 2018).

This subsection focuses on the general challenges related to human capital, leadership, and organizational structure in the public sector (public health). Streeter (2014) described this challenge as a crisis due to various factors including (a) an aging workforce eligible for retirement; (b) the loss of experienced and skilled staff due to retirement; (c) the lack of funding in budgets for the effective recruitment of candidates for vacant positions; and (d) a lack of candidates with the experience, training, and knowledge needed for vacancies. This challenge is even more pronounced in leadership positions and sectors that are underfunded and understaffed.

Serrat (2017) discussed human capital with a focus on organizations instead of leaders. Serrat explained that talent management in organizations has been a topic of concern due to several emerging trends leading to talent scarcity. The three main trends identified were (a) retirement of the baby boomer generation, (b) a widening skills gap, and (c) rapidly changing lifestyles leading to large-scale social integration. Within these three main trends, Serrat identified additional drivers:

- Evolving workforce demographics.
- Increasingly complex and dynamic contexts in which organizations conduct operations.

- More efficient capital markets enabling the rise of small and medium-sized organizations offering opportunities across the talent spectrum that are difficult for large organizations to match.

- Talent as a source of value creation in knowledge economies.

- The correlation between talent and organizational performance in which talented individuals drive a disproportionate share of organizational effectiveness (i.e., value creation extending beyond individual performance).

- Higher demands by financial markets and boards of directors.

- The increasing mobility of personnel with changing expectations, which means that if the talent are hard to find, they will be harder to keep.

All these drivers within the trends identified by Serrat (2017) were important to consider as factors surrounding succession planning and leadership development in the present study. These factors provided context regarding those experienced on the organizational level, with leaders and management structures falling under the organizational structure in which they operate. Serrat highlighted the work of McKinsey & Company to demonstrate the difficulties faced by organizations in recruiting and retaining talent, which involves the process of talent management. Talent management was relevant because it incorporates succession planning and leadership development, which were the focuses of the present study. Specifically, Serrat mentioned the five elements of a talent formula that can help organizations find and retain talent. Including considerations of leadership, management, and leadership development within the strategy:

- Instill a talent mindset at all levels of the organization, beginning with senior leaders.

- Develop a winning employee value proposition that attracts and retains scarce talent. The components of the employee value proposition are exciting work, a great organization, wealth and reward, and growth and development.

- Continuously recruit talent.

- Grow leaders.

- Differentiate and affirm.

The challenges in Human Capital management in the public sector are more pronounced in leadership positions. This study explored the challenges of middle managers with talent management in the public sector and identified practices for directors to increase the availability of experienced middle managers that are prepared to assume leadership roles in the public sector.

The strategies highlighted by Serrat (2017) are essential considerations in the subsection on leadership strategies in the public sector. Overall, Serrat described the importance of changing strategies within the organization to recruit and retain talent as well as develop leaders within the changing and increasingly complex context of human capital management. It is important to note that although Serrat did not provide results on the implementation of these strategies, a detailed description of various strategies, approaches, and models in the talent management and human capital industry was presented. The lack of research on implementing strategies, approaches, and models was a common topic when analyzing the interview information from the directors

interviewed, showing a clear gap in the literature. Additional research is needed to understand the effectiveness and results of implementing these strategies, approaches, and models that were identified in previous research and by the participants in this study. The results of my research will expand on the previous research and may enhance what has been identified.

In a qualitative study, Saddozai et al. (2017) described a similar issue to that identified by Serrat (2017). Saddozai et al. explained that talent management, also known as human capital management, is an important tool for organizations; however, there is a lack of a clear definition of talent management. To address this gap, Saddozai et al. conducted interviews with university management personnel, deans, heads of departments, assistant professors, associate professors, and lecturers in China and Pakistan. Data analysis indicated that talent and talent management are essential within academic organizations; however, human resources departments face challenges with talent management, some due to difficulties within the university. Saddozai et al.'s (2017) study occurred within the academic context of the public sector and included challenges associated with institutions' organizational structure in dealing with talent management. Succession planning was part of talent management, which means there could be similar challenges in recruiting, retaining, and preparing leaders for succession specific to the general talent management context. To provide a more specific focus related to the present study, the following subsection presents information related to succession planning, another issue for organizations and leadership.

Succession Planning in the Public, Private, and Nonprofit Sectors

The present study included an emphasis on the role and importance of succession

planning within the public sector. Succession planning involves the development and

retention of employees within the organization and the cultivation of their professional

skills (Badaway et al., 2016; Chlebikova et al., 2015). Succession planning, especially for

executives and leaders, is vital for sustainable leadership and organizations and involves

development opportunities embedded in organizational practices to develop future

leaders (Gerard et al., 2017; Iliac, 2018; Stewart, 2016; Zepeda et al., 2012). Turnover

rates among leadership in the public sector necessitate succession planning to ensure the

transfer of knowledge and transition of leadership within the organization (Appelbaum et

al., 2012; Oduwusi, 2018). However, there is a lack of research on succession planning

and its consequences specific to leadership turnover in the public sector (Clinger, 2016;

Stewart, 2016). This lack of literature could also stem from a lack of career planning,

including succession planning, in some organizations (Chlebikova et al., 2015).

Chiocchio and Gharibpour (2017) found succession management largely

overlooked in the public sector. After a review of relevant literature, Chiocchio and

Gharibpour made recommendations for a succession management strategy in the public

sector, as follows:

- Comprehensively aligning all organizational strategies, including succession
  management.

- Ensuring succession management and its implementation are consistent with
  the organizational culture.

- Determining current and future key roles in the organization using systemic methods.

- Determining role-specific standard assessment tools for assessing candidate competencies.

- Designing a career path that uses competencies to reach each of the key roles.

- Continually assessing candidates and creating a high-potential candidate pool for each key role.

- Empowering individuals to progress toward key roles.

- Implementing multiapproach short- and long-term development activities to address various learning needs and preferences.

- Evaluating succession management to ensure the relevance and efficiency of the program.

As shown in the multiple elements of Chiocchio and Gharibpour's (2017) succession management strategy, succession planning, particularly for executive roles, is complex, especially in the public sector. Furthermore, succession planning can involve an emotive change process, especially with leaders forced to leave their positions (Harvey et al., 2019; Manzoor et al., 2018). As related to human capital, succession planning is a key component of talent management involving strategic processing by the organization and influenced by organizational structure and culture (Lohrey et al., 2019; Monareng & Dunn, 2016). Succession planning is a specific process to develop a pool of talent for promotion within the organization (Rothwell, 2011). This process is critical because an organization's future plans could fail due to a lack of succession planning, particularly

when leaders leave (Johnson et al., 2018; Oduwusi, 2018; Pita et al., 2016; Tebbe et al., 2017). In other words, succession planning helps prepare organizations for the unexpected (Johnson et al., 2018). Researchers have found a relationship between leadership development and succession planning (Mahmoud et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to understand what literature is available on the topic of succession planning and the implications within organizations, particularly for senior leadership positions. This study will expand on the knowledge of succession planning and leadership development, providing more insight for public sector directors to prepare middle managers for leadership positions.

Monareng and Dunn (2016) described succession planning as a strategic process that involves identifying, training, developing, mentoring, and preparing potential talent for future leadership positions. In their study, Monareng and Dunn focused on succession planning activities and the challenges associated with implementation. Monareng and Dunn used a qualitative research design to collect data from human resources managers and managing directors within an agency. The findings showed that managers were familiar with succession planning but felt there was a lack of understanding in the agency of what succession planning really is. The managers also expressed that organizational structure and lack of adequate mentoring and training posed challenges to succession planning. Also noteworthy, the respondents reported that they did not have a succession plan in place to deal with the loss of key personnel and felt their agency did not take succession planning seriously. Specifically, human resources managers expressed senior managers showed only minimal commitment toward succession planning, and there was

a lack of integration between succession planning and its implementation through training interventions.

Monareng and Dunn (2016) concluded that there was no uniform approach to implement succession planning and that agency units were not prepared for the loss of key personnel. The researchers recommended an increased commitment to succession planning on the part of senior managers and improved accountability of managers responsible for implementing succession planning. Monareng and Dunn also identified a lack of succession planning capacity among human resources managers and senior managers. Accordingly, leadership capacity is a topic discussed further in this review of the literature. Although Monareng and Dunn provided context for succession planning and associated challenges, the study took place within one agency; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. However, the study included questions related to how managers defined succession planning, challenges they faced in succession planning, and perspectives related to preparation for replacing key members, each relevant to the proposed study.

Pita et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study to address succession planning in public sector organizations. The researchers noted that in the public sector specifically, there is a lack of action taken to transfer employee skills before they leave the organization, which reflects a lack of proper succession planning. To investigate this issue, Pita et al. examined the association between succession planning practices, internal succession barriers, and intention to leave within the public sector in South Africa. They stated that the inspiration for their study was the lack of evidence related to succession

planning initiatives, barriers to succession planning, and turnover intentions in the South

African context. Pita et al. administered a questionnaire to 243 public servants and

analyzed the data using exploratory factor analysis and regression analysis.

The study's findings were that corporation succession planning practices and

internal succession barriers were negatively associated with intention to leave among

employees in the public sector (Pita et al., 2016). In other words, employees were less

likely to have an intention to leave when there were succession planning and leadership

development opportunities. Furthermore, replacement planning and employee grooming

were predictors of intention to quit among employees. Pita et al. concluded that effective

implementation of succession planning efforts is important to improve human resources

practices and overcome barriers to succession. The researchers also mentioned that there

was no single strategy for succession planning effective for all organizations. This study

enriched this research by exploring succession planning practices directors use to prepare

middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector.

Among the implications were that organizations lacking succession planning and

grooming opportunities are likely to have employees who feel unrecognized by the

organization, thereby contributing to their intention to leave (Pita et al., 2016). In

addition, managers who focused on crisis management rather than on succession planning

due to being overwhelmed with work were less likely to retain their employees. The

researchers found key factors for effective implementation of succession planning in the

public sector to include preparing employees through training, management support, and

career path planning. Each of these factors requires the support of managers within the

organization. Pita et al. also noted that research on succession planning is still limited, particularly in the public sector, and recommended additional research in this area. This study provided additional research in succession planning practices for leadership positions in the public sector.

Like Monareng and Dunn (2016), Pita et al.'s (2016) findings were significant to the present study because they related to the public sector and demonstrated the importance of successful succession planning and leadership development to reduce intention to leave among employees and maintain organizational performance. However, Pita et al. did not address the specific strategies used by managers and leaders for succession planning and leadership development, which was one of the focuses of this study.

Ali and Mehreen (2019) used surveys to study succession planning related to turnover intention in the private sector. The purpose of their study was to determine whether succession planning had an impact on turnover intention among banking professionals. The researchers explained that succession planning is important because it allows organizations to develop a pool of skilled and talented individuals within the organization, saving the time and costs associated with external recruitment and selection. The participants expressed that succession planning provided a sense of job security and created a positive career attitude, reducing turnover intention among bank employees. Ali and Mehreen's findings are relevant to the proposed study because they showed that succession planning and leadership development could prepare organizations for a succession event and reduce turnover intention. However, a limitation to

generalizing Ali and Mehreen's findings is that the study occurred in the private sector among banking employees; different results could become apparent in the public sector.

LeCounte et al. (2017) introduced succession planning, specifically chief executive officer (CEO) succession planning, as a critical issue for organizations. For succession planning to be effective, talent management policies and practices related to leadership are important. This finding presented by LeCounte et al. mirrored Serrat (2017), who also highlighted the importance of talent management related to leadership and human capital. Unlike Serrat, LeCounte et al. focused more on the role of CEO succession planning than general talent and human capital management. The authors examined the literature to review CEO succession planning and processes and implications for organizational performance. The conceptual framework used by LeCounte et al. included human capital theory and social capital theory. LeCounte et al. concluded that abrupt CEO departures could result in a loss of senior-level expertise and knowledge, harming organizations without a succession plan in place. The researchers recommended the use of organizational development initiatives for change as new leaders enter the organization. However, LeCounte et al. noted that change could be challenging for organizations as it involves altering established structures and procedures.

The implication of LeCounte et al.'s (2017) study was that succession planning, specifically for senior leadership positions, is essential to maintain organizational performance. The authors explained that CEO succession planning includes strategic change, the development of a leadership pipeline, and executive experience. This process must include human resources executives as active decision-makers in succession

planning. LeCounte et al. recommended additional research on whether organizations that engage chief human resources officers in succession planning are more successful than organizations that do not. Szierbowski-Seibel and Kabst (2018) also recommended involving human resources personnel in the succession planning process. This study enriched this study and explored leadership development with the assistance of human resource leaders to enhance succession planning practices public sector directors use for middle managers to advance to leadership positions.

Szierbowski-Seibel and Kabst's (2018) multilevel regression study focused primarily on the role of human resources personnel and thus did not merit an in-depth discussion in this review. Of relevance, however, is that human resources outsourcing had an organizational impact among a nested sample of 14 European countries, as it improved the human resources staff-to-employee ratio. This finding is important because it indicated that other staff beyond leaders could merit consideration. Szierbowski-Seibel and Kabst recommended additional research on this topic.

More related to the research questions in the proposed study, LeCounte et al. (2017) also recommended that other qualitative and quantitative researchers explore companies' talent management practices. Specifically, the scholars suggested additional inquiry to ensure the talent pipeline produces future executive talent for the organization. The present study addressed this gap by exploring the strategies used by leaders in the public sector to address succession planning and leadership development, which involves talent and human capital management, as introduced by LeCounte et al. and Serrat (2017).

Boon and Verhoest (2018) similarly noted the importance of human resources management activities in the public sector. They recommended additional research on design and drift factors related to the side effects of human resources management activities in the public sector. In the same way, other researchers, such as Berman (2015), Karikari et al. (2015), Khumalo (2019), and Valcik and Sabharwal (2018), have highlighted the importance of human resources management in both the public and private sectors in strengthening and improving organizational performance by recruiting and retaining well-qualified talent. Specifically, human resources planning impacts the ability of those within the public sector to deliver services to the public. Successful planning involves multiple factors and challenges, including demographic issues, a lack of candidates with appropriate educational qualifications, recruitment policy barriers, and insufficient working tools, in addition to the work environment and opportunities for career growth (Khumalo, 2019). It is, therefore, noteworthy to mention the role of human resources management as part of the succession planning process in identifying and retaining new talent through human capital management. This is important because, in some cases, human resources personnel serve as leaders within the organizational structure and could merit consideration as such in the proposed study. On the other hand, whether or not human resources managers are part of the leadership team, leaders in the public sector play a role in integrating human resources management components for enhanced management capacity and organizational performance. These leaders' responsibilities include recruitment and candidate selection, training and development,

performance management, public service ethics, and succession planning (Kumar Betchoo, 2016).

McKee and Driscoll (2008) addressed executive succession planning in the public sector with a focus on a nonprofit health care organization. Despite the study being over a decade old, it merited inclusion in this literature review because it is one of the few studies on this topic. Although McKee and Driscoll's research was specific to the nonprofit sector, it could provide insight into differences between the private, public, and nonprofit sectors related to this topic. McKee and Driscoll described the departure of senior leadership as a traumatic event with the potential to impact almost everyone within the organization. The researchers used a case study to explore the management of executive succession within a nonprofit organization. The specific aim of their study was to understand the concerns surrounding the departure of senior leaders and how members of the management team prepared themselves and the organization for the transition of executive leadership. Data collection was from documents, participant observation, and semistructured interviews.

McKee and Driscoll (2008) found that within the organization, there was a positive outlook related to the organization's future. However, some senior leaders, including the vice president, expressed concern, recognizing the void leaders' departure would leave. The senior administration team had a process of creating linkages and stabilizers within the organization to prepare for executive turnover. This practice involved developing an organizational succession plan for the CEO, reorganizing into strategic business units, developing a strategic plan, and adopting a more participative

leadership style. In addition to these linkages and stabilizers, the administrative team implemented four safety nets: planning timely departures, ensuring values fit, entrenching the values in future leaders, and introducing a common executive coach. It is important to note that although McKee and Driscoll provided a detailed understanding of succession planning and preparation within a public sector organization, the generalizability of the findings is limited as the researchers' used data from one nonprofit health care organization. Furthermore, in the case study, the succession event had not yet occurred, limiting the findings to the preparation for the succession rather than the effects of the event. This study focused on directors in the public sector in South Central Texas, expanding on the previous research to include a region in Texas.

Gothard and Austin (2013) explored leadership succession planning for the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. The authors explained that executive exit could be planned or unexpected; therefore, organizations must prepare for either situation, especially with high numbers of nonprofit founders and executives nearing retirement age. Based on their literature review, Gothard and Austin identified a need to shift from traditional replacement planning to more comprehensive succession planning, demonstrating the importance of succession planning overall for private, public, and nonprofit sectors.

Santora et al. (2015) similarly explored the succession planning practices of nonprofit organizations in six countries: Australia, Brazil, Israel, Italy, Russia, and the United States. Santora et al. focused specifically on succession planning for executive directors, which they highlighted as necessary for managing sustainable organizations.

Santora et al. compared the results of survey data to identify succession planning and executive selection issues. Based on the findings, the researchers concluded that organizations should be more strategic to anticipate and address both expected and unexpected departures of executive staff. These findings are similar to those of Monareng and Dunn (2016), who found that leaders must take succession planning more seriously for the future of the organization.

Santora et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of succession planning and the need for organizations to take more action to prepare. However, as shown in the research presented thus far—specifically, the focus areas of McKee and Driscoll (2008), Gothard and Austin (2013), and Santora et al.—a gap in the literature remains in terms of understanding succession planning, specifically leadership succession planning, in the public sector. Similarly, this study identified that there was a lack of information on how organizations prepare for succession planning and the strategies in place for leadership development and response to a succession event.

Succession planning is a significant event for the future of the organizations, as shown by researchers such as McKee and Driscoll (2008), which is linked to employee performance (Ali & Mehreen, 2019). Ali and Mehreen (2019) used surveys to collect data from 239 permanent employees at commercial banks to assess whether career development and performance appraisal mediated the relationship between succession planning and employee performance. The researchers conducted their study within the private sector and applied social exchange theory. The findings showed that succession planning has a significant, positive association with employee performance and that both

career development and performance appraisal mediated this association. Based on these results, Ali and Mehreen suggested that organizations develop a pool of skilled employees through succession planning and performance management to avoid challenges related to sudden vacancies and retirements. Pooling talent for succession planning is an important strategy to consider as a potential approach to succession planning in the private sector, and potentially the public sector, as well. The following subsection will focus specifically on leadership, human capital, and organizational structure within the public sector.

Human Capital, Leadership, and Organizational Structure and Performance in the Public Sector

To frame the present study, it was essential to present the literature related to human capital, leadership, and organizational structure and performance in the public sector. Leadership is a key aspect for organizational success in the public and private sectors (An et al., 2019; Tebbe et al., 2017). Although there have been several studies on leadership within public sectors organization, there is a lack of scholarship in public administration and other aspects of the public sector compared to the amount of evidence available in other sectors (Tummers & Knies, 2016).

Kumar Betchoo (2016) highlighted a similar challenge, finding no single best model for developing future leaders in the public sector. Understanding the needs of the public sector is important in developing the sector. However, as mentioned, there is evidence that organizations do not successfully assess leadership needs, including succession needs (Goodman et al., 2015; Monareng & Dunn, 2016; Peter-Hawkins et al.,

2018). Similarly, human capital needs, such as workforce planning, are not always well integrated into the public sector or lack effective implementation (Goodman et al., 2015).

Specific to the nonprofit sector, Rathi et al. (2016) noted that understanding the knowledge needs of a sector is essential in developing the sector and understanding organizational performance. Using a grounded theory approach, the researchers administered a survey that contained predetermined themes and an open text box to gather quantitative and qualitative data from respondents. Rathi et al. used descriptive statistics to analyze the data collected from personnel at nonprofit organizations in Canada and Australia. Because the needs of nonprofit organizations were comparable in both countries, Rathi et al.'s results could be transferable outside of Canada and Australia. The significant need categories identified were knowledge about management and organizational practices, knowledge about resources, community knowledge, sectoral knowledge, and situational knowledge.

Rathi et al.'s (2016) recommendations were specific to knowledge management, which is not the focus of the proposed study. Similarly, Ruthi et al. conducted their research in the nonprofit sector rather than the public sector. However, the nonprofit organizations' needs related to management and organizational practices were key, indicating the importance of understanding strategies and approaches to management and organizational practices, as addressed by the present study.

Providing more specific insight into the challenges faced by the public sector, Green et al. (2016) found that the problem of replacing individuals leaving the labor force in the public sector is related to increased levels of retirement, placing strain on

succession planning. In addition, there are negative perceptions of the quality of work-life balance among the public sector. Green et al. suggested that leaders in the public sector, specifically the federal government, cannot maintain the status quo if they are to be successful. Rather, leaders must facilitate relationships and stimulate creativity among their employees, a process Green et al. described as a positive transformation in the federal government. The concept of positive transformation described by Green et al. is related to the concept of transformational leadership, the focus of the proposed study, as it encompasses the competencies and concepts needed within leadership to support outcomes in the public sector workforce. It is important to note that Green et al.'s work was not a study but a paper that included a description and analysis of problems in the public sector workforce and solutions for leadership.

Related to the concept of human capital and the leadership challenges in public service presented by Green et al. (2016), Gray and Jones (2018) conducted an exploratory study in Wales, United Kingdom, using a salutogenic model to capture the narrative of leaders in public service. The specific focus of the study was to understand the factors related to overwhelm among public service leaders, including workplace stress, and factors related to the resilience and well-being of these leaders. Gray and Jones used a purposeful sample of leaders with a snowball sampling approach, securing 68 participants. Participants indicated a need for leaders to develop self-knowledge and self-awareness and to be role models as a "resilient and well leader" (Gray & Jones, 2018, p.145) to others. The limitations identified by the researchers were related to the participation of 68 individuals, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Gray

and Jones recommended further research to include additional descriptors, practical segmentation of the descriptors, and investigation in different professions and sectors.

The findings of Gray and Jones (2018) were significant for the present study because they showed the importance of leaders in the public sector as role models for others, which creates implications for leaders as role models for potential successors to be resilient and successful in their roles. Gray and Jones's study was also relevant based on their findings that leadership is linked to both positive and negative outcomes for employees. Therefore, it is important to understand what factors contribute to both current and future leaders' resilience and well-being to establish a positive work climate. In addition, Gray and Jones described leadership as a social construction within the organizational context, which is the basis for understanding how ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving occur and reoccur within the leadership setting. The current study focused on the lived experiences of directors in the public sector on succession planning practices, this study enhanced the previous research by evaluating the perceptions of the leadership in the public sector environment.

Further connecting employee outcomes to leadership in the public sector, Ugaddan and Park (2017) studied how the quality of political and administrative leadership in the public sector could influence employee engagement in public sector organizations. The specific focus in their quantitative study was the relationship between leadership and public service motivation, including the psychological outcomes and perceptions of leadership among public employees. Ugaddan and Park also sought to determine how public service motivation mediates the influence of leadership quality

perceptions related to employee engagement. The researchers used the U.S. Merit Systems and Protection Board's 2010 Merit Principles Survey (Ugaddan & Park, 2017). Ugaddan and Park examined the survey results by conducting exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and a structural equation model to determine the association between quality of political and administrative leadership, public service motivation, and employee engagement.

Ugaddan and Park (2017) found that the quality of political and administrative leadership is positively associated with public service motivation and employee engagement. Ugaddan and Park also identified a mediating role of public service motivation on the association between political and administrative leadership quality. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that quality of leadership, specifically the quality of political and administrative leaders and public service motivation, significantly impacts employee engagement. Like Gray and Jones (2018), the findings of Ugaddan and Park had essential implications for the present study because they confirmed that leadership impacts employee outcomes, thereby reflecting the importance of ensuring quality leadership in the public sector.

Although not the focus of these Gray and Jones's (2018) or Ugaddan and Park's (2017) studies, the relationship between leadership and employee outcomes could demonstrate that leadership strategies are a determinant of leadership quality and might impact employee outcomes, including employee retention. In a cross-sectional survey of 275 nurses and midwives, Asamani et al. (2016) identified a link between leadership and

productivity in nursing and midwifery, with increased supervision and supportive leadership style linked to increased productivity.

From a survey of 503 participants, Al Harbi et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between the use of transformational leadership, a framing theory for the proposed study, and both organizational innovation and the creativity of employees. Specifically, leaders playing a mediating role are likely to yield positive outcomes in employees' psychological empowerment, support for innovation, workplace relationships, and employee learning. Because of the possibility of a relationship between leadership and employee outcomes, such as productivity, the following section will present literature related to leadership capacity in the public sector before proceeding to the research on strategies used by leaders in the public sector.

Leadership Capacity, Capability, and Development

As mentioned in the previous section, leaders in the public sector have the potential to impact employee outcomes (Gray & Jones, 2018; Hamann, 2016; Ugaddan & Park, 2017). However, due to the complexity of the public sector system, leaders face challenges in balancing the formal, top-down administrative functions alongside the informal and adaptive functions required of the public sector system for effective management (Murphy et al., 2017). The public sector includes individuals with diverse expertise, but there is limited evidence on this expertise (Kirkpatrick et al., 2017). Managers in the public sector are interested in effectively performing their roles and responsibilities, including the required leadership and human relations (Patton & Pratt, 2002). However, competent employees need training to become competent managers.

Developing competent managers by assessing training needs is especially important when preparing employees to become leaders who replace lost managers through succession planning. Training needs are also crucial to understanding job satisfaction, employee perceptions about the workplace environment, and intention to leave (Sellers et al., 2015). Furthermore, the behavior of leaders, including executive managers, in the public sector context is key to the successful implementation of change (Campbell & Evans, 2016; Zubedy, 2019). Developing the capacity of leaders through leadership development is an crucial aspect of the career and succession planning processes in the public sector (Khan & Louw, 2016). For these reasons, ensuring leadership capacity is essential for maintaining employee outcomes, including succession planning and leadership development, the specific topic of the proposed study.

A related aspect to the capacity and capability of leaders is leadership development to develop the skills needed to build their capacity and capability. Using qualitative data from 473 human resources managers and 276 top managers in Finland, Viitala et al. (2017) studied leadership development as an essential tool for human resources and senior managers, using content analysis to examine the data. Researchers have shown that leadership development is key in supporting the implementation of the organization's strategy, maintaining ongoing organizational development, and building capabilities that are essential for the future. For this reason, Viitala et al. sought to understand leadership development from the manager's perspective. The study results were concerning to the researchers, who found that top managers did not actively consider leadership or leadership development when asked to assess future human

resources challenges. Based on these findings, Viitala et al. suggested further research on the topic, with more discussion needed between academics and managers related to leadership development. The implications of Viitala et al. on the present study were that although some researchers have found leadership development to be necessary, managers and leaders might not actively consider the importance of leadership development and related factors, such as succession planning, as a challenge.

In a qualitative study, Megheirkouni (2016) investigated the factors influencing leadership development through face-to-face interviews with leaders in middle and top-level management in the for-profit sector. The purpose of the study was to understand these factors in an uncertain environment, specifically in the Syrian context and the instability caused by the Arab Spring. Megheirkouni found a relationship between differentiation and leadership development, noting that leadership development, particularly in large companies, requires alignment between leadership training and the role of managers. Megheirkouni also found that factors such as culture and social relationships had an impact on training. Lack of time and poor technology infrastructure had a negative effect on leadership training. These findings suggest a link between leadership, specifically the role of managers, and the successful implementation of leadership training, which is essential in understanding the importance of leaders related to leadership development of employees in the proposed study. However, there were limitations in application to the present study, as Megheirkouni researched the for-profit sector rather than the public sector. The current study explored the link between

leadership training and leadership development of middle managers in the public sector for leadership positions.

Linking considerations related to differences between the private and public sectors, Nahavandi and Corbett (2018) explored the reasons and consequences of leaders moving from other sectors into the public sector. The Nahavandi and Corbett paper was related to the present study with the application of leadership theory, specifically, the concept of the leadership leap to the public sector. Encouraged between one sector into the private sector, the leadership leap involves the transition of successful leaders into the public sector. However, the leadership leap faces obstacles due to the different characteristics of the public sector, which could pose a challenge to individuals entering leadership roles in the public sector. Based on these challenges, Nahavandi and Corbett suggested additional research on the topic, highlighting the importance of understanding the conditions for success for leaders transitioning into the public sector. The findings of Nahavandi and Corbett were relevant in the context of the present study because, in the process of succession planning for leadership positions, candidates from outside of the sector could receive consideration for the transition into vacant leadership positions. Therefore, it is important to understand the strategies used for succession planning and leadership development of leaders within and outside of the public sector to transition to leadership roles. This study linked to the previous research by exploring the strategies used by directors to prepare middle managers for leadership positions.

Relating the findings in leadership capacity described in this section to the public sector, Mau (2019) explained that globally, the public service sector needs to improve

leadership capacity. Mau outlined the challenges faced by governments in recruiting talent for the public service sector, which is related to the issue described in the first section of this literature review. Public service managers could use the strategy of branding to encourage new talent, particularly those with proven leadership ability. Another strategy highlighted by Mau was the leadership training and development of existing public service and growing their leadership capacity. Both strategies could serve as means of recruiting and retaining sufficient leadership capacity within the public sector, which directly links to the findings of my research study.

Mau (2019) conducted a case study analysis of a public sector branding initiative in Canada to describe the use of this strategy in the federal government. Mau's findings are significant in the context of the present study because they showed the importance of recruiting new talent into the public sector and developing the capacity of individuals within the sector. Building leadership capacity through leadership development in the public sector requires public sector leaders to grow the skills of existing employees.

An et al. (2019) addressed training in transformational and transactional leadership in the public and private sectors as a tool for increased leadership behaviors among Danish leaders. The purpose of the study was to determine whether training in these leadership styles improved leadership behaviors in practice with a focus on leader behavior rather than employee outcomes. An et al. investigated these leadership behaviors to motivate employees and increase goal attainment to yield improved employee performance. The study results were that, in the public sector, training on transformational leadership was associated with increased leadership behaviors; there

was no impact in private sector organizations. However, training on transactional

leadership was effective in increasing leadership behaviors in both the public and private

sectors. This study explored the concepts of transformational leadership and their effects

on directors that use succession planning practices for middle managers for future

leadership positions in the public sector.

As demonstrated by An et al. (2019), some researchers have focused on the

leadership skills and styles of managers. Alternately, scholars including Clarke and Higgs

(2016) have studied the practices of the organization itself in delivering leadership

training and development. Understanding both of these approaches to leadership training

and development was essential for framing the topic of the present study and

understanding the differences in leadership strategies in the public sector, as presented in

the section to follow.

Organizations can use many different approaches and practices to develop

effective leadership capability through leadership training and development (Clarke &

Higgs, 2016). The researchers analyzed multiple case studies of formal leadership

training and development in 10 organizations in sectors in the United Kingdom. Based on

this exploratory analysis, Clarke and Higgs identified various leadership training and

development strategies and philosophies used by different organizations and sectors,

including transformational leadership, heroic leadership, servant leadership, leadership

and complexity, and distributed leadership models. Clarke and Higgs found the 10

organizations' goals were related to their leadership and development goals and thereby

connected to the strategy and philosophy used by the organization.

Recognizing the multiple different strategies is important because, as indicated by the theoretical framework, the focus for the present study was transformational leadership, shown to be effective in the public sector (An et al., 2019; Clarke & Higgs, 2016). With the effects of training on leadership strategies described, in addition to leadership capacity, capability, and development, the following section presents leadership strategies used in the public sector. Due to a lack of research on this topic, much of the literature focuses on potential strategies rather than practical implementation.

Leadership Strategies

This section presents literature related to leadership strategies, including succession planning and leadership development. One strategy used in the public sector is the 360-degree feedback instrument through the use of the three "E" (Enlighten, Encourage, and Enable) change model (Nowack, 2015). Nowack described the 360-degree feedback strategy, which includes the three "E" model, as a means to help leaders in the public sector increase success in executive coaching, performance evaluation, talent management, and succession planning. Nowack made recommendations for implementing best practices and integrating feedback with change readiness to increase the likelihood of success for leaders using this strategy. As this was an informative article rather than a study, Nowack did not have independent or dependent variables nor used a methodology.

Nowack (2015) was relevant to the present study because the author presented a useful strategy found to improve outcomes in succession planning, performance, and other factors among employees in the public sector. The key premise of 360-degree

feedback is to foster a workforce willing to give feedback and develop an organization

with leaders able to accept that feedback. The activities associated with each phase are:

- Enlighten: Assessment and feedback process

- Encourage: Readiness to change, goal implementation intentions, skill-

  building

- Enable: Track progress and social support to reinforce learning, relapse

  prevention training, evaluation

Nowack (2015) explained that effective feedback from the workforce allows an

organization to make changes. Nowack suggested that the three "E" change model can

help to improve outcomes in distal (behavioral change) rather than proximal (insight)

outcomes only. Despite describing 360-feedback as a potential strategy for leaders in the

public sector, Nowack did not include a description of the application of the strategy or

results. The present study addressed this gap by obtaining a better understanding of which

strategies were effective from the perspectives of public sector leaders based on their

experiences in applying such strategies.

Rohr (2016) demonstrated how managers could use job descriptions as a tool for

recruitment and selection, compensation, evaluation, training and development, health

and safety, and succession planning. In contrast with Nowack (2015), Rohr presented the

job description as a strategy to improve the human resources competitiveness of an

organization beginning with the hiring process rather than with employee management.

Rohr noted that job descriptions could provide useful guidance for planning, leading,

organization, controlling, and staffing, thereby reducing the complexities and challenges

of management. The text presented existing literature with a conceptual framework

related to the potential use of job descriptions for improved management. Rohr found

that, based on the literature, job descriptions can be a practical and immediate tool for

managers and particularly useful for inexperienced managers to supervise employees.

However, like the Nowack (2015) paper, Rohr identified as a limitation the lack of actual

data to demonstrate the effectiveness of managers using job descriptions as a tool. For

this reason, additional research is needed regarding the practical application of this

strategy.

Although a key component of succession planning and important for the

sustainability and success of an organization, leadership development is complex,

especially in the public sector (Harvey et al., 2019; Kumar Betchoo, 2016; Manzoor et

al., 2018; Serrat, 2017; Tebbe et al., 2017). Despite the intricacy involved in leadership

development in the public sector and the diversity of strategies and approaches, Kumar

Betchoo (2016) highlighted some general trends for developing future leaders, drawing

on the experiences of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

(OECD) member countries. The general strategies are (a) define a competence profile for

future leaders, (b) identify and select potential future leaders, (c) encourage mentoring

and training of potential leaders, and (d) develop a comprehensive and sustainable

leadership development program.

Kumar Betchoo (2016) also mentioned several leadership strategies for competent

public managers, describing these as competencies for effective leadership, the topic of

the previous section of this literature review. However, these competencies merit

descriptions in the current section as they reflect strategies to be used by leaders within the public sector.

- Inspiring a shared vision among management, employees, and relevant stakeholders

- Strategic thinking

- Customer focus

- Decision-making and accountability for decisions

- Developing organizational talent

- Delegation to and empowerment of subordinates

- Creating and leading teams

- Leading by example

- Personal strength and maturity in decisions, including command and direction as leaders

- Effective communication

- Resilience

- Innovation and creativity

- Transparency and accountability

- Sound technical knowledge in addition to strategic management knowledge

- Ability to mentor others, including sharing competencies and developing future leaders

Kumar Betchoo found several competencies and strategies used by leaders in the public

sector essential for their success and for preparing future leaders for succession. There

was also the potential for other leaders within the sector to identify additional strategies

possibly identified in the proposed study.

Thus far, the literature review has presented leadership strategies in the public

sector. Researchers have found that organizational change in the public sector, even with

transformational leadership and other strategies, could encounter bureaucratic structures,

which can reduce the potential for change and limit employee participation in

implementing the change (van der Voet, 2016). The motivation and engagement of public

service employees also play a role in the effectiveness of transformational leadership and

potentially the impacts of leadership strategies used by managers in the public sector

(Agrawal, 2015; Bottomley et al., 2015). Specifically, in the public sector, employee

engagement positively impacts employee performance, work ethic, career development,

and benefits and could yield positive outcomes on organizational engagement, such as

commitment to the organization (Agrawal, 2015). Such barriers merited consideration in

the context of the present study to understand the extent to which leadership practices

may or may not be effective in the public sector context.

Gap in Literature

The overarching research question was:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of public sector department directors who use

succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the

public sector?

Two subquestions were also of interest to delve more deeply into the leaders' views of their succession planning experiences.

SQ1: How do you identify potential future directors to groom for leadership positions?

SQ2: What career development programs or methods do you recommend would help other department directors prepare middle managers in their organizations for leadership positions?

This qualitative phenomenology study addressed the gaps in the literature.

Gap 1: Management Style

The first gap was the lack of research examining a director's management style effective for public sector succession planning for middle managers. Organizational leadership is not simple, and many leaders fall short of requirements. Failure as a leader has significant consequences, such as high employee turnover, low-quality service due to lack of expertise, tarnished organizational image, and authoritative leadership, creating serious problems in the organization (Xu et al., 2021). Using the transformational leadership style is a strategy to address these concerns, building values and trust in individuals (Bass, 1990). Succession planning in the public sector should not be an isolated system; rather, it is an integral component of the human resources process for which directors should take the lead. Literature indicates that transformational leadership is a component of succession planning.

Transformational leadership requires providing subordinates with continuous support to perform more than expected and creating a possible path for succession

planning (Kagai, 2015). A transformational leader focuses on making changes within the organization to produce a competitive advantage (Arshad et al., 2016). In a survey from the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia in collaboration with Pricewaterhouse Coopers Malaysia, 83% of respondents viewed leadership as the top criterion in determining the next successors of any organization (Lim, 2019). Ahmad et al. (2017) conducted a study of 576 respondents from 21 Malaysian public sector organizations, finding that leaders' inspirational motivation had a significant relationship with succession plan implementation. Transformational leaders value collective purpose, open communication, liberty, justice, and equality, and developing followers on moral values. Leadership focused on governance rather than establishing rapport and relationships is less likely to succeed in organizations (Simic, 1999).

Previous scholars also found a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and a succession planning program (Ahmad et al., 2017). To date, researchers have overlooked succession planning in the public sector (Schultz & Dachapalli, 2016), with only a few studies of the topic among nurses (Groves, 2017), nonprofit organizations (Froelich et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2013), police officers (Rowley, 2013), and librarians (Weare, 2015). There is limited scholarship on leadership styles and succession planning (Ahmad et al., 2017). Hence, a study identifying and analyzing the effective management style of a public sector director was necessary for public sector organizations to address succession planning practices for middle management positions.

Finding 1: Relationship Building

A key finding of this study centered around the theme of management style was relationship-building. Relationship-building encompasses providing strong communications, giving praise, and working through issues. Directors should have frequent contact with their managers, recognizing every achievement as a means of motivation. The finding best aligns with organizational citizenship behaviors and leader–member exchange (Budur & Poturak, 2021). Relationship-building links the theme to individualized attention and inspirational motivation. Relationship-building serves as a form of individualized attention and a conduit for creating inspirational motivation.

Finding 2: Motivating, Inspiring, and Empowering

Another key was the need for directors to motivate, inspire, and empower their managers. This study's findings showed that if directors wanted their managers to reach their potential and advance to the next level, they needed to motivate and inspire managers to build their confidence. Verbal motivation ties into the idea that transformational leadership can drive motivation in general, including intrinsic motivation (Huang et al., 2021). Therefore, this study's specific focus on verbal motivation was a refinement of the literature, focusing on a specific type of motivation. Additionally, verbal motivation aligned strongly with the inspirational motivation dimension of transformational leadership. Bass (1990) developed transformational leadership theory focusing on the leadership of U.S. presidents, most of whom were charismatic orators; hence, the focus on verbal motivation aligned with the foundation of the transformational leadership theory.

In this study, empowerment came from directors providing energy or words of encouragement so that managers feel positive, valuable, and essential to the organization. The finding aligned with two components of transformational leadership theory and the dimension of individualized attention. Empowerment is a form of motivation.

Gap 2: Leadership Capabilities

The second gap in the literature was the lack of examination of leadership capabilities of middle managers in the public sector. With the help of their Human Resources (HR) departments, directors need to find ways to help middle managers reach their goals and fulfill their potential. Research shows that creating internships, job shadowing opportunities, and coaching are ways to do so. A director delegating authority on a high-profile initiative is an example of increasing a manager's leadership capabilities while providing director experience.

Kim and Patel (2017) indicated that the more employees practice, the more capable they are of improving their job performance. O'Connell and Gibbons (2016) validated that there are many ways to create effective service programs in organizations. Calareso (2013) found that by taking time to nurture and train employees through leadership training, leaders improve employees' capabilities. Furthermore, Calareso viewed staff development as building employees' leadership capabilities. Drysdale et al. (2014) explained that high-leaders challenge coworkers' thinking, increasing the administrative team's ability to develop a viable talent pool and strategy for succession planning. Chambers (2013) indicated that middle managers lack practical talents when the organization is ready to promote effective leaders. Ascencio and Mujkic (2016)

confirmed that to increase agency performance, supervisors should devote more time to improving higher management expertise. Directors need to implement a succession plan to guide employees in developing the experience to become effective leaders.

Finding 3: Developing Skill Set

Finding 3 was the lack of a succession planning program available to identify and develop middle managers who have the motivation and potential to be leaders in the public sector. Establishing succession planning ensures that an organization is prepared and does not lose valuable leadership following a departure. A succession planning program helps to prepare managers to become directors. Additionally, it allows organizations to prepare for a director's retirement by identifying common obstacles and how to overcome them. Research has shown that establishing leadership programs gives managers hope for new opportunities and builds trust and respect with the director and the organization (Mahmoud et al., 2019). This finding links to the transformational leadership dimension of individualized attention, which is the extent to which directors develop a personal relationship with their followers. Individual-level relationships can undergird other important leadership strategies (Bass, 1990). Additionally, individualized attention fosters a stronger relationship, allowing transformational leaders to become familiar with their followers' strengths, weaknesses, and specific skills (Koveshnikov & Ehrnrooth, 2018). This knowledge helps leverage followers' abilities within the organization.

Finding 4: Delegating Authority

Finding 4 relates to a director's limited opportunity to delegate authority to the middle manager for exposure and hands-on experience. Delegating authority allows the middle manager to think critically about business processes and consequences. Scholars have not explicitly applied delegation of authority to transformational leadership. However, Asbari et al. (2020) attested that a common criticism of transformational leadership is that it is elitist and undemocratic. Directors' experience-based perspectives differ from the researchers literature but align with transformational leadership theory. More specifically, Directors' perspectives align with the intellectual stimulation dimension of transformational leadership theory. Finding 4 represents a new contribution to the literature.

Gap 3: Talent Management

The third literature gap was the lack of talent management programs with succession planning that public sector directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. The public sector often faces talent drain (Vladescu, 2012); therefore, talent management as part of human resource management is essential for achieving organizational success. Talent management should align with the organization's strategy, ensure equal opportunities, and maintain diversity, notably based on employees' recognized performance and potential (Kozjek & Franca, 2020). Public sector organizations must establish a carefully designed talent management system. Talent management is a critical strategic objective for the public sector to set goals, hire

the right people in the right jobs, and have documented plans and strategies to bridge future gaps.

Researchers defining talent management have emphasized the role of talent to achieve performance, profit, and sustainable competitive advantage (Collings, 2014). According to Christensen et al. (2007), the public sector environment is complex due to the significant impact of institutional mechanisms. Therefore, the organizational environment is a necessary consideration when studying talent management in the public sector. However, despite a growing awareness of environmental impact in shaping the employment relationship and human resource management (Paauwe, 2004; Wright & Nishii, 2013), academic researchers have often overlooked talent management.

In many studies of talent management in the public sector, researchers fail to use the external and internal organizational environment to explain how organizations conceptualize and implement talent management (Gallardo-Gallardo & Thunnissen, 2016). Because organizations depend on human capital, Asrar et al. (2018) researched and tested talent management requirements, selection, training and development, skill gap and shortage, and employee retention. Organizations should invest in talented employees over other priorities because there is no substitution for human capital or skillful managers. Getting the right people at the right place with the right skills and engaged in the right activities could help the organization achieve its targeted goals. Most organizational leaders focus on growing their talented managers through training and development programs.

This study's findings extended Harker et al. (2016), identifying talent management as the process of improving business to meet organizational goals. Church et al. (2015) acknowledged that talent management is important when leaders develop promotable employees. De Meuse and Dai (2013) focused on effective business practices because directors should implement succession plans and talent management practices to guarantee an adequate talent pipeline and satisfy future leadership requirements.

There is little empirical research on specific talent management for middle managers in the public sector. Several scholars called for more research on talent management in various countries and industry sectors and suggested contextualizing talent management in theoretical frameworks and research designs (Meyers & van Woerkom, 2014; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012; Thunnissen et al., 2013). There is a need for a deeper understanding to explore why organizations have adopted a soft inclusive or hard exclusive talent management paradigm and determine what influenced adopting an inclusive or more segmented people management approach in the public sector. Therefore, the present study included evaluating the talent management practices public sector directors use that will benefit succession planning to identify middle managers for advancement into director positions.

Finding 5: Training Opportunities

A key finding from the theme of talent management was the lack of training opportunities available to middle managers to acquire the skills necessary to become department directors. Understanding managers' strengths and weaknesses is crucial to building their management capabilities; thus, directors should regularly evaluate

employees and training plans to increase knowledge and experience. Researchers (e.g., Andriani et al., 2018; Buil et al., 2019) have linked training to trust and improved performance, supporting the relationship between transformational leadership and job performance. Therefore, directors' experiences and perceptions of training as crucial for improving employee outcomes within transformational leadership align with the literature on the benefits of transformational leadership. Ahmad et al. (2017) stated, "Training is essential in reinforcing the trust between the employee and the leader" (p. 9). Accordingly, training relates to the transformational dimension of individualized attention. Therefore, the theme of talent management aligns with the literature and the theory of transformational leadership.

Finding 6: Recruitment and Retention Strategies

The lack of recruitment and retention strategies for middle managers was another key finding from the present study. When a director leaves the organization, the middle manager should assume responsibility so the organization does not lose momentum. Strategies for identifying the organization's potential next director increase director–manager trust and improve manager performance. This finding also aligned with training opportunities in talent management gap. Training is linked to trust and improved performance. Recruitment and retention also align with the benefits of transformational leadership: keeping knowledge and skills in the organization and ensuring business sustainability. Recruitment and retention fit into the dimension of individualized attention in the transformational leadership theory.

Summary and Conclusions

Chapter 2 presented the research problem and purpose, followed by the literature relevant to the conceptual framework. After the literature search strategy, there was a discussion of the conceptual framework based on Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Bass and Avolio's (2004) leadership model. The final section included the gaps in the literature and a summarization of the major themes identified in the study. This study focused on directors' practices for middle management succession planning in the public sector. Six sections comprised the literature review: human capital, leadership, and organizational structure and performance; succession planning in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors; human capital, leadership, and organizational structure and performance in the public sector; leadership capacity, capability, and development; and leadership strategies.

The literature review included several studies on succession planning in the public sector specific to leadership. However, researchers focused on leadership and succession planning in the public sector in general rather than the specific practices helpful in preparing middle managers for leadership positions. More specifically, there is a lack of evidence about which strategies public sector leaders use related to succession planning and leadership development (Monareng & Dunn, 2016; Pita et al., 2016). What is known is that leaders' behavior impacts employee outcomes (Agrawal, 2015; An et al., 2019). Employee outcomes are essential in the public sector, linked to public service outcomes with a proven association between leadership and service delivery (Gautam, 2018; Khumalo, 2019; Zepeda et al., 2012). This qualitative hermeneutic study was an

exploration of the lived experiences of public sector directors who practice succession planning for middle managers. The findings of this study filled the essential gaps in the literature on directors' effective management styles, lack of a plan or strategy to assess middle managers' leadership capabilities, and lack of a talent management program for middle managers. Chapter 3 includes a discussion on the qualitative hermeneutic approach used in this study to explore, understand, and interpret directors' experiences in a specified context.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the succession planning practices public sector directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in Texas. This approach was apt to obtain a detailed and rich understanding of the experiences of public sector directors from the perspectives of transformational leaders who practice succession planning programs. A hermeneutic phenomenological design was appropriate to detail the experiences of transformational directors and the practices useded in succession planning (see Laverty, 2003). Interviews elicited the meanings and understandings of the phenomenon of what public sector directors practice to prepare middle managers for future leadership positions. The findings of this study could advance social change, providing information leading city directors to promote middle managers and prepare them to fill key leadership positions. The implications of positive social change included improvements to practices for succession planning by city directors who use these findings. City directors could also enhance employees' job performance and productivity, increasing the number of successful leaders in the public sector who can positively affect city communities.

Research Design and Rationale

I used one research question to explore the lived experiences of the public sector directors as they use succession planning practices to prepare middle manager for leadership positions: What are the lived experiences of department managers who use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector? The study focused on how leaders, such as directors in the public sector,

use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for these positions following retirements or resignations. In their responses to the interview questions, the leaders provided information about succession planning in terms of how organizations prepare for and replace departing managers and leaders critical to the organization's continued and future success. The planning process includes how the organization's leaders identify and recruit successors, manage transitions from one leader to another, and develop successors. The data provide a greater understanding of the lived experiences of managers and leaders, identifying high-potential middle managers and including them in training and development for future management roles. Succession planning ensures operational continuity, helping the organization to sustain its initiatives and performance as it strives to meet its mission in the face of turnover.

I considered quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches to determine the best method to answer the research question. The mixed methods approach requires qualitative data to support quantitative information and vice versa (Pickard, 2013). This approach was not the preferred one because the research question is concerned with the participants' lived experiences. A quantitative component for statistical information would not have clarified the responses about the transformational city director and succession planning phenomenon.

Qualitative methodology was the most appropriate approach to answer the research question. How leaders prepare middle managers for future leadership positions and identify high-potential middle managers to train and develop for future leadership positions were equally significant components of this study. A qualitative researcher

typically uses information from participants with a guiding conceptual framework to answer the research question (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). I considered various designs in the qualitative tradition, including grounded theory, ethnography, case study, narrative, and phenomenology. Grounded theory is not built upon a theory or conceptual framework or based on the traditional aspects of research (Pickard, 2013). Grounded theorists use study results to develop a theory (Walsh et al., 2015). The researcher does not specify a particular theory or framework because of the evolution of a developing theory based on the data explained by grounded theory seminal researchers. With this study based on the conceptual framework of succession planning strategies, grounded theory was not an appropriate qualitative design. Ethnography is a qualitative design suited for studies of a particular culture or group (Maier & Thalmann, 2012). The case study design is an approach to understand distinctions about a group (Yin, 2014) and was also the wrong choice for this study.

I selected the phenomenological design because the research question evolved from the lived experiences of managers and leaders with succession planning practices used to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. Phenomenological researchers explore the conscious experiences of the participant from the first-person point of view (Heinonen, 2015). Phenomenological studies require the collection and analysis of participants' lived experiences as they relate to the understanding of and meaning they give to a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological design met the research goals of this study.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in a qualitative study involves exploring a phenomenon by collecting data, then reviewing and validating the emerging information (Anderson, 2014; Cleary et al., 2014). As the researcher, I adhered to all the guidelines in the data collection process. Although I have worked in the public sector for 20 years, I have no direct relationships with any of the participants I selected for this study. I have considerable experience in employee succession planning because I serve in a leadership position and manage employees using succession planning practices to prepare them for the next level in management. I conducted this study in the South-Central region of the United States, where I have indirect relationships with executive leaders in the public sector. Although I do not work for any of the executive leaders who participated in this study, I am familiar with the fundamental concepts of practices used for succession planning.

I followed the ethical standards mandated by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for doctoral studies. As a researcher, I must also adhere to the principles outlined in The Belmont Report (United States. National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). The purpose of The Belmont Report is to protect participants in research studies (Oquendo et al., 2004). Additionally, I remained unbiased throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Christie et al. (2015) explained the researcher's role as collecting, analyzing, and validating data without bias. According to Edwards and Brannelly (2017), mitigating personal interests and predispositions is a challenge for qualitative researchers; if ignored,

biases could inhibit the research process (Robinson, 2014). Ethical research practice leads to validity, quality, and bias reduction (Loui, 20167). I collected raw data that were unbiased and not supportive of preexisting assumptions concerning the phenomenon viewed through a personal lens. I attempted to remain impartial despite my personal beliefs, setting aside my opinions and judgments.

Data collection entailed conducting semistructured interviews with executive leaders in the public sector and reviewing their organizations' standard operating procedures related to succession planning, if applicable. Through my interactions with the participants, I documented interview notes in a reflective journal to maintain participant confidentiality. I adhered to the interview protocol (see Appendix C) to ensure consistency in data collection throughout the process. I audio recorded each interview with the participants' permission to improve clarity and accuracy, mitigate bias, and increase validity and reliability.

Methodology

The qualitative phenomenological approach was appropriate to answer one overarching research question and two subquestions. The aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of public sector city directors' succession planning practices when preparing middle managers for leadership positions. The overarching research question was as follows:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of public sector department directors who use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector?

Additional questions enabled a more in-depth exploration of the leaders' views of their succession planning experiences.

SQ1: How do you identify potential future directors to groom for leadership positions?

SQ2: What career development programs or methods do you recommend would help other department directors prepare middle managers in their organizations for leadership positions?

A goal of phenomenological research is to obtain complex, vivid descriptions of a human experience as lived in the context of time, space, and relationships (Finlay, 2009; van Manen, 1994). Through careful exploration, a researcher seeks to understand events through the participants' lenses. The data are detailed, narrative participant accounts of their knowledge and experience with a phenomenon (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Phenomenological researchers seek to understand the world in which the experience occurred as described by the participants. In this study, I presented an understanding of each participant's world and experiences as obtained through individual interviews.

Participant Selection Logic

The goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon as investigated in a particular context (van Manen, 1997). Purposeful selection was appropriate to select information-rich cases for detailed study (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002), obtaining participants who could illuminate the phenomenon of succession planning to prepare for future leaders. The participants were 17 executive leaders in the public sector who practice transformational leadership

when employing succession planning with middle managers. Purposive sampling is consistent with interpretive paradigm research (Llewellyn et al., 1999). Sample size is not a determinant for a qualitative study's validity; however, it must be sufficient to answer the research questions comprehensively. Therefore, the sample must be large enough to establish saturation.

It is essential to recruit enough participants in the target population to justify a study's findings (Gentles et al., 2016). For this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I sought to recruit 25 participants who met the selection criteria. To take part in the study, participants must have been leaders who worked in the public sector in South Central Texas and used successful practices to improve succession planning for their middle managers. Additional eligibility requirements included that all participants were currently in an executive leadership position in the public sector or had worked in the public sector in an executive leadership position. When selecting participants, I ensured their characteristics aligned with the overarching research question and that individuals understood the purpose of the study and the research goals. The participants shared characteristics, including the successful application of leadership responsibilities, substantial knowledge, and contextual diversity about effective practices used in succession planning for middle managers in the public sector.

I conducted a Google search to locate assistant city managers in South Central Texas, using public websites to find contact information. Next, I contacted the assistant city managers to request contact information for prospective participants who met the specified criteria for the study. I asked permission from the assistant city managers to

access the prospective participants using a letter of cooperation. I asked the assistant city managers to serve as the primary approving authority because of their roles as executive officers who supervise directors.

Acceptable participants are key to conducting qualitative research and achieving a working relationship (Dennis, 2014). Interviewing participants in their business setting usually provides a level of comfort that supports working relationships (Lancaster, 2016; Yoon & Bono, 2016). I established an initial working relationship with the prospective participants using email for communication. According to Dennis (2014), connecting with study participants and maintaining a working relationship are strategies that support open communication and rapport. All participants selected met the eligibility criteria aligned to the research question. Supporting working relationships were open-ended interview questions to explore participants' knowledge of the business phenomenon.

Instrumentation

I created and distributed an interview protocol consisting of three components. The first component included prompts to establish rapport and ensure the participants felt comfortable sharing their beliefs honestly, knowing their information would remain confidential. The second component consisted of the interview questions. If the participant was unsure of the meaning of a question, I clarified with further explanation. If I needed clarification on a participant's response, the process allowed me to probe any of their answers that seemed unclear. This was part of the evolutionary process of collecting data instead of formulating another set of questions. The closing statement was

the third component of the interview protocol to solicit any general comments a participant wanted to add.

The instrumentation included a recording from Microsoft Teams meetings. I tested the equipment to ensure proper operation to capture information from the participants. The procedure ensured accuracy and enabled me to review the transcript for further analysis. I took field notes to represent my reflections on each interview to recap or document points from the participants.

Field Test

Conducting a field test ensured the interview questions aligned with the research question. I emailed an invitation (see Appendix A) to four qualitative research experts. The experts received an abbreviated proposal that included the problem statement, purpose statement, research question, and interview questions. After their review, the experts could offer advice for improving the study. I received responses from three of the experts within 8 working days.

The first expert suggested revising the interview questions to reflect more of the participants' experiences. The second qualitative expert recommended revising Questions 3, 4, and 7 and using "you" or "your" to reflect more of the participants' lived experiences. This expert also noted that the original questions asked for abstract opinions about succession planning rather than personal experiences. The third expert suggested including more about the participants' "experience" in a few questions. Another idea was to add aspects of transformational leadership to identify the themes related to the four I's

of transformational leadership. I thanked the three qualitative experts for their

participation in the field test. The revised interview questions are in Appendix B.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I intentionally selected the participants for this study based on their expertise as

managers and leaders in the public. The participants were transformational leaders in the

public sector who had personal experience following succession planning practices for

future leaders. I emailed a letter to potential participants, explaining the purpose of the

study. The email contained information about what participation required, from the

beginning of the process through any follow-up interviews necessary to clarify

information.

I asked those who agreed to participate to sign a form acknowledging their

consent. Once I received the form, I contacted the participant by email or telephone to

schedule an interview via web-conferencing software, such as Microsoft Teams, a viable

tool used in phenomenological interviews (see Carter, 2012; Clancy, 2013; DeFelice &

Janesick, 2015). I ensured the participants' comfort and mitigated any anxiety or privacy

concerns. The participants were free to withdraw at any time for any reason.

The interview process began by engaging with the participant, creating a

comfortable environment of trust. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes,

depending on what information they chose to provide in response to each question. I

recorded the interviews with the participants' permission. Using Moustakas's (1994)

phenomenological model, I separated myself from previous knowledge of the succession

planning phenomenon by bracketing. I also listened attentively to the participants' lived

experiences regarding their succession planning practices, withholding any preconceived beliefs. During the interviews, I asked probing questions in response to participants' statements so they could elaborate and provide richer descriptions of their lived experiences.

I transcribed the interviews using NVivo software. NVivo helped with organizing and storing initial phrases and sentences that stood out in the transcripts and were relevant to answering the research questions. Reviewing the transcripts showed how often similar phrases and sentences appeared, allowing patterns in the data to emerge. Linking these meaning clusters enabled organizing the themes from participants' experiences. This process allowed me to identify and cluster themes as exhaustively as possible from the participants' experiences through their thorough, repeated, and rich narratives (see Heidegger, 1927/2010). Participants exited the study after answering all interview questions. Although the participants could discontinue their participation at any time and for any reason, none did.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis began with transcribing the interview recordings, followed by phenomenological reduction, a process that gives meaning and structure to information (Bevan, 2014). I analyzed the data as suggested by Moustakas (1994), using a modified van Kaam method to represent the insights and the essence of experiences for the leaders. As I read the transcripts, I noted the participants' expressions as they related their experiences and underlined the keywords for each in their transcripts.

Individual words and phrases underwent analysis and coding, creating categories and patterns using a systematic approach to establish a phenomenological analysis of data. I continued with the analysis with clustering to reach the comprehensive meaning through an iterative procedure that entailed going over each participant's transcript to identify similar words and phrases to categorize commonalities for themes and patterns of the ideas (see Moustakas, 1994). I contextualized the categories from the interviews and developed a composite summary of all observed categories. Next, I used the words in the category to create themes and properties from the participants' language to provide support for conclusions and answer the research question.

I noted repeated words and phrases when reading each transcript line by line. The identification process of open coding began with identifying keywords or phrases in transcripts similar across all participants. I identified the keywords and verified them as concepts, systematically color-coding them to develop various themes and properties. The properties underwent double coding, with the first color representing the theme and the second color representing the property. For example, a theme of succession planning practice (SPM) was coded in pink, with the property under SPM, succession planning strategy (SPS), coded in green.

The concepts functioned as the themes, with the data analyzed within either a group or specific perspective based on the influence of the keywords and phrases when designating each as a property or theme. They were within a thematic framework, with similarities of the comments determining the categories that became themes and properties. Each theme and property received definitions generated from the interview

transcripts. Upon establishing the themes and properties, I used the participants' transcripts as supporting data.

The language of interviews is not a literal interpretation of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The concepts become themes for the themes and properties considered as ideas, visions, and possible projections of what the participants share. The data interpreted through the participants' values and beliefs and sorted into themes and properties relate to or answer the research question. According to Marshall and Rossman (2014), qualitative interpretations are not determined by how often a keyword or phrase appears but become a conceptualization of and a meaning attached to the words and phrases shared by the respondents. I read and reread the transcripts until I no longer found anything new, which is when I determined that saturation had occurred, and the themes and properties created were the result and analysis of the data.

Discrepant cases that emerge in the process of creating the themes that came out of themes and properties from the data are those recognized as specific to an individual participant who might have opposed or taken another position regarding the conceptual understanding of the data interpretation. I identified the discrepant data as separate themes to represent that a participant had a different perspective of an interview question. It is essential to acknowledge and recognize the views of participants with different perspectives.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The qualitative method has tenets of rigor based on the trustworthiness of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). There are four components of qualitative trustworthiness:

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Validity and reliability in the qualitative research framework are equivalent to the

credibility and trustworthiness of the participants and the methods used for data

collection (Cope, 2014). There was the purposeful selection of participants based on my

knowledge of their employment and work experience. The individuals were considered

credible sources of information, and I accepted their responses without question (see

Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

Credibility

Credibility comes from multiple perspectives, including participant selection in

purposeful sampling, researcher bias, and the interview process. The participants were

responsible for implementing an organizational function with middle managers and had

experience with successful succession planning practices, which established them as

experts. Additionally, I requested verifiable documentation that they are directors or

leaders in the public sector by asking for their position title at the beginning the

interview.

According to Morse (2015), qualitative research credibility procedures strengthen

dependability and their relationships to the process of triangulation. I used a

phenomenological research design with interviews as the only source of data. Therefore,

triangulation was not applicable to the data analysis process in this study. Saturation

occurs when the data yield no new information and themes become repetitive (Fusch &

Ness, 2015; Rowlands et al., 2016).

Transferability

The individuals who read the study determine transferability to their situations or individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To improve the transferability of the findings, the collected data guided the values placed on the rich description of the phenomenon of directors' lived experiences with succession planning practices for middle managers in the public sector. Clarifying participants' views was through their demographics data and roles in the organization, providing a rich description and variation from the member selections. The interview setting with each participant ensured that the research data provided transferability for other industries after this study.

Dependability

Constructing dependability in a qualitative study involves noting the current or changing circumstances while studying a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). van Manen (1990) stated that participants' knowledge reflected in their conversations with a researcher is the foundation of dependability. The depth of participants' knowledge adds a rich perspective to understand their lived experiences, contributing to the dependability of the data (Kafle, 2013). The interview was the only source of data for this study, so the intensity of participants' lived experiences shared during interviews in real time provided a depth of understanding to create dependability (see Kafle, 2013; McConnell-Henry et al., 2011).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a process by which researchers articulate and record their thoughts and present the findings to establish objectivity (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

To assist with identifying similar words and concepts, a researcher uses a process of thematic development, reflecting on and repeatedly reviewing interview transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). I listened to the audio recordings while reading the transcripts to establish confirmability.

Reflexivity and confirmability require self-awareness during data collection. Mitigating research bias entailed bracketing, writing a statement of what I believed about succession planning and the practices used in the public sector for middle managers. My reflections concerning this statement showed that my background and beliefs did not interfere with data collection. Using bracketing helped to mitigate the influence of personal experience on the participants and the results.

I reviewed my field notes while reading the transcripts, documenting similarities among the participants to support confirmability. The field notes consisted of my observations during each participant's interview, which I wrote down immediately afterward. The notes also included nonverbal cues, including body language, tone of voice, pauses, or hesitation. I remained attentive to the participants to ensure I captured their perspectives.

I maintained an audit trail to document the steps of the study using thick, rich description. The audit trail was a means for me to mitigate researcher bias and supported confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail contained a description of how the data evolved from the commonality of participants' remarks (see Ben-Ari & Enosh, 2011). I documented the steps of reading the transcripts, developing the conceptualized themes and properties for data analysis. I established an objective relationship between

interview data and the findings by analyzing transcripts for emerging themes to ensure confirmability, as described by Cope (2014).

Ethical Procedures

To ensure ethical practices for the protection of human participants, I secured the approval of Walden University IRB before participant selection. Assigning alphanumeric codes in place of participants' names preserved confidentiality. Each participant signed an informed consent form that included the purpose of the study, risks, time commitment, interview process, benefits of the study, the lack of compensation for participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. When making the initial contact, I ensured the participants understand the concept of informed consent. All collected data are stored on a USB drive stored in a locked cabinet. Pursuant to IRB requirements, I will destroy the archived USB drive and all field notes 5 years following publication of the research.

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Summary

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In Chapter 3, I presented the qualitative method and the hermeneutic phenomenological design to answer the research question. The criteria for participant selection related to leadership and succession planning, as the problem of a department director responsible for middle managers in the public sector, were the impetus for selection. Additionally, I described the data collection method, data analysis procedures, and the structure chosen to organize the data and create concepts that will become the findings of the study. All data remained secure, free of any information that would identify the participants.

The data analysis results provided the foundation for Chapter 4, which presents how the findings answered the research question. The findings included properties, themes, definitions for each property, and transcripts and field notes from each participant interview.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public sector directors who practice succession planning to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. Public sector directors' insights showed how their succession planning practices affect middle managers' advancement into director-level leadership positions in the public sector. Understanding these experiences could affect the design and implementation of succession planning in public sector organizations. There was one overarching research question:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of public sector department directors who use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector?

There were two subquestions to gain more detailed insight into the research.

SQ1: How do you identify potential future directors to groom for leadership positions?

SQ2: What career development programs or methods do you recommend would help other department directors prepare middle managers in their organizations for leadership positions?

This study's findings came from the lived experiences of 17 public sector directors with a minimum of 3 years of experience in the public sector environment. The objective of this study was to uncover directors' lived experiences of succession planning practices in the public sector. Three major themes emerged from the participants' lived experiences and answered the research questions: management style, leadership

capabilities, and talent management. Chapter 4 includes a description of the field test, study procedures, study setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and study findings. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Field Test

I conducted a field test to determine the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the interview questions. Field testing in a phenomenology study can indicate potential issues with reliability, validity, and generalizability (Beck et al., 1994). Three Walden University doctoral-level professors with experience in different research methods assisted in testing the efficacy of the interview questions to determine if they were easily understandable, broad enough to elicit sufficiently rich and thick information, and appropriately aligned with the research questions.

The field test participants received the interview questions, problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions via email to assess the interview questions' relevance and applicability. Participants were to assess the alignment between the research questions and eight open-ended semistructured interview questions and offer feedback and suggestions for improvement. I revised the original interview questions based on their feedback.

Research Setting

Gaining access to participants was an essential and challenging part of the research due to the availability of the director once the initial contact was made. A list of all public service directors and their contact information was freely available on each city's website. The first contact with potential participants occurred through email with

an explanation of the study and a request to participate. After responding to the initial invitation, participants received an official invitation with the consent form and a request to respond with the words "I consent." Upon receipt of the consent, I scheduled a mutually acceptable time and date for the interview.

The interviews occurred virtually. I audio recorded the conversations using the Microsoft Teams application and a backup smartphone. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. I dressed professionally and was mindful of the participant's time and comfort. Before the interview began, I asked participants if they had any questions and reiterated that the study was confidential, with their names, place of employment, and other identifying information to remain anonymous. I listened carefully and watched for nonverbal cues to create the best working relationship and elicit the necessary information. I began each interview by asking permission to start recording and posing preliminary questions, such as length of time as a director, length of time working in the public sector, and what field managed in the public sector. Recording all interviews enabled verbatim transcription, eliminating the need for follow-up interviews. I thanked each participant for agreeing to participate in the study.

Demographics

The participants were directors that were employed in the public sector. All participants had bachelor's degrees and master's degrees. Eight participants were male, nine were female; they ranged in age from 46 years to 65 years old. One participant was retiring on the same day of the scheduled interview. One participant had been retired for 7 months. Fifteen participants continue to work in a public sector organization.

Participants' years of experience as a director in the public sector range from 4 years to

28 years. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric identifier from P1 to P17 to

protect their identities.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Years as director	Age
P1	Female	4	55
P2	Male	18	63
P3	Female	15	59
P4	Female	8	47
P5	Female	17	56
P6	Female	20	58
P7	Male	23	65
P8	Female	28	54
P9	Female	8	63
P10	Male	26	65
P11	Male	13	64
P12	Female	17	52
P13	Male	6	48
P14	Male	16	55
P15	Female	7	46
P16	Male	10	46
P17	Male	12	55

Ethical Considerations

A part of ethical research is ensuring participants' safety and confidentiality.

Throughout the study, I followed ethical protections to safeguard participants. According

to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), researchers must obtain individual consent before

conducting interviews. The consent form included the purpose of the study, ethical

protections, controls over disclosed information, and study-related risks and benefits

(Mealer & Jones, 2014). Participants could decline to answer any question that made

them uncomfortable. I described the procedures used to ensure confidentiality and inform participants of their role in the research.

The informed consent form also indicated that no rewards or incentives were available, participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Should they have wished to withdraw, participants were to express their intention verbally or in writing via email; however, no participants withdrew their consent. Participants reviewed and acknowledged the informed consent form via email with the words "I consent."

There were no conflicts of interest to disclose. Although I currently work in the public sector in South Central Texas, I had no authority over any participant through employment or as a director at one of the organizations. I did not need to exclude any participants due to conflict of interest or other ethical concerns.

Following ethical protections is imperative for participants' protection. Researchers can maintain ethical standards by engaging in actions that support sound ethical choices, demonstrating awareness, practicing respectful participant encounters, and allowing open dialogue during interviews (Bromley et al., 2015). Other ethical considerations include protecting the confidentiality of collected data and ensuring individuals' comfort with voluntarily participating (Loui, 2016), which I discussed with participants. I maintained data integrity by not using participants' personal data for any purpose of the study. I did not use any director's name or place of employment. A researcher must protect participants' identities to ensure anonymity (Honan, 2014). The confidentiality of participants' answers to interview questions is also essential (Alby &

Fatigante, 2013). I assigned each participant a unique alphanumeric identifier, such as P1, P2, and so on

Confidentiality in research is a concern for study subjects who prefer to remain anonymous (Lancaster, 2016). To protect participants, I secured all hard copy data, research notes, and consent forms in a locked, fireproof safe in my home office. All digital data are encrypted and password-protected on my laptop computer. After 5 years, I will erase the electronic records and shred hard copy data.

Data Collection

The Phenomenological Interview

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena in the world (Tanwir et al., 2021). The approach entails exploring life experiences and how individuals perceive, understand, and deduce the meaning of the phenomenon in the subjective experience. Hermeneutic phenomenology is an interpretive design based on Heidegger's (1927/2010) philosophy. Interviews were the instrument used in this phenomenological study as they provided in-depth, contextualized, open-ended responses about participants' views, opinions, feelings, knowledge, and experiences (Tanwir et al., 2021). Interviews are the most versatile data collection method used in qualitative research.

After obtaining Walden University IRB approval (Approval No. 10-29-21-0659613) and permission to conduct research, I contacted prospective participants through email requesting their participation. Each city had a list of all public sector directors' names and contact information freely available on their websites. Initial contact occurred via email with an explanation of the study and a request to participate. The

email listed the participation criteria of self-identifying as a director in the public sector,

having a minimum of 3 years' director experience, and being 18 years or older.

Responses to the email resulted in 17 connections.

I emailed formal participation invitations and consent forms after confirming the

directors' qualifications and interest in the study. The consent form included the study's

background, procedures, voluntary nature, risks and benefits of participation, privacy

information, researcher contact information, and instructions for providing consent. If the

directors wished to participate in the study, they responded by email with the words "I

consent." Upon receiving their consent, I scheduled interviews at mutually convenient

times and places.

Interviews occurred from December 12, 2021, to January 5, 2022, with each

lasting 45 minutes. I followed the interview protocol for each, documenting the date,

time, participant name, and interview location. I recorded 17 interviews via the Microsoft

Teams video conferencing application on an HP Spectre laptop computer and captured

audio on as well. Temi was the software used to transcribe all interviews and serve as an

additional backup repository of the interviews.

I originally planned to conduct face-to-face, one-on-one interviews at agreed-

upon locations. However, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated virtual interviews. I

began each interview with an introduction, reading the informed consent to ensure all

interviewees understood the rules of the study and their rights as participants. I began

each interview with open-ended, predetermined questions derived from the overarching

research question and two subquestions. I provided sufficient time to ensure participants'

responses were thoughtful and accurate. At the end of the interviews, I thanked the

directors for their participation, informing them that I would transcribe their interviews

and not contact them to review the transcripts.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the Data

Data analysis occurred logically and sequentially to address the research question

and subquestions and determine the study's findings. Listening to recorded interviews is

essential when analyzing and reflecting on the data (Wagstaff & Williams, 2014). The

data analysis process involved thorough, repeated, and interrelated procedures to ensure

the validity and reliability of the findings. Data analysis occurred using NVivo R1 to

organize the text, visual, and data files and let themes emerge from the data. The software

also supports the end-to-end research process for qualitative research studies. Researchers

can encrypt and store data using software programs (Zamawe, 2015). NVivo is useful for

coding interview data, mapping data using related diagrams, and analyzing data (Gläser

& Laudel, 2013; Woods et al., 2016).

Coding allows researchers to interpret data related to the topic (Franzosi et al.,

2013). Data organization and preparation was by using a color code scheme. Coding

entailed sorting and grouping related data and arranging the data into categories. Include

more information about your coding process such as the number of codes.

Reviewing the data allowed for discovering recommendations and findings of

how directors use succession planning practices to consider middle managers for

leadership positions. Interpretation leads to uncovering and compiling the data into codes

(Turner, 2010). I followed the analysis method formulated by van Kaam (1966) and modified by Moustakas (1994) to support this study's intent of exploring practices directors use to prepare middle managers for future director positions.

Data analysis occurs through the steps of document review, organization, and theme-building (Cope, 2014; Nassaji, 2015; Watkins, 2017). Yin (2014) identified five steps for data analysis: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding data. In the first step, I compiled all interview data, including participant responses, notes, recordings, and Temi transcripts. In Step 2, I dissembled the data and reviewed the content from all sources. Step 3 entailed reassembling and sorting the data into categories and then coding information using participant identifiers. In Step 4, I interpreted the data to describe events leading to participant actions and identify any process inconsistencies. Finally, in Step 5, I summarized and compared relevant content to identify emergent themes (see Yon, 2014).

Three themes emerged from the data. The three themes were management style, leadership capabilities, and talent management. There were similarities with the tenets of transformational leadership theory supportive of optimizing middle managers' performance and transitioning a high-quality middle manager to an executive leader (director). NVivo's data coding, word mining, thematic node data, and work banks are useful for cataloging data intuitively for concept placement (Brandão & Miguez, 2017; Castleberry, 2014). NVivo facilitated the extraction of codes and nodes from collected documents to create easily accessible word banks. Using nodes helps to categorize data into definable sections and subsections for easy manageability (citation). Word mining

entailed querying data for the most common words in each document and then organizing by data hierarchy.

All collected data underwent combination and analysis to identify three key themes. The relevant evidence from the literature review and transformational leadership theory supported this study's findings, which was vital to the study's success. After identifying key findings from directors' practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions, I compared and classified themes from the literature review to support this study's findings.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility means that qualitative research findings are believable from participants' perspectives (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). Research credibility is concerned with truth-value: the truth of how the participants know and experience the phenomenon. Credibility indicates whether the research findings represent plausible information collected and interpreted from the participants' views (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Hermeneutics is a design to establish and demonstrate credibility through the participants' behavioral experiences and their original data (Dangal & Joshi, 2020). To enhance the credibility of this study, I engaged in reflexivity by (a) making notes about participants' comments and researcher's thoughts during the interview, (b) memoing right after the interview, and (c) developing and continually editing my subjectivity statement when reviewing the transcripts.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability of the findings and is associated with the replicability of the study. A research study has greater transferability when future researchers can successfully evaluate the findings and procedures, applying results in similar contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A primary method used for increasing transferability is keeping detailed descriptions of each stage of a study, allowing future researchers to replicate the research (Holloway & Wheeler, 2013). Qualitative researchers facilitate transferability through thick description (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The findings from interviews with directors in the public sector having expert knowledge about the succession planning process and practices allow other researchers to assess the transferability of the findings to relevant, similar contexts. Transferability enables the reader to assess whether the findings are applicable to other settings. A researcher cannot determine transferability, as only the reader knows the specific settings of transferring findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, detailed rich data was obtained from participants in various age groups and locations in South Central Texas to enable other researchers to assess the benefits of the results in relevant, similar contexts.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of and confidence in the findings based on the participants' narratives and words. Confirmability is a means to ensure the findings emerged from the participants and not the researcher. Confirmability is essential to unbiased findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Achieving confirmability in this study entailed developing and administering a consistent research protocol. Objectivity resulted

from presenting the same interview questions to all participants while maintaining sensitivity and empathy.

Study Results

The overarching research question was as follows:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of public sector department directors who use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector?

Two subquestions were also of interest to delve more deeply into the leaders' views of their succession planning experiences.

SQ1: How do you identify potential future directors to groom for leadership positions?

SQ2: What career development programs or methods do you recommend would help other department directors prepare middle managers in their organizations for leadership positions?

I collected data from one-on-one semistructured Microsoft Teams interviews with 17 public sector directors in South Central Texas. The participants described succession planning practices used to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. Data analysis indicated three prominent themes for middle management succession planning: management style, leadership capabilities, and talent management. Six subthemes emerged from the themes: (a) relationship building, (b) motivating, inspiring, and empowering, (c) developing skill set, (d) delegating authority, (e) training opportunities, and (f) recruitment and retention strategies. The participants reported using various

practices for middle management succession planning and stressed the need for their

organizations to implement a robust succession planning program. Furthermore,

participants reported openness to growth opportunities to advance high performers in

middle manager positions. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the themes and findings.

Figure 2

Themes and Findings

All the participants were thrilled to have a conversation surrounding middle

management succession planning. The participants viewed this conversation as long

overdue and hoped to take back insight to their organization. Interestingly, despite the

participants working in a public sector environment, the findings were consistent with

private sector organizations. The differences emerged specific to what public and private

organizations view as barriers and how they navigate obstacles to perform succession

planning. The following sections include a discussion of the themes and findings

supported by participants' responses and quotations.

Theme 1: Management Style

The first major theme was management style, which enables directors to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. Management style comprises the methods a person uses to manage an individual or group of people in an organization. Participants felt it was important for directors to motivate their managers, be inspiring, and empower them to be the best they can be. Participants' responses to Interview Questions 1 and 6 indicated that empowering, inspiring, developing, providing growth opportunities, and clearing paths for middle managers to reach their goals prepare them for leadership positions. Participants determined if middle managers were leaders by assessing their drive or motivation for advancing in the organization. P9 and P5 said they observe middle managers in meetings, watch how they handle situations, and stress that every meeting they attend is an interview; thus, they should be prepared at all times. P3 used inspirational motivation to challenge middle managers to embrace divergent thinking, create strategies, and develop innovative methods and creating efficiencies. Many participants began to inspire middle managers when they joined the organization by assessing their skills, identifying if the position was the right fit, and planning their career path. Participants' descriptions of their leadership style and characteristics fit the description of a transformational leader.

Transformational leadership is a people-oriented approach to management based on the idea that motivated employees will be more effective and productive. Transformational leaders use action- and results-based strategies to empower employees to work together toward a common goal. Transformational leadership is a style that could

help public sector organizations understand each employee's strengths and talents of and leverage those skills to help the organization and its personnel succeed. Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. Transformational leadership has a significantly positive impact on organizational performance and effectiveness (Avolio et al., 2009; Bass, 1985; Russell, 2013; Sosik & Jung, 2010).

P9 and P12 found it essential to spend time and communicate with their middle managers at employment onset to build relationships and help them feel secure in their roles. The participants believed that such communication also enabled managers to become stronger leaders. P5 reported spending significant time with her middle managers, working together to build strategy and organizational change. She scheduled individual time with each middle manager to talk through any issues and get a sense of their career path. Empowering and enhancing middle managers' capabilities and ability to become directors could help improve an organization's succession plan. Participants' responses aligned with Luna (2012), who found that positive leader–subordinate relationships could change how managers feel about becoming leaders.

Theme 1 ties to the conceptual framework of transformational leadership because the purpose of this study was to find practices directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. P1 and P7 inspired their subordinates by establishing career paths and having open-door policies. A leadership philosophy matching these characteristics is transformational leadership, which centers around employees' emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals (Northouse, 2015). Warrick (2011) found

that executive managers who use transformational leadership elicit positive changes in individuals, groups, teams, and structural cultures. Directors who inspire middle managers by creating trust-based relationships while building management skills epitomize great transformational leaders. Transformational leadership focuses on the growth and development between a leader and follower rather than addressing an exchange or transaction between the two (Wiltshire, 2012).

Along with the literature, this study's findings indicate that effective business practices change how succession planning builds managerial success by modifying how directors function as leaders. Executive leaders need to find methods from existing research that tie to the business practice (Newhall, 2017). Additionally, by applying the concepts of transformational leadership to motivate, inspire, and develop middle managers, leaders can plan, lead, and control an organization's resources and achieve organizational goals.

This study showed that a director who practices transformational leadership helps determine a plan to develop and elevate middle managers' current performance and leadership skills for promotion. P6 and P7 evaluated their middle managers regularly to identify areas of excellence and areas in need of assistance or development. The participants reported remaining accessible to their middle managers to ensure sufficient support for success and opportunities for improvement following unsuccessful outcomes.

Walker and Aritz (2015) stated that managers are not capable of performing their roles when hired. Providing continual access and allowing middle managers to make decisions without repercussions can improve job performance and managerial skills and

may help middle managers advance to director positions. Table 1 shows the subthemes of motivating, inspiring, empowerment, and relationship-building discussed by participants.

Table 2

Theme 1: Management Style

Subtheme	Nodes	Sources	References
1	Style of leadership	34	58
2	Relationship-building	29	39
Total		63	97

Theme 2: Leadership Capabilities

Leadership capabilities was the second theme that emerged. The participants' answers to Interview Questions 3 and 7 indicated how directors build leadership capabilities. All participants acknowledged that developing managerial skills is essential for middle managers, and succession planning is an excellent approach. Most participants used internships, mentoring, coaching, and leadership exposure with major initiatives. Three participants, P2, P8, and P10, stressed that all aspects of executive training for middle managers are crucial to their success as middle managers and advancement into director positions. P12 expressed the desire to mentor and offer coaching to immediate and nonsubordinate middle managers. However, an overwhelming number of participants identified the HR department as a barrier to the utilization of these programs. P1 and P5 stated that a better understanding and clarification of the Municipal Civil Services rules is imperative for effectively training middle managers.

All interview participants said they provide internal and external training for their middle managers. However, training does not have a strong development program to help

middle managers gain the necessary skills to be directors. P7 explained that the director works directly with middle managers and creates a development plan to prepare them for the next level. Directors perform this work without HR assistance, which affects the morale of the middle manager and the organization. P11 stressed the importance of identifying managers whose leadership skills need development and working with them to grow their skills. P1 and P7 stated recognizing a manager's shortfalls is essential, and having a serious discussion to determine the middle manager's interest in advancement is key. Both participants said that if the manager wants to move up, the director is responsible for helping them advance by developing their skills.

Most participants used delegation of authority to prepare middle managers for director positions. The interviewees felt that assigning responsibility and authority and providing support gives middle managers confidence and helps prepare them for the next level. P9 was vehement that delegating responsibility motivates, inspires, and empowers middle managers, giving them a sense of ownership in the organization and making them feel that management entrusts them to lead. P4 stated that providing middle managers with these opportunities is a great coaching technique and teaches them how to lead and follow.

The findings in this study aligned with Kim and Patel (2017). P14 explained that the more employees practice, the more capable they are in improving their job performance. O'Connell and Gibbons (2016) identified many ways to create effective service programs in organizations.

Transformational leadership theory provided a conceptual framework to understand transformational leaders' characteristics enabling middle managers to reach their goals. According to Zubedy (2019), transformational leadership theory has a positive association with implementing organizational change. The theory is also an important tool for change in the public sector (Kellis & Ran, 2015). P12 noted that "if leaders take the time to groom, train and nurture middle managers through leadership training, it would improve middle managers capabilities." Ahmad et al. (2017) indicated that leaders using transformational leadership in succession planning must conduct effective mentoring, developing managers to meet organizational needs. The findings in this study aligned with Mohamed and Manaf's evaluation of transformational leaderships with the practices the directors used—for example, mentoring as part of succession planning to reduce competency shortcomings and influence middle managers' performance.

A director's autonomy could have developed from learned experiences while in subordinate positions (Piatak, 2017; van der Voet & van de Walle, 2018). Directors with backgrounds supporting succession planning were experienced leaders who reinforced the development of comparable manager attributes. P10 acknowledged, "When middle managers see that an organization is vested in them, for example, with training opportunities or shadowing opportunities provided by the organization, they seldom looked elsewhere for job promotion."

P2 and P5 detailed that work relationships and attitudes were of high importance in the public sector and reliant on comprehensive training and preparation displayed in a

manager's work ethics. Most participants agreed that creating a conducive work environment for managers and providing career development and training strengthened succession planning. P14 stated that listening and inspiring managers to challenge themselves continually empowers them to commit to the department and work beyond expectations. In addition, directors' mentoring and succession planning for middle managers was a learned strategy that supported positive work efforts, motivating them to excel within the organization. Further findings indicated that when hired, managers lack practical talents for becoming effective directors (Chambers, 2013). To increase the public sector organization's performance, directors, with the assistance of HR, need to commit to improving middle managers' knowledge (Ascencio & Mujkic, 2016).

Interview Question 3 related to the most common problems organizations experience when starting succession planning or a management program. The participants discussed a lack of planning, HR support, leadership knowledge, organizational knowledge, empathy, conflict resolution, and ability to delegate. Directors and HR professionals need to implement a succession plan to guide middle managers toward becoming adequate directors. Implementing the right practices at the beginning of the hiring process could be a more suitable way to identify future directors.

Participants felt delegation of authority helped establish middle managers' leadership skills, providing firsthand director experience. Directors also use delegation of authority to help prepare middle managers for director positions. Interview participants identified job shadowing as part of the training, allowing middle managers to gain work experience while learning about the director position. P4 expressed concern that external

managers often lack organizational knowledge, which detracts from building continuous

director awareness of the organization and the role, causing the organization to suffer.

Table 2 presents two findings (developing skill set and delegating authority) discussed by

the participants and incorporated in Theme 2.

Table 3

Theme 2: Leadership Capabilities

Subtheme	Nodes	Sources	References
1	Developing skill set	12	21
2	Delegating authority	19	43
Total		31	63

Theme 3: Talent Management

      Talent management engagement was the third primary theme that emerged from

the interview data. Participants stressed the HR department's fundamental role in talent

management if succession planning is to succeed in the public sector. All participants

emphasized the need for HR to strategically partner with the director to sponsor talent

management and succession planning programs and develop effective middle

management leadership. Theme 3 incorporated two subthemes: training opportunities and

retention and recruitment strategies.

      Participant responses to Interview Question 4 indicated the biggest benefits of a

succession planning program were retaining talent and providing better morale, which

leads to a strong culture. P9 stressed the importance of regular communication with

middle managers, providing management support and guidance on organizational

strategies. P2 said it was essential to check on managers' well-being so they know the

director cares about them as a person. All participants identified communication as key to retaining talent. Participants responded to Question 5 by indicating that they identify future leaders by developmental planning and assessing skill sets regularly.

P10 and P5 stated that planning for training is crucial to understanding the director's talent and managers' skill sets. They felt it was their responsibility as a director to develop the managers' talent and prepare them to assume the director role in the future. P12 indicated that without a plan or strategy to understand the necessary training components, it was difficult to evaluate a manager's experience and identify what strategies to use in helping them build on their experiences.

The theme of talent management aligned with the literature showing that a well-established HR strategy is vital to developing successful talent management approaches and succession planning. Tomcikova et al. (2021) stated that talent management and development are evolving, becoming the fastest-growing stream in human resource management. Planning and building proper training strategies can directly impact public sector organizations' succession planning tools to identify, retain, attract, and develop talent. Additionally, Tomcikova et al. (2021) expressed that talent identification and development are becoming demanding and challenging human resource management activities. P6 and P9 stated that their HR department must work with directors in creating a successful succession planning program, including training. P11 expressed that planning is essential and is a gap in the organization's pipeline due to the lack of strategies. Proper human resource management strategies provide a foundation for

successful succession planning and talent management strategies; without strong HR support, directors struggle to focus on talented employees' development.

All participants noted that successful recruitment strategies are directly associated with succession planning. Participants' responses to Interview Question 4 identified the most significant benefits of succession planning as retaining talent and increasing the organization's morale, which leads to a strong culture. P8 stressed the need for regular communication with middle managers, providing management support and guidance on strategies for the organization. P2 found it essential to check on managers' well-being, showing that they care about them personally and professionally. All participants identified communication as key to retaining talent.

In responding to Interview Question 5, participants indicated identifying future leaders through developmental planning and regularly assessing skill sets. P7 said identifying talent begins during recruitment, and poor selection will not contribute to promoting future leaders and will jeopardize succession planning pipelines. According to P6, HR should work with the director to develop a recruitment strategy based on an existing talent pipeline. P3 stated, "Organizations need to get real about putting the right person in place rather than just filling a spot with external fresh talent." She continued that sometimes "fresh talent" is necessary but that middle managers in their roles for long periods or on an interim basis should have development opportunities. When not seriously considered for those positions, managers become frustrated, leading to an atmosphere of low morale and tarnishing the organization's brand.

P5 identified future leaders' readiness as essential to active succession planning. When managers are ready for director positions yet face limited opportunities, there could be frustration and pressure to slow down succession planning work. Moreover, P4 noted if organizations do not prepare enough future leaders to fill new openings, they must rely on external recruitment, causing low morale, poor work culture, and negative brand impacts. P1 expressed concern with initially turning to external candidates when leadership positions become available, saying, "There should be mechanisms in place to give a middle manager an opportunity to fill those spots without bringing in barriers, such as Municipal Civil Services rules [and] competitive recruiting requirements." Without requirements or restrictions on executive-level director positions, organizations should have strong succession planning in place and create a talent pipeline to prepare middle managers to fill these positions. P9 stated that organizations should be concerned about how the industry brands them.

The findings on external versus internal promotions were related to existing literature. Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou (2019) noted that leaders in organizations need to develop their recruitment strategies to identify and attract new talent and enrich their succession planning pipeline. Nayak et al. (2018) found that talent management strategies that include talent development, retention, and acquisition are integral to an organization's culture and branding. Additionally, Ibrahim and AlOmari (2020) said an organization's reputation as a competitive employer attracts talent to join and take advantage of talent development programs.

Bass (1985) examined Burns' (1978) leadership model by differentiating transformational leaders' characteristics into four leadership concepts: individual consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Northouse (2015) defined transformational leadership as attending to followers' needs and motives in pursuit of organizational growth. Transformational leadership captures the essence of talent management strategies, and its relationship with succession planning reflects this study's findings. Pandey et al. (2016) observed that transformational leaders sponsor followers' development and growth to achieve organizational goals.

This study was an exploration of the talent management strategies used by public sector directors in succession planning by applying the transformational leadership theory. The findings supported the application of transformational leadership to talent management research. P9 said, "Transformational leaders have great change management skills and thrive on the ability to invest and focus on people, so talent management is a practice of transformational leadership." Gaining respect and confidence from their employees, transformational leaders develop a workplace environment that supports middle managers' growth through talent identification and development and provide internal promotions (Liao et al., 2017). This study's participants said for talent management programs to operate and deliver successfully, public sector directors, in collaboration with HR, need to sponsor talent development initiatives and have confidence in talent growth and their ability to nurture internal successors.

All participants described their leadership style using the characteristics of transformational leadership. Moreover, they noted that transformational leaders drive talent development strategies by believing in middle managers' ability to transform and change. Transformational leaders have the desire and energy to develop resources in pursuit of growing the organization, and they challenge the status quo and embrace change (Abouraia & Othman, 2017; LePine et al., 2016). P5, P8, and P6 added that transformational leaders are passionate about integrating leadership development programs to impact organizational succession planning. They provide continuous support to their direct reports so they can grow their skills and take leadership responsibility. Table 3 shows the subthemes of training opportunities and recruitment strategies discussed by participants comprising Theme 3.

Table 4

Theme 3: Talent Management

Subtheme	Nodes	Sources	References
1	Training opportunities	23	40
2	Retention and recruitment strategies	10	16
Total		33	56

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the key findings of this study. Following the data collection and analysis processes, the chapter presented findings to answer the overarching research question, What are the lived experiences of public sector department directors who use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector? The emerging themes were management style, leadership capabilities, and

talent management. The findings that emerged were style of leadership, relationship-building, developing skill set, delegating authority, training opportunities, and retention and recruitment strategies. Generally, the findings were consistent with the study's purpose and linked to the conceptual framework applied to succession planning practices directors use when preparing middle managers for leadership positions. The main themes and findings enabled understanding that public sector organizations need to implement practices for replacing departing directors with qualified new directors.

This study could contribute to the effectiveness of public sector organizations and their succession planning practices for leadership positions. Galbraith et al. (2012) stated that succession planning is an excellent method for polishing leadership positions. Succession planning allows middle managers to develop higher-level skills internally before an organization pursues external hires. Directors involved in succession planning practice excellent organization management and improve capabilities by enhancing talent management to achieve sustainability.

Chapter 5 has a restated purpose and nature of the study, followed by the reasons for the study. The chapter interprets the findings of the study, provides study limitations, recommendations for future research, and describes implications for social change. Chapter 5 ends with an overall study conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the succession planning practices public sector department directors use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. My intent was to understand the lived experiences of public sector department directors in South Central Texas that use succession planning as a strategy to prepare middle managers for future leadership positions. Director's engaging in succession planning practices can be helpful in combating poor performance, higher turnover rates, organizational stability, loss of institutional knowledge, and negatively impacting the organization (Leonard-Barton et al., 2014). Additionally, director's use of succession planning practices for middle managers increases the likelihood of maintaining an appropriate talent pipeline in the public sector for leadership positions (Dobberowsky, 2016). The findings in this study could apply to public sector directors seeking to identify, influence, promote, and improve practices used for middle managers and can also extend the knowledge in this discipline by offering a deeper examination of finding that public sector directors experience while attempting to using succession planning practices for their middle managers. Succession planning is vital in the public sector and can be especially advantageous for directors when using practices for middle managers for professional development and growth and to enhance overall performance. Leadership succession planning can benefit employee development and engagement by offering positions within the organization that increase middle managers ambition, supplementing them personally and professionally (Beheshtifar & Vazir-Panah, 2012). It involves the development and

retention of employees within the organization and the cultivation of professional skills (Badaway et al., 2016).

Succession planning is especially important for executives and leaders of an organization as it provides sustainable leadership and organizations can development opportunities embedded in their organizational practices to develop future leaders (Gerard et al., 2017; Iliac, 2018). Additionally, turnover in leadership in the public sector requires that succession planning be in place to ensure the transfer of knowledge and the transition of leadership within and organization (Appelbaum et al., 2012). According to Effelsberg et al. (2014), improved public sector leader awareness regarding transformational management practices will lead to improved middle management performance. This ultimately leads to higher performing public sector workers that will provide better services to citizens. An examination of this study identified by the directors during the interviews with me revealed six key findings on how the transformational leadership theory along with the four components of the theory impact succession planning practices for middle managers in the public sector. The findings included (a) motivating, inspiring, and empowering middle managers; (b) relationship building; (c) developing skillset; (d) delegating authority; (e) training opportunities; and (f) retention and recruitment strategies.

I used the transformational leadership theory and the four components denoted as the 4 Is of transformational leadership (Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991). The four components are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. A study investigating the link between the

components of transformational leadership and succession planning in Malaysia by

Armugam et al. (2019) showed they all four components had a positive relationship with

succession planning. Another study by Ahmad (2018) analyzed the four components of

transformational leadership and demonstrated that individualized influence was the main

predictor of succession programs. Transformational leaders seek to influence, motivate,

and inspire individuals and social systems and create positive change as they develop

followers into leaders (Burns, 1978). Avolio and Bass's (1993) transformational

leadership model emphasizes creating inspired vision of the future and motivating

managers to get buy into and deliver through relationships. Therefore, transformational

leadership, which entails identifying and developing managers for exceptional

achievements now and in the future, favors succession planning and management.

Interpretation of Findings

Finding 1

Finding 1 identified by directors revealed the importance and need to motivate,

inspire, and empower middle managers. All 17 participants interviewed in this study

expressed that it was a director's responsibility to practice a management style that

embodies motivating, inspiring, and empowering, especially for succession planning

purposes. For example, the directors in this study use mentoring and coaching as

practices that help them motivate, inspire, and empower their managers. Research

supports this philosophy and indicates that modern employees desire coaching,

development, feedback, and a sense of belonging (Comaford, 2018). The needs of

managers differ from those of prior generations and thus management styles that focus

solely on production and results rather than the needs of managers are less effective. The

directors recognize that leadership and coaching is required to form and advance strategic

plans of an organization and it is essential for succession planning of middle managers.

The directors find that coaching managers by teaching techniques and providing

guidance, feedback, and support to be successful in the public sector must be important to

the organization. The directors also insisted that mentoring or providing other directors to

mentor their managers is also essential. Mentoring gives a manager that extra support

with they need advice, guidance, and more coaching. It gives the manager someone they

can confide in and trust.

Finding 2

Finding 2 in this study described on relationship building between the director and

the manager was critical in helping to preparing middle managers for the next level. All

directors interviewed in this study when describing their leadership style mirrored that of

transformational leadership. Additionally, all directors concurred that a leader and

follower relationship is essential when grooming middle managers for potential

leadership positions in the public sector. Bass (1985) provided an expanded and refined

version of transformational leadership that includes the leader and the follower. Bass's

transformational leadership theory focused on a strong relationship between leaders and

followers (Barbinta & Mursean, 2017). A transformational leader inspires trust, loyalty,

and aspiration in followers (Vargas, 2015). Bass stated that transformational leadership

motivates followers to do more than their leader expects. Both the leader and follower

form a trusted commitment that results in a positive outcome (Louw et al., 2017).

Directors in the public sector building positive relationships with their managers develop

trust and loyalty which results in positive outcomes.

Finding 3

Finding 3 of this study was the need to develop skillsets of middle managers in

the public sector. Directors would like to take advantage of more skill development tools

like online training with a mixture of individualized training and skills-based evaluations

to help build plans to develop the middle managers' leadership skills. One barrier

directors faced with developing managers is budgetary constraints that prohibit them

provided the necessary educational training. A second barrier was the lack of support the

director gets from their human resources department because of a critical

misinterpretation of the municipal civil service rules as they apply to succession

planning. This causes issues when directors want to apply hands-on training and work

with the manager and develop a plan for the manager in a succession planning capacity.

This lack of support results in the manager not being providing the proper development to

get them to the next level. Management commitment and leadership is highlighted as the

most pertinent critical success factor in driving a good implementation plan for

development skills (Achanga et al., 2006; Netland, 2005; Worley & Doolen, 2006).

Without visible and active support from the directors developing the skillsets, the

manager is unlikely to succeed. Additionally, human resources must understand the

managerial effort required, the amount of time that needs to be dedicated, and the need

for adequate funding. Managerial efforts are reported as one of the most challenging

factors in helping to develop middle managers (Bhasin & Burcher, 2006). Without a

consolidated effort between directors and human resources, this practice will suffer

because there is an absence of the leadership. Good leadership influences knowledge

creation and effective skills in the workforce and management must invest in developing

the skills and knowledge of middle managers to enhance organizational culture and

performance.

Finding 4

Finding 4, delegating authority, ties into developing the skillsets of managers

because without the skills a director would not feel comfortable delegating authority. In

this study, directors expressed the importance of a managers having the opportunity to

gain director level experience by delegation of authority given on major initiatives or

even when the director will be absent. Hashem et al. (2013) conducted a study concerning

the impact of structural empowerment in achieving psychological empowerment, there is

a statistical significance between availability of structural empowerment representing by

delegation authority, personality development, participation and development innovative

behavior represented by achieving one's awareness that they hold an important and

meaningful job position, feeling effective, independence and the capability to be

effective. Delegation of authority is a modern trend practiced by managers (citation). The

function of it stands out as contributing to and increasing the level of motivation of

managers and achieving positive returns for an organization as well as the director. For a

director, it alleviates functional burdens, gains managers' satisfaction, and builds

cooperation and trust between the director and manager (Al-Jammal, 2015). For the

manager, it works on achieving functional empowerment, constructing alternative and

administrative leadership, and making managers feel self-confident and motivated for

excellency in performance (Author, 2015). The practice of using delegation of authority

should be used more in the public sector because it is about entrusting the manager to do

parts of a director's job. This suballocation of powers to the manager helps achieve

effective results in succession planning for the midlevel manager.

Finding 5

Finding 5 in my research was the lack of training opportunities for middle

managers seeking to move up into director positions. Moreover, the participants in my

study indicated that in the public sector there is a lack of a talent management program

that can be used by directors to help with middle management development -). Leaders of

successful organizations focus on building a comprehensive set of leadership

development and training activities, as they support diverse talent (Amagoh, 2009). In

this study, directors in the public sector lose talent in midlevel management due to there

being no training opportunities for talent management within the organization for middle

managers. Directors felt there is little to no support from their human resources

department to develop training plans or establish new training opportunities for middle

manager that seeks to go to the next level. Following human resources guidance can

hinder directors from creating opportunities for middle managers causing the middle

manager to give up and look for other opportunities outside of the organization. Public

sector directors must have a plan in place for training, staffing, and sustainability so that

the organization can survive (Klien & Salk, 2013). Directors in the public sector who

plan to increase the success of their departments should plan for the short and long term.

Directors who choose not to plan will more than likely be reactive to the changes in the environment, society, staff, and industry (Grau, 2014).

Finding 6

Finding 6 was the lack of retention and recruitment strategies in the public sector, especially for middle managers. The need to have a pipeline of talent in place and the practical desire for workforce and succession planning are critical to sustained and uninterrupted service in government (citation). Succession and workforce planning present an opportunity to proactively identify, plan for staffing, train, and understand knowledge needs (citation). This creates a flexible organization that can predict where critical needs are in the organization, providing the necessary time to adjust programs, training, and recruitment to meet these needs. Research has shown that organizations with an integrated approach to succession management experience higher retention rates, increased employee morale, and environment that stimulates innovation and organizational change (CPS Human Resources, 2005).

<center>**Limitations**</center>

This research relied heavily on the access to and the agreement of department directors in the public sector to participate in the study. Department directors were identified as the study sample because of their position and role; most of the data came from the participants (see Yin, 2014). One limitation of this study was the generalizability of the findings. Because of small sample sizes in qualitative research, the generalizability of the findings to the broader population is limited (Sim et al., 2018). Accordingly, the lived experiences of directors in the public sector in South Central

Texas who participated in this study may not reflect the lived experiences of individuals outside of the sample.

Another limitation with this study was the potential for bias or distortion of research outcomes due to unintended influences from the researcher as well as the research participants (see Roller, 2013). This is critical in qualitative research where interviewers try to establish strong relationships with their interviewees to delve deeply into the subject matter. Since I am the researcher and had a small amount of research experience, human error may have led to the misinterpretation of the analysis of the collected data. Reflexivity, specifically the reflexive journal, is one effort that addresses the distortions or preconceptions researchers unwittingly introduce in qualitative designs (Beck et al., 1994). I used a reflexive journal where I logged the details of how the results of each interview could be influenced. The journal helped me identify my prejudices and subjectivities, while more fully informing me on the impact of these influences on the credibility of the research outcomes. The reflexive journal served as a key contributor to the final analysis and enriched the overall study design by providing a documented first-hand account of interviewer bias and the preconceptions that may negatively influence the findings.

Finally, the last limitation of this study was the inability to conduct interviews face-to-face due to the onset of the pandemic. Citizens were under a stay-at-home order so meeting face-to-face was prohibited. I used Microsoft Teams software to conduct all interviews via the internet.

Recommendations

The literature research yielded minimal information on the lived experiences of

public sector Directors and no results for studies of Directors in the public sector that

used succession planning practices for middle management. This lack of research reflects

an essential gap in the current literature, it is recommended that public sector

organizations consider replicating the study in the next five years to compare the results

to determine whether additional Directors in the public sector have implemented

additional succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership

positions. Another recommendation is that a larger sample size could be considered to

ensure that the results are generalizable to a wider range of population. Furthermore,

future studies could focus on specific practices such as leadership capabilities to provide

a deeper knowledge into director's using the practice to aid in preparing middle managers

for leadership positions. Finally, I recommend that future researchers add employees that

would like to become leaders as participants.

Recommendation 1

Serrat (2017) identified trends and drivers that are important to consider as factors

surrounding succession planning and leadership development. More specifically, Serrat

discussed the five elements of talent formula that can help organizations find and retain

talent. Included in this research was leadership, management, and leadership

development with the strategy. Saddozai et al. (2017) found that succession planning was

a part of talent management with challenges in recruiting, retaining, and preparing leaders

for succession specific to the general talent management context. Further research on

implementing strategies, approaches, and models to understanding skillsets and delegating authority could help public sector organization gain effective strategies to retain talent.

Recommendation 2

Pita et al. (2017) study found that corporation succession planning practices and internal succession barriers were negatively associated with public sector employees leaving the organization when there were no succession planning or leadership development opportunities. Pita et al. concluded that effective implementation of succession planning efforts is important to improve human resources practices and overcome barriers to succession. Further research is needed in the public sector due to the limited research in understanding what factors contribute to both current and future leaders' resilience and well-being to establish a positive work climate that include training opportunities and the retention and recruitment strategies for middle managers.

Recommendation 3

Szierbowski-Seibel and Kabst (2018) study focused on the role of human resources personnel and found that human resources outsourcing had an organizational impact because it indicated that other staff beyond leaders could merit consideration. LeCouonte et al (2017) found that succession planning, specifically leadership positions, is essential to maintain organizational performance. The process must include human resources executives to work with leaders. Further research is needed on whether organizations that engage department directors in succession planning are more successful than organizations that do not.

Recommendation 4

Gray and Jones (2018) found the importance of leaders in the public sector as role models for others, creates implications for potential successors to be resilient and successful in their roles. They also found that leadership is linked to both positive and negative outcomes for employees. Ugaddan and Park (2017) found that the quality of political and administrative leadership is positively associated with public service motivation and employee engagement. Additionally, they found that a mediating role of public service motivation on the association between political and administrative leadership quality. Al Harbi et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between the use of transformational leadership and organizational innovation and the creativity of employees. Further research on the relationship between leadership and employee outcomes could demonstrate that leadership practices such as motivating, inspiring, and empowering middle managers are a determinant of leadership quality and could also impact the importance of relationship building between the director and the manager.

<div align="center">

Implications

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The findings of my study extend to the existing literature in that middle management succession planning is vital in the public sector in many ways. The focus of this research was to understand how public sector directors prepare middle managers for leadership positions. Directors should use succession planning as an activity to ensure continuous functioning of vital work in the event of unexpected job vacancies in organizations (Cole & Harbour, 2015). Preparing middle managers for leadership positions positively impacts organizational management, middle managers, and their

communities. Directors' best professional practices for using succession planning is to ensure well-qualified middle managers can step in where and when the need arises. The succession planning process may also have implications on middle management development and engagement. Succession planning offers middle managers opportunities of accomplishing executive leadership positions within the organization, which may excite employee ambitions, which ultimately helps supplement them personally and professionally (Beheshtifar & Vazir-Panah, 2012). Directors in organizations should implement practices to evaluate and follow the progress of middle managers to properly strategize a successful plan (Stahl et al., 2012). A key component of a productive government organization is effectively developing talent management and succession planning practices that support sustainability and performance goals (Beheshtifar & Vazir-Panah, 2012).

Implications for Practice

This study may be helpful to further the knowledge of successful succession planning practices directors in the public sector can use to prepare middle managers for leadership positions. It is important for directors to provide continuous training programs to develop their current middle managers. Leadership development practices are essential methods for improving and learning new knowledge, skills, and capabilities of middle managers (Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015). These practices are effective ways to grow the ability of middle managers to perform leadership roles in the future. Hence, it is advantageous for directors enhance middle managers capabilities by using talent

management and succession planning practices that support sustainability and performance goals.

Research participants within this study discussed that the management style practiced by a director has a direct impact on the success of middle management succession planning. All participants agreed that the best director follows the transformational leadership theory concepts, allowing then identify, analyze, and nurture potential leaders that are currently middle managers. Research participants insisted that a director needs to continue to coach, be a mentor or provide mentorships to middle managers to improve succession planning practices that prepare middle managers for leadership positions. Director's utilizing a transformational management style, implementing talent management programs that help to address leadership capabilities of middle manages results in continuous education, establishes middle manager's career paths, having effective communication, and building a positive rapport could improve managerial business practice.

Implications for Theory

Findings from my study generally confirmed and expanded on Van Wart (2013) findings of directors being contributing supervisors responsible for the development of high-quality middle managers using intuitive efforts for succession planning and creating opportunities to increase efficiency. The significance of directors utilizing successful practices of succession planning are essential for the development of future high-quality managers (Titzer et al., 2014). Previous studies have also described the importance of leadership succession planning (Jacobson & Sowa, 2015). The findings also support

previous research (Gray, 2014; Swensen et al., 2016) to ensure the preparedness of leadership, executive leadership, and management team for succession planning purposes. I found that directors who use the concepts of the transformational leadership theory as their leadership practice, have a desire to use succession planning with their middle managers as they understand succession planning increases organizational efficiency and enhances advancing internal opportunities for leadership positions.

Implications for Social Change

Directors preparing middle manager for leadership positions not only positively impacts the organization; it could also have an impact on middle managers and their communities. The implications for positive social change could include preparing public sector directors with better awareness of solid practices required to implement changes in middle management succession planning. Using the practices identified from this study could improve middle management succession planning in the public sector and contribute to positive social change. Understanding that the management style of a public sector director plays a significant role in middle management succession planning to identify leadership capabilities in a middle manager and identifying potential leaders through talent management practices. Directors can prepare their high-quality middle managers succession planning practices to recognize demands to fill critical leadership positions in support of organizational efficiency and quality service to the community and our citizens. The impending implication for organizational social change is the outcome of visionary leaders who are more effective will have managers who are also more effective and effective performers, resulting in greater effectiveness of the organization.

Additionally, utilizing this outcome also ensures that the citizens are being served in the appropriate manner and needs are being met in the community.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study's findings revealed that directors have an obligation to strengthen middle managers skills and knowledge as they prepare them for future leadership positions (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2012). This study explored what practices public sector directors use when preparing middle managers for leadership positions. The supported findings in this study displayed that in the public sector, directors use some succession planning practices with their middle managers but face challenges when trying to implement succession planning practices with middle management.

According to Gray (2014), succession planning is a method to recognize and develop future leaders within organizations. Directors in the public sector using talent management practices to develop workforce plans can clearly define the required capabilities, and competencies, now and in the future for middle managers. Talent Management applying a workforce plan will expand leadership capabilities and builds a strong talent pool. For example, developing a skill gap analysis, develop a training program, establishing career pathways, utilizing talent management practices, and then establishing succession planning.

Directors motivating, inspiring, and grooming managers may encourage managers to trust their leader and help the manager fit into the organization. The supporting conceptual framework that ties to this study was the transformational leadership theory along with the leadership model of Bass and Avolio. Transformational leadership aims to

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encourage leaders to go beyond their self-interest for a common need (Warrick, 2011). Bass and Avolio's leadership model ties to this study by the relationship of four concepts of the transformational leadership theory having a direct relationship to succession planning and its components of career development to prepare future leaders within the public sector. Generally, transformational leadership and the Bass and Avolio leadership model support public sector director's intentions to transform middle managers into viable future leaders within the organization.

The findings discovered that directors motivating, inspiring, empowering, relationship building, training, developing skills are practices directors use to prepare middle managers for future leadership positions. The findings in the study showed that if directors practices the management style that uses the concepts of a transformational leader while creating workplans to determine leader capabilities, and creating talent management programs for middle managers could sustain managers, sustain the organization in the case of a departure, and retain expert knowledge within the organization to ensure the community and the citizens within have the effective delivery of goods and services and have the protection of life and property.

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Appendix A: Request for Field Study Qualitative Research Expert Participation

April ___, 2021

Hello Dr. [add potential participant's name],

I request your participation in a field study in my doctoral research study on transformational leadership and succession planning for middle managers in the public sector. The study explores practices city directors use to identify potential leaders in middle management for future leadership positions. The field study contains eight interview questions on the lived experiences of public sector department directors.

The purpose of this study field study is to test the relevancy, open-ended, and applicability of the interview questions through the expertise or qualified PhD College professors. The main study will explore the lived experiences of department directors in the public sector. The findings could uncover information that may lead city directors to promote middle managers and prepare them to fill key leadership positions. It may also enhance employees' job performance and productivity, which could increase the number of successful leaders in the public sector. The main research question for this study is "What are the lived experiences of department directors that use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions in the public sector?" The eight interview questions are below:

1. Why do you think succession planning is needed in an organization?

2. What are the essential components of a succession planning program?

3. What are the most common problems that organizations experience in getting started on a succession planning and management program?

4. What are the biggest benefits that organizations experience from a succession planning and management program?

5. How do you identify future executives in city management?

6. As a leader, what do you consider to be your leadership style?

7. What programs do you recommend, such as coaching, mentorship, and developing programs as methods to help city directors to prepare middle managers for leadership positions? Explain.

8. What else, if anything do you believe is pertinent to the purpose of this study about succession planning and promoting middle managers into leadership positions, which you can share that is not covered in the interview questions?

The main study will be a qualitative phenomenological study that includes interviewing department directors who have experience working in South Central Texas in the public sector. The procedure for recruitment will comprise of a purposeful sample technique of public sector department directors. The directors must have worked in public sector for a minimum of 2 years to participate in the study. Data collection will include eight semi-structured open-ended interview questions. I will transcribe and code the interview questions. I will analyze the data extracted from the interview questions with NVivo software.

If you agree to participate in this field study in support of my doctoral research as a qualified PhD college professor, please review, critique, and comment on the eight interview questions to determine if they are open-ended and if they establish alignment

between the research question and the interview questions via email. I also ask that you

offer feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Thank you, in advance, for your assistance.

Appendix B: Revised Interview Questions

1. Tell me why you think succession planning is needed in an organization?

2. Based on your experiences, what are the essential components of a succession planning program?

3. Can you describe the most common problems you have experienced in organizations when getting started on a succession planning and management program?

4. Describe the biggest benefits your organizations experience from a succession planning and management program?

5. Based on your experiences, how would you identify future executives in city management?

6. Can you describe your leadership style?

7. Can you describe programs or practices you use that could help other directors prepare middle managers for leadership positions? Explain.

8. What else, if anything do you believe is pertinent to the purpose of this study about succession planning and promoting middle managers into leadership positions, which you can share that is not covered in the interview questions?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview: Exploring the lived experiences of city directors who use succession planning practices to prepare middle managers for leadership positions.

1. The Microsoft Teams interview will take place in a private office or private conference room of the participant. I will let the participant know that this interview will be recorded, and then I will begin recording. Start time: _____

2. The interview session will commence with salutations, introducing myself to the research participant, after which I will introduce the research topic.

3. I will thank the participant for taking the time to respond to the invitation to participate and ask if there are any questions or concerns before we begin.

4. I will review the informed consent form with the participant and ask if there are any questions or concerns, and then I will begin.

5. The interview will span approximately 30 minutes for responses to the eight interview questions, including any additional follow-up questions.

6. I will define any terms that participants do not understand, such as succession planning, city directors, middle managers, et cetera.

At the end of the interview, I will thank the research participant for taking the time to participate in the study. End time: _____