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# Succession Planning Strategies of Nonprofit Organization Executives

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MS, Lawrence Technological University, 2006

BS, University of Michigan-Dearborn, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Nonprofit organization executives lack strategies for effective succession planning. Executives who implement succession planning strategies can improve human talent, transition executive successors, and retain leadership continuity to preserve organizational success. Grounded in the human capital theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies nonprofit organization executives use for effective succession planning. The participants included four executives from multiple organizations in southeast Michigan who used strategies for effective succession planning. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and company documents. Through thematic analysis, three themes emerged: effective strategies to formalize a succession plan, effective strategies to develop succession planning candidates, and effective strategies for transition timing. The key recommendation included having a formally documented succession plan made accessible to the nonprofit organization's employees. The implications for positive social change include the potential to increase community prosperity through further access to employment and services enabling southeast Michigan residents to increase their support of community enrichment.

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Acknowledgments

The decision to pursue a doctorate degree was not made easily. Understanding the level of investment and commitment was a constant struggle. The journey to obtain a Walden University Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree was peppered with anxiety, challenges, and fatigue. Yet, I would endure the entire process again to achieve the level of joy and personal achievement the DBA degree brings.

The DBA journey was not a voyage I undertook alone. I was fortunate to have the financial backing of my employer, the U.S. Army-DEVCOM-Ground Vehicle Systems Center, and the emotional support of my family and friends. I was also privileged to have the academic backing from my Walden University classmates and the institutional guidance from my Walden University committee members, Dr. Jamiel Vadell, Chair, Dr. David Blum, SCM, and Dr. Gregory Uche, URR.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

**Background of the Problem**

Researchers working with nonprofit organizations uncovered a lack of succession planning (SP) strategies (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Researchers noted approximately 23% of nonprofit organization executives plan for succession (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017). Stephens (2016) stated effective SP reduces pressure and frustration employees faced during organizational changes. Effective SP may improve an organization's ability to achieve efficient executive transitions while retaining current candidate employees for future succession opportunities (Booker et al., 2016). Executives from southeast Michigan's nonprofit organizations could use the study findings to implement SP strategies into their organization's strategic plan to improve human talent, transition executive successors, and to retain leadership continuity, as well as increase employee productivity, and organizational success.

**Problem Statement**

Nonprofit organization leaders are ill-prepared for the departure of their executives (Stewart & Kuenzi, 2018). Chiocchio and Gharibpour (2017) noted that approximately 74% of nonprofit organization executives do not plan for succession. The general business problem was that nonprofit organization executives are unprepared to transition their successors. The specific business problem was that nonprofit organization executives lack strategies for effective SP.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP. The target population for the research

were four executives located in southeast Michigan who have successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization. The implication for positive social change includes benefiting local residents by increasing community stability with increased access to employment and services that enables residents to increase their contributions to community advancement.

## Nature of the Study

I selected the qualitative research method. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) stated qualitative researchers may explore business problems through exhaustive, open-ended, interpretive questions, documenting human experiences. Quantitative researchers pursue an understanding and generalization of a phenomenon by objectively (a) collecting numerical data, (b) measuring variables, and (c) testing hypotheses through statistical models to address the research question (Quick & Hall, 2015). The quantitative research method was not used as quantitative data will not provide the rich, interpretive information required to explore the phenomenon. Mixed methods researchers use aspects of both quantitative and qualitative research in the same research, such as examination of variables and identifying links between factors, as well as exploring and understanding the phenomenon (McManamny et al., 2015). The mixed methods research method was not used as the quantitative approach did not sufficiently address the research question.

The research designs considered for this study were (a) ethnography, (b) phenomenological, and (c) case study. Ethnographic researchers observe human behavior, investigate human experiences, and explore cultural phenomenon (Kruth, 2015). Ethnographic research design was not optimal for my study as I did not partake in extended participant observation nor culture immersion to explore the phenomenon. Errasti-Ibarrondo

et al. (2018) claimed phenomenological researchers focus on participants' personal lived experiences related to a given phenomenon. The phenomenological research design was not optimal for my study as my intent was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, not participants' lived experiences. Yin (2014) claimed case study researchers conduct in-depth exploration of a phenomenon in its actual setting, through *how, what*, and *why* questions, seeking to understand the differences within cases to replicate findings. Taylor and Thomas-Gregory (2015) proposed the context of case study research is bounded by time and place. A multiple case study research design was selected as it allowed me to explore a given phenomenon within a bounded time, to compare findings of each case.

## Research Question

What strategies do nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP?

## Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use for effective SP?

2. What were the key challenges to implementing the strategies for effective SP?

3. How have you measured the effectiveness of your strategies for SP?

4. How have the implemented strategies for effective SP impacted the organization?

5. What additional information would you like to share about strategies used for effective SP?

## Conceptual Framework

Human capital (HC) theory was the chosen conceptual framework to view the phenomenon of this study. Schultz (1961) established HC theory arguing company's workforce is the most valuable business asset. They key tenets of HC theory include knowledge and know-how are a form of capital derived from purposeful investment, as well

as a positive relationship between HC investment and increase in employee earnings (Schultz, 1961). I expected HC theory to enable me to understand my study's findings on how nonprofit organization executives obtain strategies for effective SP.

## Operational Definitions

*Human capital*: Employees' knowledge, skills, and commitment, which creates organizational value and a competitive advantage (Pasamar et al., 2019).

*Nonprofit organization*: A mission-driven institution whose profits are used to advance a social agenda for its members or community (Agarwal et al., 2018).

*Succession planning*: A management process by which business leaders identify and prepare candidate employees to change roles while minimizing disruption to business operations (Manning et al., 2015).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

### Assumptions

Assumptions are ideas a researcher assumes to be true but are unverified (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I assumed the participants would be accessible and willing to share their views, experiences, and SP strategies. I assumed the participants had successfully implemented SP strategies in nonprofit organizations. I assumed the participants would offer truthful responses to the interview questions and have access to SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks.

### Limitations

Limitations are possible weaknesses of a study not within researcher's control (Yin, 2018). A limitation of this study may be participants withholding pertinent information about SP strategies. Another limitation of this study may be participants' inaccuracy and

completeness of responses to the interview questions. A final limitation may be participant

bias to the interview question responses negatively impacting the research findings.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are decisions researchers make to identify the parameters of a study

(Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Delimitations of this study may include the (a) sample size

consisting of four nonprofit organization executives, (b) targeted population comprising

executives from four separate nonprofit organizations, and (c) geographical location in

southeast Michigan. Another delimitation may include interviewing only those nonprofit

organization executives who have successfully implemented a succession plan.

## Significance of the Study

**Contribution to Business Practice**

I expect the findings of this study to provide value to businesses by offering

nonprofit organization executives with effective SP strategies to improve and retain human

talent, transition executive successors, and sustain the organization. The study findings may

be of value to companies by offering effective SP strategies to retain leadership continuity

and increase employee productivity and organizational success. I expect the findings of this

study to enhance the practice of business by promoting the understanding of the significance

of SP and HC development for organizational prosperity.

**Implications for Social Change**

This study may contribute to positive social change by increasing community

prosperity through further access to employment and services, enabling residents to increase

their support of community enrichment. Communities across the United States depend on

the civic services offered by nonprofit organizations such as charity, faith, or education. The

findings from this study may support nonprofit organization executives with effective SP strategies to transition their successors and sustain the organization so that they may continue their dedication to furthering social improvement.

**A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The review of the professional and academic literature for this doctoral study comprises of journals, professional books, and government reports organized using a topical structure. The literature review begins with a discussion of the HC theory conceptual framework and continues with a critical analysis and synthesis of the literature. The critical analysis and synthesis begins with an introduction to SP, followed by five categories of research including (a) how HC investment supports effective SP, (b) how HC investment effects employee retention, (c) how HC investment effects knowledge management, and (d) nonprofit organizations and nonprofit organization leadership. The review also examines the business problem across various industries for a complete application of the study's purpose and research method.

Utilizing the Walden University Library, chosen keywords were *succession planning, nonprofit organization succession planning*, and *succession management*. Sources derived from databases including Business Source Complete, ScienceDirect, ABI/INFORM Collection, ProQuest, Emerald Insight, and SAGE Journals. As a result of the literature pursuit, the critical analysis and synthesis include research relating to both the purpose of the study and the conceptual framework, of which at least 85% include a publication date 5-years or less from the anticipated completion date (CAO approval).

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore the strategies that nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP. McKee and Froelich (2016) noted

when nonprofit executives prepare to depart their organization, the risk of a leadership void and ensuing consequences accelerate. Santora and Bozer's (2015) research revealed 24% of nonprofit leaders had not implemented SP in their organizational strategy. Acree-Hamann (2016) and McEnany and Strutton (2015) suggested preparing the workforce to succeed outbound leaders (a) reduces employee turnover, (b) increases job satisfaction, and (c) improves knowledge management, contributing to company success. Business executives can mitigate workforce gaps by implementing SP strategies through human resources and organizational development activities (Johnson & Torres, 2016; McEnany & Strutton, 2015).

**Human Capital Theory**

*History of Human Capital Theory*

The concept of HC may have originated as early as the 18th century by Smith, a Scottish philosopher, economist, and author (Nichita et al., 2019). Lewis (1954) refined the idea of HC while forming the field of development economics. Schultz (1961) formalized HC theory suggesting an organization's staff is the most valuable business asset. Schultz proposed HC theory as a means to develop an organization's workforce into future leaders through improving their skills and increasing their knowledge while current leaders continue to lead the company. Becker (1962) contributed to the refinement of HC theory to better describe how business leaders implement employee training practices. Becker suggested near-term investments in workforce education and training manifests in far-term organizational productivity. HC theory evolved over generations, centralizing on the idea that company leaders and their employees may use HC investments to increase market competitiveness, productivity, and profitability.

*Key Tenets of Human Capital Theory*

The key tenets of HC theory include knowledge and know-how are a form of capital derived from purposeful investment, as well as a positive relationship between HC investment and increase in employee earnings (Schultz, 1961). Schultz stated HC theory could explain the discrepancies between employees based on their education, training, and professional experience. Schultz's (1961) theory suggested employee skills, obtained through training and hands-on experience, increased their value in the marketplace. Jerzak (2015) stated HC theory advocates employee education and training which increases their workplace productivity and efficiency and offers career advancement opportunities. Becker (1962) offered business leaders should invest in and develop their organization's HC to safeguard growth and prosperity. Business leaders may stand to gain a competitive advantage by investing in their organization's HC, resulting in increased employee value and protected continuity of operations (Jerzak, 2015). Business leaders looking to develop employees to become future leaders may benefit by applying HC theory strategies simultaneous with the prevailing group of leaders.

**Human Capital Investment and Increase in Knowledge.** Market fluctuations challenge business leaders to efficiently increase their productivity while continuing to create opportunities for employee advancement (Kearns et al., 2012). Kearns et al. (2012) claimed education and training serves as a vital tool for developing the workforce. Developing an organization's workforce requires more than just education. Brown and Eisenhardt (1995) proposed professional development required more than just education. Brown and Eisenhardt suggested effective professional development included specialized training, demonstrating implementation of newly acquired skills, and mentoring. Business

leaders looking to invest in HC to increase employee knowledge should recognize the approach is a comprehensive strategy requiring time and resources.

HC investment should align with organizational leaders' strategic objectives, regardless of short-term or long-term outcomes (Dunlap, 2015). Grossman and Salas (2011) emphasized the purpose of developing employees is to increase their knowledge and know-how to enhance their experience and capabilities. Professional development of an organization's workforce should look to maximize the skills of an organization (Mabey, 2013). The knowledge gained from development initiatives may increase employees' skills professionally and personally. Mabey (2013) noted an increase in knowledge through HC investment may improve workforce morale and can contribute to organizational longevity. Mayo (2000) concluded employees' who participated in professional development activities and increased their know-how were likely to remain with their company. Leaders investing in their organization's HC appear to improve their workforce's skills, morale, and retention.

Knowledge advancement is a vital element in effective HC management (Schuler, et al., 2011). Effective HC management includes identifying, developing, and retaining employees who may in turn become future business leaders (Hajimirarab et al., 2011). Professional development requires organizational leaders to purposefully invest company resources in their HC strategies (Pilcher, 2012). Becker (1962) offered employees who received professional development and demonstrated knowledge increase best positioned themselves for leadership opportunities. The quality and quantity of skills and knowledge gained by an organization's workforce and how they apply them for the benefit of the organization may be an indicator of the significance HC investment has on an organization's success.

**Human Capital Investment and Increase in Employee Earnings.** Business leaders implementing the concept of HC theory may increase workforce value, subsequently increasing their wages. Leaders choosing to invest in HC programs support increased earnings for employees with accumulated education and training (Wahrenburg & Weldi, 2007). Wahrenburg and Weldi (2007) noted the accumulation of knowledge also increases access to better paying jobs, reduced employee turnover, and faster transitions up the organizational hierarchy. Carneiro et al. (2010) stated HC theory suggests leadership investments in education and training genuinely lead to more productive employees. Carneiro et al. (2010) claimed associates who are more productive will also have higher earnings and be more employable, e.g., having practical skills and knowledge allowing individuals to obtain and maintain employment, contributing to the talent pool within a given organization. As an employee's HC increases through education and training, their market value increases in proportion to the amount knowledge received, increasing their likelihood of retention and opportunities for advancement (Xu & Fletcher, 2017).

Fix (2018) claimed investment in HC, notably education and training activities, results in improved productivity and the ensuing rise in salaries and wages. LeCounte et al. (2017) maintained professional development may cost an organization several thousands of dollars or more, but it offers a means to increase employee value over time. Marginson (2019) argued the relationship between workplace earnings and investment in HC development lack sufficient evidence. Marginson suggested investment in HC contributes to the value of the employees, while it may or may not directly increase their wages.

Organizational executives should focus on the long-term gains of investing in HC, such as employee retention and increased productivity. Fix (2018) emphasized company

leaders struggle to objectively measure the returns on investment from various forms of HC development. Fix stated the rise in employees' earnings do not come solely from individuals' professional development, but depends on job type, economic climate, and performance of the organization as a whole. Workforce earnings may eventually rise due to the growth of a company, which gradually but eventually occurs through improved knowledge and skills (Amodu et al., 2017). The application of HC theory may contribute to an eventual rise of employee earnings.

### Human Capital Theory Examples in Prior Studies

HC theory may be found in business management studies, specifically as an applied theory within an organization to explore the impact on the workforce. HC theory applied within an organization reveal employees with advanced training may receive increased earnings or enhanced visibility. Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2004) indicated 1 year of training results in an average of 10% increase in employee wages. Spence (1973) stated personnel who are more productive tend to invest into advancing their education. Spence suggested education does not automatically increase an employee's productivity, rather it signals to business leaders a more capable employee, resulting in greater opportunities and increased wages.

Maphisa et al. (2017) highlighted the South African sugar manufacturing industry witnessed a sharp decline in skilled employees. Maphisa et al. (2017) noted personnel opted to join other industries or retired. As a result, similar firms integrated talent management practices in their HC strategies to improve employee education and job satisfaction for increased job retention levels (Maphisa et al., 2017). The integration of the HC theory in organizations may promote employee retention and create the foundation for future leaders.

Kucharčíková et al. (2018) revealed that leaders of e-commerce businesses neglected the concept of HC development which severely hindered their ability to remain competitive. Kucharčíková et al. (2018) noted company leaders who invested in information technology education and related training bolstered their workforce's value and the well-being of their firms. The use of education and job-specific training may improve employee productivity. The application of HC theory may help to promote the success of both traditional and online businesses.

Business leaders may use HC theory to prevent the loss of knowledge. Mucherumuhia and Kagiri (2018) conducted a study highlighting successful audit firms invested in HC to reduce the rates of employee turnover. The approach ensured the organization's executive can retain the skills and knowledge attained by the existing workers so that they can pass it to the next generation of employees (Mucherumuhia & Kagiri, 2018). More often, an HC investment strategy promotes employee retention and knowledge transfer (Xu & Fletcher, 2017). However, the HC investment strategy may also offer market competitors with the opportunity to poach the educated personnel (Mucherumuhia & Kagiri, 2018). The application of HC theory facilitates knowledge transfer in a company and supports its longevity when employees are retained.

### *Advantages of Human Capital Theory*

HC theory may offer business leaders advantages. LeCounte et al. (2017) offered HC development provides employees varying opportunities to improve their competencies resulting in increased professional opportunities. Kariuki and Ochiri (2017) stated HC development, along with mentoring, benchmarking, and strategic training, have a positive effect on organization productivity and supports change management through SP. The value

organizational leaders place on their talent pool appears to be critical to their company's success.

Galiakberova (2019) claimed HC investments promise to offer company leaders a greater financial return than investments in securities. HC theory may prove beneficial to an organization's associates as investments may also include investing in a workforce's health and morale programs (Galiakberova, 2019). Galiakberova posited HC theory may serve as a nation's economic growth source offering competitive business advantages in a global market.

### *Limitations of Human Capital Theory*

HC theory has some limitations. Marginson (2019) argued HC theory lacks realism due to a closed analytical system of independent variables and reliance on a linear theory applied to factors that are non-homogeneous in space and time. Marginson contended HC theory attempts to unify formal education and work as if they are a single domain, potentially excluding other attained training and professional experiences, such as on-the-job training. Kariuki and Ochiri (2017) suggested HC is business leaders' most valuable asset and while worth investing, does not always guarantee returns.

HC theorists asserted employees' educational attainments and the subsequent positive impact they may have in their workplace may only be realized gradually over time (Tan, 2014). Tan (2014) indicated HC theory may be viewed solely as an education tool to mitigate economic uncertainties, creating an illusion that education will solve business leaders' problems. Kozioł et al. (2014) stated HC theory poses some disadvantages specifically as they relate to pay differences. Kozioł et al. (2014) offered employees may

attain somewhat equal educational levels yet encounter compensation differences based on job descriptions, discrimination, or market fluctuations.

### *Contrasting and Supporting Theories and Models*

Fix (2018) challenged the link between investments in human capital and its effect on increased workforce productivity and income. Fix offered social hierarchy as a contrasting theory. Fix stated social hierarchy theory stresses organizational hierarchical rank increases employee income more so than HC investments. Bowles and Gintis (1975) remarked HC theory omitted the significance of social class to the explanation of increased workforce productivity and income. Bowles and Gintis proclaimed inadequate schooling negatively affected human welfare and reflected social inequalities necessary to promote an organized and obedient workforce. Bowles and Gintis proposed an alternate version of HC theory should comprise both a theory of labor production and social reproduction, i.e., reproducing social inequalities across generations.

Marginson (2019) proposed an alternative approach to HC theory based on a meta-method using a semiopen analytical model, drawing upon on qualitative and quantitative research. Marginson suggested the alternative approach would use multiple theoretical lenses, the use of mathematical models, and an analysis of interdependent variables to explain how education augments employee productivity and wages. Gardner and Hatch (1989) posited HC theory could improve if viewed as multi-dimensional and included many attributes and skills, both mental and physical, rather than education alone. Gardner and Hatch offered the multiple-intelligences theory, which is a theory identifying seven personal intelligences employees may use to solve complex problems or develop valued products, improving their workplace value and earnings.

Nelson and Phelps (1966) viewed HC theory as an associates' capacity to successfully adapt to changes in the workplace. In 1966, Nelson and Phelps' approach to HC focused on the use of newly acquired technology and technology transfer as organizational capital to increase productivity. Spence (1973) offered the job-market signaling model as an alternative to HC theory. Spence claimed investing in employee education does not automatically lead to increased HC, but rather serves as a means by which more outgoing employees can "signal" employers to gain positions with increased wages.

**Succession Planning**

*Introduction to Succession Planning*

Between 44% to 90% of executives, depending on the industry, lack a succession plan, risking organizational stability (Santora et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2017). Business leaders from varying organizations, such as healthcare, retail, nonprofit, or small family-owned businesses, lack preparation to handle the shortage of qualified candidates as a result of a transitioning workforce (Acree-Hamann, 2016; Karaevli & Hall, 2003; Webb et al., 2017). Users of SP specify the passing on of professional roles, and in some cases, leadership or ownership of an organization to an employee or group of employees (McKee & Froelich, 2016). McKee and Froelich (2016) described SP as the ability of business leaders to acknowledge, plan, implement, and manage SP strategies in a way that facilitates continuity from one employee to another, ensuring sustained or enhanced productivity. Although SP involves preparation for the replacement of key organizational individuals to ensure that after certain personnel leave their position, there is an uninterrupted transition of

responsibilities, research suggests the majority of business executives lack an effective succession plan (Santora et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2017).

SP is a sensitive undertaking of the nurturing and sustained development of the workforce aimed to safeguard the continuity of critical organizational roles (Estedadi, 2015). Waheed and Zaim (2015) argued SP's primary purpose is managing workforce changes supporting successful realization of business objectives. Estedadi (2015) maintained SP evolved to a strategic undertaking, facilitating the replenishment of employees in important positions, identifying, assessing, and developing the workforce's knowledge and abilities. Estedadi proposed SP evolved as a means to manage transitioning staff members, as well as future staffing requirements, whereby human resource leaders align organizational needs with new or existing talent. SP users aim to address organizational changes through its workforce by identifying talent and developing their competencies in alignment with the company's needs to ensure a smooth continuity of operations.

Dalpiaz et al. (2017) purported a leader's goal for SP is to keep the organization afloat during times of employee transitions. Dalpiaz et al. (2017) noted the fluid and proactive business process included (a) identifying qualified candidates, (b) articulating responsibilities, (c) developing assessment criteria, (d) communicating, (e) empowering a relationship between the transitioning personnel. Chiocchio and Gharibpour (2017) revealed a SP process positively influenced organizational prosperity by identifying organizational needs as well as developing and retaining valuable personnel. Maintaining business operations is essential for prosperity, thus leaders should proactively plan for SP in alignment to needs of the company executives.

Bozer et al. (2017) posited the size of the business significantly impacted the succession process. Bozer et al. (2017) determined business size (e.g., number of employees) correlated to resource availability. Edmonds (2016) stated executives of smaller organizations lacked skills in recruiting talent and sustaining employee development. Edmonds claimed smaller organizations often struggled in realizing the benefits and importance of SP. The researchers suggested company size and access to resources contributed to business leader's ability to effectively plan for succession (Bozer et al., 2017; Edmonds, 2016).

### *Challenges Associated with a Lack of Succession Planning*

The lack of a discernable succession plan negatively effects the morale of the stakeholders, as well as throughout the organization, triggering hastily made personnel decisions, adversely impacting the business and causing flared emotions (Manzoor et al., 2018). Without a succession strategy, business leaders might experience loss of market position, employees, and customers (Manzoor et al., 2018). Estedadi (2015) indicated the costs and challenges associated with a lack of a SP program can ultimately lead to the collapse of an organization. Hiring new personnel or outsourcing may have a high financial impact on an organization's resources, such as increased compensation or implementing costly new business ideas (Estedadi, 2015). Organizational executives utilizing SP strategies may save resources, avoid reduction in workforce morale, and prevent a business' downfall.

The lack of formal SP is linked to challenges in the identification of labor shortage and needs, which affects an organization's survival in a competitive business environment. Payne et al. (2018) argued a lack of a transition strategy made it difficult to identify individuals who are able to backfill positions based on their capabilities and experience.

Payne et al. (2018) noted business executives lacking succession plans tend to have fewer motivated employees since opportunities for promotions are uncertain. Unclear career paths may affect employee retention and influence their degree of self-motivation and professional development.

SP entails developing an opportunity for employees and ensuring they are effectively prepared for various roles in the organization. McKee and Froelich (2016) suggested SP serves as motivation and increases the workforce's chances of being productive and remaining in the company. An obvious absence of SP may damage employee productivity as associated activities accelerate the transition of competent workers from mere contributors to positions of greater impact, e.g., management (Manzoor et al., 2018). With reliable SP, there may be increased employee commitment to the organization, improved morale, and reduced turnover.

Estedadi (2015) proposed a lack of SP exists because some managers fail to prioritize its importance or feel their companies are too small for implementation. Payne et al. (2018) indicated company leaders with formal SP programs have an advantage compared to those that lack one. Business executives may mitigate challenges as they emerge and prepare adequately for the future. Business executives lacking succession plans experienced challenges in the proactive identification and development of leadership talent and could not retain such talents (Wiesman et al., 2016). Wiesman et al. (2016) stated there is a close link between employee retention and the ability of a business to meet their needs and development requirements. Wiesman et al. suggested a lack of SP is likely to have psychological impacts on the employees, as well as why management is likely to face challenges in retaining talent. Organizational executives prioritizing SP and investing in

employee development may increase their chances of retaining their talent pool for good of the company.

### *Investing in and Tracking of Succession Planning*

Schulaka (2015) claimed SP was a complex and emotionally burdensome task formulated around several variables, thus often avoided. Pandey and Sharma (2014) identified challenges circumventing the implementation of SP strategies. Pandey and Sharma posited business leaders were allocating funds in in other areas of talent management, resulting in a negative dual effect including the loss of high potential employees and breaking the link between talent management initiatives and SP activities. Pandey and Sharma highlighted the inability to retain high performing employees and since talent management initiatives are interdependent, a disconnect to SP may result in a series of organizational failures. SP does not appear to produce immediate results; therefore, many executives may not recognize its potential and dismiss its significance (Pandey & Sharma, 2014; Schulaka, 2015).

Pandey and Sharma (2014) identified four SP challenges companies may face and subsequently look to overcome. Challenges included leaders' failure to identify future needs, leaders' inability to develop a pool of qualified candidates, a lack of talent assessment tools, and a lack of a formal process managing all elements (Pandey & Sharma, 2014). The researcher's study found that 100% of respondents agreed that developing a talent pool to identify high potential candidates was a major contributor to SP (Pandey & Sharma, 2014). Pandey and Sharma claimed 96% of the respondents stressed their executives' inability to identify future company needs, thus negatively impacting SP. The evidence may suggest implementing a system to track (a) leaders' future needs, (b) qualified

employees, and (c) employee development may support effective SP (Pandey & Sharma, 2014).

Karaevli and Hall (2003) claimed about one-third of participants felt their company's leadership was adequately prepared to address sudden personnel changes. Karaevli and Hall (2003) suggested business leaders were not completely devoted to the challenge of addressing turbulence in the market due to an excessive focus on succession events rather than the succession process. Peters-Hawkins et al. (2018) stated most organizational leaders lack focus on anticipating the company's future leadership needs, retaining, mentoring, and supporting high potential candidates, and SP from within. Peters-Hawkins et al. (2018) proposed a major SP issue is the lack of comprehensive candidate evaluations, stating "90% of supervisors do not adequately evaluate the administrators they supervise" (p. 37). Peters-Hawkins et al. explained the notion that leaders feared negative perceptions associated with poor evaluations, thus inadequately assessing talent. Karaevli and Hall (2003) and Peters-Hawkins et al.'s (2018) findings suggested business leaders were reactive rather than proactive when addressing SP and, when faced with a succession event, do not have successors readily evaluated or identified.

Reardon (2018) claimed SP presented challenges, including competing priorities compounded with multiple variables, prompting decision makers to make choices that offered a level of personal comfort rather than the best interest of the organization. The 'comfortable decisions' may, in part, come from the SP team (Reardon, 2018). Whether there is a core team of planners, a core team plus a few specialists, e.g., cross-organizational personnel or outside consultants, Reardon (2018) claimed leaders tended to follow advice from those they felt a sense of trust and communication, despite their qualifications. Pandey

and Sharma (2014) identified talent pool creation as a major challenge in SP. Phikiso and Tengeh (2017) discovered leaders who have an inability to identify their organization's future talent pool and subsequently create a pool of suitable candidates hindered SP. A lack of assessment tools and formally integrated processes may plague leaders' ability to effectively identify candidate employees ripe for succession. This lack of SP may influence business leaders to hastily make succession decisions based on familiarity rather than qualifications.

Lynch (2015) stated company leaders faced SP challenges due to a lack of abilities to recruit, develop, and manage their employees. When a departing employee reluctantly relinquishes their roles and responsibilities, succession issues arise, often times dooming the employee transition (Daspit et al., 2016). Leaders' SP initiatives benefited when formal mentoring and coaching programs were integrated into the strategy (Manning et al., 2015). Eliades et al. (2017) argued leadership recognition of viable workforce candidates early in a succession activity benefitted the organization and its likelihood for a successful employee transition. Eliades et al. (2017) and Manning et al.'s (2015) findings proposed providing an opportunity for mentoring an imminent successor is just as important as early recognition of succession-worthy employees.

HC theorists suggested organizational leaders investing in their workforce will likely improve longevity (Mucherumuhia & Kagiri, 2018). Mucherumuhia and Kagiri (2018) proposed company leaders investing in HC gain a competitive advantage over their competitors by developing a long-term strategy. The use of HC theory encourages business leaders to apply on-the-job training and education scholarships to enhance the skills and knowledge of employees (Mucherumuhia & Kagiri, 2018). Leaders investing in HC may

establish a pool of competent and satisfied workers who can promote increased productivity. Mucherumuhia and Kagiri (2018) stated HC investment allows organizational leaders to retain their workers leading to effective SP. HC theory, as a business investment, appears to focus on the aspect of long-term value offered by employees as a means of productivity.

**Human Capital Investment Supports Effective Succession Planning**

*The Significance of Effective Succession Planning*

SP among corporate leaders is increasingly gaining interest among management practitioners and researchers (McKee & Froelich, 2016). McKee and Froelich (2016) suggested SP differs from employee replacement, which is perceived as a reactive initiative centered on finding a competent individual for transitioning personnel. McKee and Froelich claimed the inability of a firm to have a strategic and well-articulated succession plan as part of its organizational culture might result in disruptions and crisis during a transition. Several unforeseen reasons such as untimely death, incapacitation, unplanned resignation, and retirement may contribute interruptions in organizational operations (McKee & Froelich, 2016). SP should be considered regardless of planned employee retirements or transitions to account for all replacement scenarios to avoid organizational interruptions.

Estedadi (2015) stated company executives might face a crisis if the talent pool available is underdeveloped to uptake new positions. The void left by vacancies in an organization can present adverse effects on the organizational performance and compromise its longevity (Estedadi, 2015). Industry leaders recognized the need to avoid transition crisis through initiatives that facilitate continuity of operations (Estedadi, 2015). SP has emerged as an important business strategy to develop the organizational human talent pool, especially in the critical operational areas that enhance the success of the company (Beheshtifar &

Nekoie-Moghadam, 2011). Threats to a firm's prosperity created by voids in workforce vacancies can be mitigated through early SP.

McKee and Froelich (2016) suggested company executives claim to have initiatives designed to identify talented individuals, develop them for defined positions, and then only focus on a handful of potential candidates for a position. McKee and Froelich supposed when this cherry-picking occurs, the talent pool becomes limited and results in conflicts among competent personnel who feel left out. McKee and Froelich posited while some business executives genuinely have succession plans, the programs are not effective, which compromises the human talent pool. Some organizational leaders undertake SP as a compliance issue, instead of a genuine corporate strategy to increase business efficiency (Manzoor et al., 2018). The researchers proposed executive-forced SP may contribute to the lack of good corporate governance, limiting resources available for SP and defaulting to cherry-picking specific candidates to address vacancies (Manzoor et al., 2018; McKee & Froelich, 2016).

***The Significance of Human Capital Development for Effective Succession Planning***

SP is a proactive and methodical process where business leaders identify key positions considered too important to be left vacant or occupied by unqualified personnel (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017). Succession management goes beyond hiring executives or top-level managers to enable the creation of a strategic plan to fill critical positions with skilled and experienced employees (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017). Corporate talent supersedes money and technology, as people provide their companies with competitive advantages (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2011). People, regardless

of their position, are an organization's primary asset, offering their executives with advantages over their competition, thus should warrant attention within a strategic SP.

Chlebikova et al. (2015) advised personnel development enabled enhancement of an employee's professional skills resulting in increased workplace value and motivation. Webb et al. (2017) suggested employees with a clear career roadmap contributed to organizational SP initiatives. Bozer et al. (2017) claimed organizations with leadership development strategies coupled with internal recruitment were positively associated with SP.

Leaders applying SP create a culture that embraces employee development, employee engagement, and leadership succession (Webb et al., 2017). This business management strategy attracts and retains high-performing personnel and is essential for sustained organizational health (Webb et al., 2017). Wiesman et al. (2016) posited the identification of high-performing employees with high potential successfully fulfilled SP opportunities when given technical and leadership training and exposed to cross-organizational activities. Candidate identification coupled with professional development appears to support effective SP and may attract and retain top quality employees.

Perrenoud and Sullivan (2017) stated company executives that plan and implement SP strategies facilitated positive occupational transitions, specifically those involving leadership positions. Business leaders who implemented SP strategies and managed knowledge transfer experienced a limited amount of impact to operational continuity (Berns & Klarner, 2017). Ali et al. (2017) expressed managers utilizing a knowledge transfer approach helped transitioning parties assimilate and proved advantageous for the organization's succession activities. Allowing time for knowledge tansfer from the predecessor to the successor supported successful SP strategies (Sibbald et al., 2017).

Transfer of organizational knowledge, over time, from a predecessor to a successor may ease disruptions to a company's productivity.

Stewart (2016) suggested keeping the human talent pipeline filled during employee successions required a holistic organizational approach. Sustaining a talent pool of qualified employees should be an objective for executive's leadership effectiveness (Patidar et al., 2016). Assessing a successor's ability to produce, communicate, and retain the predecessors' information helped facilitate a successful nonprofit organization transition (Drury, 2016; Perrenoud & Sullivan, 2017). Ali et al. (2017) advised employees in a would-be successor role to work with their leadership to gain necessary training and hands-on experience to aid in their transitions from one job to the next. Knowledge transfer and ample time to transition job responsibilities, e.g., through a period of shadowing, may support smooth SP activities.

Succession and talent management are dynamic processes that occur during changing times of an organization. SP is effective when aligned with other human resource practices, including talent management, and employee development initiatives (Waheed & Zaim, 2015). SP leaders rely on performance reviews, which are inherent undertakings in talent management (Waheed & Zaim, 2015). Waheed and Zaim (2015) supposed lack of aligning SP with other human resource undertakings leads to challenges in identifying the appropriate candidates for future roles. SP appears to be most effective when HC principles are integrated, notably when employee assessments shed light on the aptitudes of the available talent pool.

Saletnik (2018) offered professional mentoring by the current predecessor to the successor supported successful transitions. Predecessor flexibility, transparency, and

communication helped efficiently accomplish succession efforts (Ghee et al., 2015).

Jaskiewicz et al. (2015) noted a sign of effective leadership succession occurred when the

departing associate relinquished control of their activities and instead engaged in coaching

the incoming associate. Ghee et al. (2015) described smooth employee successions

occurring when incoming and outgoing workforce members proactively prepared for the

transition and forged a strong business relationship based on goals and communication.

Communication, engagement, and surrendering of job control appear to support SP between

associates.

### The Effect of Human Capital Development and Succession Planning on Employees

Amodu et al. (2017) indicated use of rewards, salary increases, and professional

training promote productivity in an organization, creating positive attitudes among workers

resulting in improved work quality and morale. Amodu et al. demonstrated a link between

investment in HC and SP, where by workers felt motivated by wage increases and training

sessions provided by company executives. Vito (2018) suggested a stable workforce created

by leadership development provided a basis for the creation of succession policies. Kim et

al. (2015) indicated HC investments contributed to employee motivation and advancement

opportunities, improving workplace productivity. The implementation of HC theory seems

to create positive attitudes among workers which supports company longevity and

systematic SP.

HC theorists supported effective SP as it promotes productivity and creates a talent

pool of workers that can take the positions of transitioning (e.g., retiring) leaders

(Mucherumuhia & Kagiri, 2018; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Mucherumuhia and Kagiri

(2018) claimed organizational leaders lack efficient SP thus retaining the same leadership

team for many years. Mucherumuhia and Kagiri suggested successful organizational leaders implement career management strategies, including training and development strategies that enhance the performance of their employees. Rhodes and Brundrett (2009) claimed a clear and coordinated approach to workforce development increased an organization's talent pool of leaders, positively influencing SP. Business executives who devoted resources to their firm's HC promoted their employee's professional growth, improved their engagement, and increased their likelihood of retention, which ensured the executives could acquire future leaders from the existing workforce (Hassan, 2016). The application of HC theory may positively influence effective SP and subsequent long-term success, specifically for organizational leaders who implement strategies to increase the value of their personnel.

B. Mahmood et al. (2019) proposed employee performance had a strong, positive relationship with SP, suggesting leaders who invest in their employees' professional development leads to a reciprocation of that investment towards achieving organizational goals. Ahrens et al. (2015) posited leadership succession may be viewed as competition, whereby an employee's HC (e.g., the sum of five professional variables) was a primary factor for selection as a potential leadership successor. Mehrabani and Mohamad (2011) specified for an organization's longevity, its employees are the most critical element in the SP process. HC theory may offer business leaders with a guide by which to develop their employees so that they are educated and experienced to succeed outgoing leaders, enhancing an organization's prosperity.

*The Effect of Company Size on Human Capital Development for Effective Succession Planning*

The absence of aspects related to HC theory may lead an organization's downfall

due to the lack of effective SP. Anshika (2018) explained that many small business leaders

around the globe have struggled due to the lack of SP, preventing the continuity of culture

and the retention of know-how required to maintain competitiveness. Anshika asserted the

retirement of small business leaders may result in the collapse of the company because,

unlike multinationals and other large corporations, small business leaders ignore HC

development strategies due to the associated costs. Vito (2018) posited variations in

business size, training programs, and organizational investments affected employee

satisfaction and SP strategies. Small to medium-sized business leaders seeking to implement

effective SP should align resources to enhance knowledge and talent management (Sandada

& Mangwandi, 2015). A correlation between a small business leader's capacity to invest in

HC and the ability to effectively implement SP may exist (Anshika, 2018; Sandada &

Mangwandi, 2015; Vito, 2018).

Investing in HC and implementing effective SP challenges large firms as well.

LeCounte et al. (2017) argued executives of highly successful, larger organizations serve as

the backbones and driving forces for their HC. LeCounte et al. stated successful executives

implemented systems to identify high-potential employees and placed them into programs to

unlock their leadership potential. Maphisa et al. (2017) posited executives who promote HC

theory identify high-potential candidates and subject them to on-the-job training to increase

their experience and eventually create a workforce talent pool to become future leaders.

Investing in HC across all business sizes lends itself to increased opportunities to effectively

implement SP strategies.

**Human Capital Investment Effect on Employee Retention**

*The Role of Succession Management and Talent Management on Employee Retention for*

*Effective Succession Planning*

Succession management can be perceived by some business leaders as a proactive approach in managing human resources, also referred to as human talent (Gozukara & Simsek, 2015). Gozukara and Simsek (2015) addressed SP as the identification of individuals displaying high potential for transitions based on the anticipated needs of the organization. Hoboubi et al. (2017) suggested the need to engage in a tailored development of high potential employees with the intent of having a talent pool to meet evolving organizational requirements. Hoboubi et al. stated company leaders may promote workforce satisfaction and increase competitive advantage by investing in human resource activities aligning to organizational objectives. Human resource experts emphasize managing workforce talent is a key aspect of enhancing well-being of organizations (Waheed & Zaim, 2015). Business executives may increase job satisfaction by investing in HC which may support employees' desire to remain within the company.

Talent management is largely the identification, hiring, and retention of workers who portray talents aligning to organizational leaders' objectives (Farashah, 2015). Talent management includes the development and deployment of selected individuals for specific positions, where they can maximize their productivity (Farashah, 2015). Waheed and Zaim (2015) argued talent management is an integrated business strategy, which fosters the development of workers with the intent of helping them to fulfill their potential. Many business executives appear to engage in talent management to ensure they acquire and retain inherent skills they need to promote productivity and organizational performance.

Talent management is an integral part of modern business due to its contribution to a companies' success and survival (Farashah, 2015). Through human resource programs,

business leaders seek to attract the best available workers and support initiatives to develop

and retain them (Kontoghiorghes, 2016). Effective talent management programs begin at the

recruitment stage, offering an opportunity for human resource staff to identify the

capabilities and competencies of each employee (Kontoghiorghes, 2016). Amidst the

challenges faced by the human resource managers, such as competition for skilled workers

and high turnover rates, talent management offers an opportunity to address these issues

through a sustainable approach (Isa et al., 2018). Developing an organization's workforce

early and often appears to improve SP activities through improved competencies and

increased employee retention.

Kontoghiorghes (2016) posited human resource managers employ human talent

management as a means of realizing the company's future at varying levels of the

organization. Talent management supplements SP by offering opportunities for the

individuals with the highest potential within the workforce to learn, develop, and gain the

necessary experience in advancing their careers (Isa et al., 2018). Farashah (2015) claimed

talent management entailed stimulating and retaining persons who show the ability to play

key roles in the future of the organization, while SP implementers lead the organization to

look closely at the talents available. Isa et al.'s (2018) and Kontoghiorghes (2016) findings

suggested workforce development should occur at all levels within an organization, offering

additional opportunities to high potential members, whereby the skills gained help keep the

individuals satisfied and retained.

Talent management is a strategic HC process that facilitates SP (Groves, 2018).

Talent management can be viewed as a process that incorporates SP within the process of

workforce development within the organization (Groves, 2018). Succession and talent

management center on facilitating the long-term success of a company. Researchers suggest successful SP initiatives require inputs from a range of key individuals across the organization, beginning with identifying talent and ensuring the succession processes are embedded into the corporate strategy (Groves, 2018). Leadership implementation of a SP program requires focusing on change management, communication, and organizational culture alignment, commonly addressed by the human resource staff in talent management practices (Groves, 2018). Leaders effectively managing human talent may influence company executives to focus on the skills and experiences required to sustain and enhance competitiveness in the future.

*The Effect of Human Capital Development on Employee Retention for Effective Succession Planning*

Professional experience is an important aspect of how personnel perform in the workplace. Organizational executives across all industries implement strategies ensuring they retain talented workers who can contribute to the profitability and performance of their business (Nasir & Mahmood, 2016). Strategies include (a) offering better compensation, (b) building healthy relationships across different levels of the organization, (c) offering bonuses and benefits, and (d) training and development programs (Nasir & Mahmood, 2016). Nasir and Mahmood suggested employees who contribute substantially or demonstrate they can facilitate the future success of a business are actively retained. The relationship between employee retention and SP is important, stemming from human resource practices (Presbitero et al., 2016). Researchers appear to suggest employee retention, talent management, and SP complement each other at different stages within a business (Nasir & Mahmood, 2016; Presbitero et al., 2016).

Presbitero et al. (2016) posited a positive correlation between workforce retention and SP as both are focused on ensuring organizational effectiveness now and in the future. Researchers claimed an effective SP program increases the rates of employee retention (Presbitero et al., 2016). SP offers future opportunities to the workforce, while employee retention supports retaining of the skills needed to engage in these opportunities. Employee retention is important in creating an organizational culture and communicating the culture to the current and future workforce (Presbitero et al., 2016). Retaining staff members and transferring organizational values appear to provide an opportunity to identify the talents required to support SP activities.

Kiazad et al. (2015) offered employee retention is a feeling personnel have of being wanted and connected in their responsibilities and with others in the workplace. Kiazad et al. described processes promoting employee rotation to ensure workers feel they are compatible with their roles and mindful of their contributions to the organization. Employee retention helps to create comfort in employees, which in turn helps create confidence in business leaders to continue to invest in and develop their employees (Nasir & Mahmood, 2016). Presbitero et al. (2016) advised employee retention entails company executives making sacrifices that include (a) financial rewards, (b) promotion opportunities, (c) development opportunities, and (d) work environment improvement. Such investments may support retaining human talent within the organization, aiding in SP activities.

***The Effect of Human Capital Development on Job Satisfaction for Employee Retention and Effective Succession Planning***

Employee retention entails meeting the critical needs of the workforce and aligning them to company leader's objectives (Gilding et al., 2015). Achieving congruence in

meeting employees' needs and company leader's objectives creates a positive environment

for effective SP (Gilding et al., 2015). When employees feel their needs are met, they feel

their performance contributes to the success of the business (Nasir & Mahmood, 2016).

Employee retention programs help staff members realize the value of their performance to

the organization, while the training and development programs help increase their

productivity (Gilding et al., 2015). These realizations may motivate career aspirations,

leading to increased company loyalty, and increased job satisfaction, further supporting SP

activities.

Job satisfaction alludes to the level an employee is content with their role,

colleagues, environment, and other factors in their workplace (Platis et al., 2015). Low

levels of job satisfaction may result in decreased employee productivity and organizational

performance (Platis et al., 2015). Hoboubi et al. (2017) revealed that job satisfaction is a

combination of psychological, physiological, and environmental aspects that determine how

fulfilled an individual is with their job. Satisfied workers are more productive and

committed to the organization (Hoboubi et al., 2017). Hoboubi et al. suggested a

relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment, creating opportunities

for employees to take on new roles. Workforce members content in their jobs may commit

to the success of their company, thereby remaining longer or permanently with the company

and available to support in SP activities.

Bakotić (2016) posited job satisfaction and organizational commitment are

psychological states, alluding to the relationship the employee has with the organization and

their probability of remaining a member. Bakotić characterized employees with a high level

of organizational commitment having an increased willingness to work hard and produce for

the organization. Researchers indicated that employees develop organizational loyalty from job satisfaction when they perceive their leaders investing in professional development, as well as observing a clear and established path for advancement (Hanaysha & Tahir, 2016). Committed and satisfied employees tend to seek opportunities within their organization (Bakotić, 2016). The act of seeking opportunities within an organization may complement SP initiatives.

Organizational executives investing in HC enhance employee job performance and job satisfaction, significantly improving job retention. Mucherumuhia and Kagiri (2018) asserted HC investment fosters employee retention in human resource management practices. Mucherumuhia and Kagiri indicated employees increase their performance intensity in direct proportion to the levels of expectation of desirable outcomes or rewards. Maphisa et al. (2017) indicated that the level of employee job satisfaction may predict their desire to remain within an organization. Employees may strive to attain job satisfaction due to self-interest such that learning job-appropriate skills and company culture allow them to avoid pain. Maphisa et al. (2017) and Mucherumuhia and Kagiri's (2018) evidence suggested the use of talent management strategies can promote job satisfaction and result in employee retention. An exception to this notion may be for associates planning to retire or have plans in other fields, thus not benefitting from rewards or self-interest and unphased by job retention.

**Human Capital Investment Effect on Knowledge Management**

*The Effect of Human Capital Development on Knowledge Transfer for Effective Succession Planning*

Preserving the skills and knowledge available within an organization is imperative to ensure new or transitioning workers can acquire the relevant insights to maintain effective and undisturbed business operations (Rodgers et al., 2017). Passing information and experience from one set of employees to another facilitates a smooth continuity of operations (Kodam et al., 2016). HC programs aimed at knowledge transfer help executives strategize and create a roadmap through which business objectives can be achieved (Joshi et al., 2016). HC-driven knowledge transfer initiatives facilitate the realization of business objectives by ensuring minimal gaps in competency, safeguarding against losses in profitability or skilled personnel (Joshi et al., 2016). Joshi et al. (2016) stated knowledge transfer initiatives offer a platform where by experienced personnel educate, mentor, and engage in the development of their colleagues to confirm company leaders have skilled successors prepared to take on new positions. Through knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing models, SP strategies may be more effectively and efficiently realized.

Support to SP through knowledge transfer is often highlighted in risk management programs, where by company leaders prepare for unexpected situations, such as a loss of an experienced employee (Rodgers et al., 2017). HC managers with an integrated knowledge transfer strategy may mitigate risks to business continuity through a pool of capable successors who can temporarily or permanently substitute the required positions (Rodgers et al., 2017). Knowledge transfer programs may create an environment characterized by healthy competition through the competences created in the workforce (Joshi et al., 2016). Joshi et al. (2016) suggested knowledge transfer activities may result in increased motivation for workforce members involved. HC leaders with knowledge transfer programs

can mitigate unexpected vacancy situations which supports the continuity of business operations with prepared successors.

Knowledge transfer supports a changing business environment and the need to accumulate the experiences held by employees in an organization (Gozukara & Simsek, 2015). The feedback gained from knowledge transfer helps shape and inform the current and future organizational structure (Gozukara & Simsek, 2015). Understanding the needs of business leaders is vital for success, thus assessing the effectiveness of knowledge transfer programs supports leaders' ability to plan for the future (Joshi et al., 2016). HC managers may mitigate business uncertainty by consciously implementing and tracking knowledge transfer programs to ease the disruptions caused by changing times and employees.

Knowledge acts as a valuable resource in the achievement of business longevity. Flynn and Rutherford (2018) asserted innovative organizational executives usually create new value in terms of new products, processes, or organizational practices. The acquired knowledge enables companies to enhance their productivity and gain a competitive edge over other businesses (Flynn & Rutherford, 2018). Mucherumuhia and Kagiri (2018) claimed business leaders may use HC theory to prevent the loss of knowledge within a company, which could result in the eventual decline of an organization. Flynn and Rutherford revealed the absence of SP contributes to the loss of key personnel. Flynn and Rutherford indicated that failing to train the next generation of business leaders hindered employee retention, thus negatively impacting productivity. A lack of HC development may hamper the transfer of knowledge and hurting business continuity.

***The Significance of Knowledge Transfer for Effective Succession Planning***

Csizmadia et al. (2016) described knowledge transfer as the process of sharing

information between employees or within an organization such that information gained

improves or sustains productivity. Csizmadia et al. stressed knowledge transfer as an

important function in effective SP. A lack of knowledge transfer from a transitioning

employee may cause a reduction of organizational continuity amassed by the successor

(Csizmadia et al., 2016). Kodam et al. (2016) highlighted when knowledge transfer

strategies are integrated within an organization, the likelihood of maintaining productivity is

greatly increased. Sibbald et al. (2017) claimed formal knowledge transfer improves the SP

process and organizational performance. Sibbald et al. proposed effective SP depended on

cooperation between the predecessor and successor and allowed for employee development

and knowledge transfer through the crossover and discovery phases. Sibbald et al. posited

effective SP was achieved if (a) driven by executives, yet collaborative and openly

communicated, (b) supported as a continuous process, (c) identified metrics, (d) established

milestones, and (e) included post-succession assessments. Knowledge transfer may increase

the effectiveness of SP processes, especially when formal processes exist and the

predecessor and successor work diligently together.

**Nonprofit Organizations and Nonprofit Organization Leadership**

*An Overview of Nonprofit Organizations*

A nonprofit organization is an institution dedicated to furthering community

resident's social enhancement through civic services such as charity, faith, or education

(Agarwal et al., 2018). Agarwal et al. (2018) described nonprofit organizations as tax

exempt entities based on their public benefit to societal change. Maier et al. (2016) stated

nonprofit organizations concentrate on achieving their social mission and utilize profits to

sustain their work. Nonprofit organizations are accountable to stakeholders such as volunteers, donors, and community residents rather than shareholders (Maier et al., 2016). Nonprofit organizations may operate in a variety of business domains such as science, art, religion, or education.

### *Leadership Styles in A Nonprofit Organization*

Nonprofit organization leaders face unique business challenges due to resource management, tax exempt business model, and often times the dependence on volunteers to support operations (Bish & Becker, 2016). Nonprofit organization executives require varying leadership styles to prosper the organization. Palumbo (2016) noted servant leadership as one of many leadership styles evident in nonprofit organizations. Palumbo described servant leaders as embodying the desire to empower and develop their staff members. Leaders displaying total commitment to servant leadership met the needs of the organization's workforce but risked opportunities to focus on their customers (Palumbo, 2016). Effective nonprofit organization executives should adjust and apply different, but appropriate, leadership styles to help the organization flourish.

Kuntz et al. (2019) described transactional leadership as a praise and penalty style of leadership, and transformational leadership as a motivating and inspiring style of leadership. Cai et al. (2018) suggested nonprofit organization leaders using a transformational leadership style positively influence their workforce than nonprofit organization leaders using a transactional leadership style. Transformational leaders may be able to influence organizational changes while exhibiting an interactive leadership style and developing an engaged organizational culture (M. Mahmood et al., 2019). Cai et al. suggested a more effective approach for nonprofit organization leaders to successfully implement

organizational changes or overcome business challenges included utilizing a balanced combination of transactional and transformational leadership styles (Cai et al., 2018). Nonprofit organization leaders may benefit from a balanced blend of leadership styles.

### *Leadership Techniques in Successful Nonprofit Organizations*

Effective leadership is a crucial driver for a successful nonprofit organization (Zavadsky, 2016). Zavadsky (2016) claimed nonprofit organization leadership made of dynamic and diverse leadership styles positively influence a staff's performance. Similar to for-profit organizations, nonprofit organization leaders may actively compete for resources to remain a viable industry competitor (Maier et al., 2016). Ogliastri et al. (2016) described tensions nonprofit organization executives face and respond to when conflicted between social mission and mission to remain financially afloat. Leadership adaptability may support successful nonprofit organization executives to lead their workforce, pursue resources, and remain mission focused.

Nonprofit organization executives should remain informed of contemporary business practices to adapt internal strategies for longevity (Choi, 2016). Zavadsky (2016) posited establishing and maintaining stakeholder relationships demonstrated an important strategy. Choi (2016) emphasized workforce development and organizational culture as primary focus areas for strategy investment. Bernstein et al. (2016) stressed the importance and potential benefits of taking risk by implementing innovative business strategies. Choi (2016) and Zavadsky (2016) proposed nonprofit organization executives remain abreast of advanced business strategies to include stakeholder engagements and HC investments.

Bernstein et al. (2016) suggested organizational leaders tend to take more business risks and implement more innovative strategies in the earlier stages of their careers.

Bernstein et al. noted in an organizational leader's tenure, their attitude toward risk and change tends to become conventional. Conte (2018) argued organizational leaders with a longer tenure embrace innovative strategies as compared to organizational leaders with a shorter tenure. Hughes et al. (2018) claimed dynamic leadership styles in the workplace had more positive influence over the organization's culture than that of innovative strategies. A balance between dynamic leadership styles and business innovation may offer nonprofit organization executives a more effective management approach.

Nonprofit organization leadership approaches tend to influence the workforce's personal and professional development and impact the workforce's productivity (Kearns et al., 2015). Kearns et al. (2015) speculated nonprofit organization leadership styles differed according to position. Conte (2018) posited nonprofit organization leadership styles differed according to tenure. Bish and Becker (2016) claimed nonprofit organization leadership styles differed according to commitment and duties. The leadership style exemplified by an organizational leader often mirrors that of an organization's mission (Kearns et al., 2015). Nonprofit organization leaders' leadership approaches vary based on mission, position, and experience, and may impact their members' growth and productivity.

Wright (2017) stated an effective nonprofit organization leader demonstrated management skills, the ability to develop robust relationships, and successfully plan and execute strategies. Kearns et al. (2015) listed (a) technical, (b) interpersonal, (c) conflict resolution, and (d) conceptual skills as effective leadership abilities nonprofit organization leaders exhibit to successfully perform their duties. Bish and Becker (2016) identified leadership commitment, innovation, and knowledge as important traits for nonprofit organization executives to remain competitive and innovative. Choi (2016) offered

nonprofit organization executives willing to embrace innovative approaches positively

benefited the organization. Conte (2018) suggested leadership tenure impacted the level of

innovation a nonprofit organization executive was willing to take on. Choi (2016), Kearns et

al. (2015), and Conte (2018) advocated nonprofit organizational leader's tolerance for risk,

technical and personnel skills, and professional experience support their ability to

effectively manage the success of the organization.

### *Leadership Challenges in Nonprofit Organizations*

Maintaining the prosperity of a nonprofit organization remains a challenge for

nonprofit organization leaders in an ever-changing business landscape (Armsworth et al.,

2015). Li et al. (2017) claimed when employees perceived organizational leadership changes

occurring to achieve personally driven goals, resulting in decreased organization

performance, their motivation and engagement diminished. Appelbaum et al. (2015)

suggested leaders who clearly articulate the benefits of organizational change to sustain

organizational longevity positively influenced their employees' attitudes towards change.

Appelbaum et al. (2015) offered mitigating resistance to organizational changes by first

improving the climate of the workforce and reengaging in change management initiatives

upon support from the workforce. Regardless of organization type, people remain the chief

asset for a company's success, therefore informing the workforce of looming organizational

changes may sustain or improve their performance.

Successfully leading a nonprofit organization does not need to occur in a vacuum.

Nonprofit organization executives mitigated operational challenges when collaborating with

other nonprofit organizations and for-profit organizations for mutual benefit (Armsworth et

al., 2015; Chapman & Varda, 2017). Armsworth et al. (2015) noted public firms partnered

with nonprofit organization leaders to support collaborative projects, co-funded efforts, or funded grants. Nonprofit organization leaders demonstrated successful collaborations through cross-sector cooperative initiatives, solving complex social challenges (Chapman & Varda, 2017).

Chapman and Varda (2017) stated nonprofit organization leaders collaborating within and across other organizations required dynamic and distinctive leadership characteristics. Chapman and Varda claimed nonprofit organization leaders exhibiting a strong commitment to the organization's social mission engaged in partnering ventures, providing increased opportunities to improve the surrounding community. Armsworth et al. (2015) proposed nonprofit organization leaders with developed professional networks offered greater opportunities to gain resources for their organizations. Armsworth et al. (2015) and Chapman and Varda's (2017) findings proposed nonprofit organization executives stand to benefit from formal and mutual partnerships to share resources or address shared challenges.

### The Effect of Human Capital Development in Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations differ in operations and focus over those used by for-profit organizations (Agarwal et al., 2018). Human resource strategies focused on the implementation of high-performance work practices, such as employee recruitment and retention, reveal how nonprofit organizations are able to adapt to traditional for-profit organization strategies for overall betterment (Robineau et al., 2015). Robineau et al. (2015) suggested employee training, development, and focus on personnel retention supported high-performance human resources practices. Terrana (2017) argued few nonprofit organization executives performed comprehensive internal evaluations of their company's

professional development programs. Enhancing the professional development of the workforce supports the longevity of nonprofit organizations, offering a means to gain a competitive advantage (Robineau et al., 2015). Laurett and Ferreira (2018) stressed the importance for nonprofit organization leaders to formulate human talent strategies to cope with internal and external challenges to remain successful. Laurett and Ferreira (2018), Robineau et al. (2015), and Terrana (2017) suggested successful nonprofit organization leaders effectively balance mission and purpose with organizational management, notably through the development of their workforce.

### *The Effect of Succession Planning in Nonprofit Organizations*

Bish and Becker (2016) proposed employee roles and responsibilities and executives' performance metrics are key factors to understanding a nonprofit organization's succession requirements. Nonprofit organizations have evolved to copy several traditional business strategies (Maier et al., 2016). Laurett and Ferreira (2018) indicated nonprofit organization executives implemented human resources strategies to address challenges associated with human talent, specifically focused on fulfilling their social mission. Adopting strategies typically found in for-profit and private sector businesses proved difficult with workforce pushback (Maier et al., 2016). Liket and Maas (2015) argued few nonprofit executives implemented structured organizational processes. A lack of structured organizational processes has stalled SP initiatives in many nonprofit organizations (Maier et al., 2016). Terrana (2017) highlighted the downfall of many unformalized nonprofit organizations unwilling to adapt or partner with other comparable nonprofit organizations for mutual gain. Laurett and Ferreira (2018), Liket and Maas (2015), and Maier et al.'s

(2016) findings indicated nonprofit organization leaders may benefit from formalized SP strategies that many for-profit organization leaders have implemented.

**Transition**

Section 1 of this study encompassed several aspects of discussion including (a) the background of the problem, (b) problem and purpose statements, (c) nature of the study, (d) the research question, (e) interview questions, and (f) conceptual framework. Section 1 of this study also included (a) operational definitions, (b) assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, (c) significance of the study, and (d) the review of the professional and academic literature. Exploration of the research phenomenon was through the conceptual framework of HC theory. The review of professional and academic literature included research related to the conceptual framework, as well as an introduction to SP, followed by five categories of research including (a) how HC investment supports effective SP, (b) how HC investment increases employee retention, (c) how HC investment increases knowledge transfer, and (d) nonprofit organizations and nonprofit organization leadership. The lack of investment in HC hindered effective SP strategies among business leaders, to include nonprofit organization executives, was identified as a business problem as these executives often struggle to maintain undisrupted continuity of operations or organizational prosperity during employee transitions.

Section 2 of this study contains (a) purpose statement, (b) an explanation of the role of the researcher, (c) participants, (d) research method and design, (e) population and sampling, (f) ethical research, and (g) data collection, organization, and analysis. Section 2 also covers my study's reliability and validity, as well as transition and summary. Section 3 of this study addresses my study's (a) findings, (b) application to the practice, (c)

implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action and future research, and (e)

reflections and conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the strategies that nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP. The target population for the research were four executives in southeast Michigan who have successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization. The implication for positive social change includes benefiting local residents by increasing community stability with increased access to employment and services that enables residents to increase their contributions to community advancement.

## Role of the Researcher

Clark and Vealé (2018) explained the role of the researcher is an individual or group that systematically collects and analyzes qualitative data to address a study's research question. My role as the researcher included (a) describing the topic under inquiry, (b) developing open-ended interview questions, (c) recruiting participants, and (d) collecting and analyzing data. I did not have any relationships with the identified nonprofit organizations or participants employed by the nonprofit organizations. Study participants were informed of research topic and their rights in partaking in the study through informed consent process prior to conducting the interviews. Informed consent includes enlightening participants they are not under obligation to participate in the study or answer interview questions and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence (Lie & Witteveen, 2017). I obtained informed consent from each participant before conducting the interviews through electronic mail indicating their consent to partake in the study.

The *Belmont Report* was used for ethical considerations and procedures as the report offers ethical guidelines to conduct research with human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). The elements outlined in the report include (a) respect for persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice, supporting ethical research and the protection of human subjects in research (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Respect for persons includes allowing human subjects to decide for themselves, treating them with reverence, and obtaining informed consent (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Beneficence comprises a philosophy of seeking to maximize the benefit of the research study while minimizing risks to the human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Justice encompasses ensuring research procedures are managed thoughtfully, reasonably, and without manipulation, fairly and equally amongst all human subjects (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Roulston and Shelton (2015) suggested researchers remain impartial during the research process to refrain from viewing data through a personal perspective. To mitigate bias and avoid viewing the data through a personal lens, I utilized data collected from open-ended interview questions and company documents from four nonprofit organization executives. Garcia and Gluesing (2013) posited placing aside personal beliefs may contribute to improving a study's data integrity, while reducing researcher bias and predispositions. To improve data integrity, I attained data saturation and used member checking and triangulation to mitigate personal bias. Data saturation occurs when data are collected and no new information emerges during the remainder of the data collection process (Yin, 2018). Member checking validates collected data and avoids misrepresentation of the participants' responses. (Birt et al., 2016). Triangulation from

multiple sources of evidence allow researchers to infer completeness and trustworthiness of their studies (Flick, 2017).

Wittmayer and Schäpke (2014) recommended researchers exercise caution to limit or eliminate personal beliefs and experiences to circumvent unwarranted influences on the research processes. I used objectivity to improve data quality through independence from the research topic and my application of the professional and academic literature. Boudana (2011) stated objectivity allows researchers to reduce favoritism and ground their assumptions in correctness based on a factual state of reality.

I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A) to manage the interview process, mitigate personal bias, and achieve a better understanding of my participant's responses. Rowley (2012) claimed researchers implement an interview protocol to effectively manage (e.g., organize, and conduct) research study interviews. Castillo-Montoya (2016) recommended researchers use interview protocol forms to maintain consistency when asking the interview questions. My interview protocol included (a) an explanation of the study's purpose, (b) a request for participation, (c) availability and locations for interviews, (d) the interview questions, and (e) my contact information (see Appendix A). My interview protocol also included a script to systematically guide me through (a) information provided to each participant, (b) open-ended interview questions, and (c) actions taken while conducting the interviews to promote seamless discussions and reduce negative impacts (e.g., fatigue or disinterest) on the research participants.

## Participants

Elo et al. (2014) offered researchers establishing eligibility criteria collect relevant research data and confirm the transferability of findings. The eligibility criteria for my

study's participants included (a) being a full-time executive within a southeast Michigan

nonprofit organization, (b) having 12 months or more experience as an industry executive,

and (c) having successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization

within five years from date of interview. Agarwal et al. (2018) described nonprofit

organizations as tax exempt entities based on their public benefit promoting social good

through civic services such as charity, faith, or education. Participants who met my

eligibility criteria were selected to align with my study's research question.

My strategies for gaining access to the participants included contacting the southeast

Michigan Chamber of Commerce, targeting Wayne County for a list of nonprofit

organizations (https://www.michamber.com/). I also reviewed the list of nonprofit

organizations contained within the Michigan Nonprofit Association membership list, noting

viable candidate nonprofit organizations (https://www.mnaonline.org/). I contacted

executives of nonprofit organizations by phone and email to assess their willingness to

participate in this study by explaining the purpose of the study and their role in the research.

I provided a letter of invitation (see Appendix B) by email to expressly interested

participants, which included a consent form for their review. Beskow et al. (2014) stated

routine communications with study participants can help develop a positive working

relationship, which is an important aspect of qualitative research. Researchers may

safeguard the well-being of a study's participants and develop a bond by remaining sensitive

and mitigate bias during interactions (Collins & Cooper, 2014). I remained respectful,

empathetic, and suspend personal judgments to develop confidence with the research

participants and improve the data collection process throughout all interpersonal

communications. I did not have prior professional experience with the study topic; I

obtained my knowledge on the research question and conceptual framework from

professional and the academic literature.

## Research Method and Design

**Research Method**

The research methods considered for this study were (a) qualitative, (b) quantitative,

and (c) mixed methods. I selected the qualitative research method. Qualitative researchers

may explore business problems through in-depth, open-ended, interpretive questions,

detailing participant experiences (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Bansal et al. (2018) stated

qualitative researchers use tools to construct a research theory based on descriptive data that

may challenge existing theories and reveal new theoretical insights. Konecki (2019)

maintained the development, along with some standardization of qualitative research

methods and procedures for data analysis increases the accuracy of the research method. For

my qualitative study, I generated deep and detailed descriptions from five open-ended *how*

and *what* interview questions to explore the strategies nonprofit organization executives use

to effectively implement SP.

The quantitative research method was not used as quantitative data did not provide

the rich, interpretive information required to explore the phenomenon. Quick and Hall

(2015) suggested quantitative researchers pursue an understanding and generalization of a

phenomenon by objectively (a) collecting numerical data, (b) measuring variables, and (c)

testing hypotheses through statistical models to address the research question. Quantitative

researchers interpret numerical data from a statistical analysis of variables lacking an

opportunity for follow-up questions to add clarity and understanding to the research topic

(Bannon, 2015).

The mixed method research method was not used as the quantitative aspect of mixed methods did not sufficiently address the research question. McManamny et al. (2015) argued mixed method researchers use characteristics from quantitative and qualitative research in the same study. Halcomb and Hickman (2015) purported mixed method researchers combine quantitative and qualitative data to understand a complex phenomenon and often address a research problem through numerous philosophical models in a single study. The mixed method research method did not sufficiently address the research question for this study.

**Research Design**

The research designs considered for this study were (a) case study, (b) ethnographic, and (c) phenomenological. A multiple case study research design was selected. Multiple case studies allow a researcher to explore a given phenomenon within a bounded time and place to compare findings of each case (Taylor & Thomas-Gregory, 2015). Case study researchers conduct in-depth exploration of a phenomenon in its actual setting, through *how, what,* and *why* questions seeking to understand the differences within cases to replicate findings (Yin, 2014). Lukka (2014) stated case study researchers detect and develop themes to address a research question using the responses from participant interviews.

Keutel et al. (2014) posited ethnographic researchers explore populations' customs, culture, actions, beliefs, or other social traditions. Grossoehme (2014) suggested researchers use ethnographic studies to explore shared beliefs, behaviors, and language of individuals within the same ethnic or culture-sharing group. Kruth (2015) suggested ethnographic researchers observe human behavior, investigate human experiences, and explore cultural

phenomenon. Ethnographic research design was not optimal for my study as I did not partake in extended participant observation nor culture immersion to explore the study.

Errasti-Ibarrondo et al. (2018) revealed phenomenological researchers focus on participants' personal lived experiences related to a given phenomenon. Corby et al. (2015) stated phenomenological design researchers depend on detailed descriptions of participant's experiences, significantly elevating the accuracy of the information. Phenomenological researchers focus on known concepts that lack a deep and comprehensive understanding, thus seek to define a common meaning for individuals' lived experiences regarding a phenomenon (Kaya, 2018). The phenomenological research design was not optimal for my study as I intended to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, not participants' lived experiences.

I attained data saturation through semistructured interviews, asking open-ended questions, and collecting SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. I conducted interviews with the participants and collected documents until the data became redundant and no new information emerged. Fusch and Ness (2015) and Yin (2018) stated data saturation occurs when no new information emerges from additionally collected data. Carcone et al. (2015) argued conducting additional interviews is unnecessary when a researcher attains data saturation.

**Population and Sampling**

Davoudi et al. (2016) suggested sampling is a process of gathering holistic information rather than measuring individual units of the population. Etikan et al. (2016) stated researchers select a study's participants based on specific criteria when using the purposeful sampling technique. When purposeful sampling is used, qualitative researchers

select participants based on their familiarity and involvement with the research topic and the ability to provide detailed information to reveal a deeper understanding (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Davoudi et al. (2016) claimed researchers select participants to represent a sample of the population to provide a perspective of the research inquiry. For this study, I did not interact with entire population and used a purposeful sampling method. Davoudi et al. (2016) purported qualitative case study researcher's use small participant sample sizes to seek a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Yin (2018) suggested for case study research, three to eight participants make for a suitable sample size to accumulate ample data to understand the phenomenon.

Guetterman (2015) reported researchers using a multiple case study design should use a suitable sampling size, which is generally two or more participants, to satisfy the research objectives. Gentles et al. (2015) claimed purposeful sampling allowed qualitative researchers to select participants with an ability to provide deep and meaningful information to achieve data saturation. I used the purposeful sampling method to target a specific population with the knowledge and experience to answer my research question. I purposefully selected four executives located in southeast Michigan who have successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization.

The criteria I used to select research study participants included (a) being a full-time executive within a southeast Michigan nonprofit organization, (b) having 12 months or more experience as an industry executive, and (c) having successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization within 5 years from date of interview. Robinson (2014) reported researchers specify participant criteria when formulating a study. The participants

were asked five semistructured, open-ended interview questions seeking to collect rich descriptions of effective SP strategies. Seidman (2015) claimed semistructured, open-ended interview questions offer researchers an opportunity to solicit participants for rich and thick descriptions of their experiences.

Fusch and Ness (2015) argued qualitative researchers conduct comprehensive interviews to achieve data saturation. Tran et al. (2016) suggested reaching data saturation indicates the conclusion of the data collection phase where no new or relevant data is available. Tran et al. indicated achieving data saturation in qualitative research demonstrates a researcher has acquired sufficient data enabling a viable study. I achieved data saturation through semistructured, open-ended interview questions and SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks to the point no new data emerged.

Elo et al. (2014) recommended researcher's develop trust with their study's participants to promote the transferability of credible data. Ranney et al. (2015) purported research data may be affected based on where interviews occur. Research participants may feel more comfortable in an interview location of their choosing, furthering the likelihood of rich data collection (Hoover & Morrow, 2015). I requested each participant select a location that is private and convenient to conduct the interviews, taking into consideration my own personal safety. Marshall and Rossman (2016) stated interviews should not be administered in public, unsafe, or inconvenient locations to the research participants or the researcher.

I conducted virtual face-to-face, semistructured interviews with each participant, administering five open-ended interview questions in accordance with the interview protocol (see Appendix A). Interviews conducted face-to-face offer researchers a high

degree of control over their interview protocol and allow for sharing of deeply personal experiences, improving the validity of the collected data (Jenner & Myers, 2019). I took handwritten notes and audio recorded the interviews to ensure accuracy of the collected information for eventual transcription. Employing an audio recording device during an interview allows for a researcher to commit full attention to the participant and effectively manage the collection of data (Sutton & Austin, 2015). I used Zoom Cloud Meetings to conduct and record the interviews. Zoom Cloud Meetings is a web-based "cloud" audio and video platform for communication by two or more users (Darr et al., 2019).

I ensured data saturation by asking open-ended questions during semistructured interviews and collecting SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks to the point no new data emerged. I sought to improve the richness and quality of my research findings and improve transferability by using purposeful sampling to ensure a representative sample and data saturation. DeMassis and Kotlar (2014) stated collecting data from two or more sources may improve data credibility and increase a researcher's understanding of the research phenomenon. Hagaman and Wutich (2017) claimed achieving data saturation occurs when the collection of data generates redundant information. I also ensured data saturation through member checking by having my research participants review their interview responses and validate my interpretations. Birt et al. (2016) posited member checking validates collected data and avoids misrepresentation of the participants' responses. I scheduled follow-up interviews by email within two weeks of the initial interview. Participants had an opportunity to make corrections to my interpretations and corroborated my understanding.

**Ethical Research**

Artal and Rubenfeld (2017) stated researchers implementing ethical procedures respect the study's participants, offer informed consent, and benefit social concerns. Petrova et al. (2016) claimed qualitative researchers should adhere to a high standard of ethical practices to ensure participant dignity, autonomy, and confidentiality within their work. To safeguard ethical research, I observed several procedures beginning by seeking approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting participant interviews. The IRB approval number for this study is 11-11-20-0627336.

Lie and Witteveen (2017) stated an ethical researcher should attain informed participant consent before commencing the data collection process. Upon receipt of Walden University's IRB approval, I emailed potential participants with an introduction to myself, an explanation of the purpose of the study, and their role as research participants (see Appendix B). My email contained an attached informed consent form for participant review and, for those who agreed, instructions to reply to the email with the words "I consent to participate in this study" to indicate their willingness and consent to participate in the study.

Hammersley (2015) stressed the importance of participant privacy, safety, and right to withdraw from a research study. An informed consent form should clearly state that research study participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any given time (Tam et al., 2015). I informed my participants of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point in the process and may choose not to respond to any interview question without repercussion. I informed my participants if they wish to withdraw before or after the interview phase of the study, they may submit a written request to withdraw, by email, to the address provided in the informed consent form. I informed my participants if

they choose to withdraw from the study during the interview, none of their collected data would be used in the study and they need only provide a verbal statement.

Participants may receive compensation for their involvement in a study (Collins et al., 2017; Yin, 2018). I did not offer compensation to my study's participants. I informed my participants their involvement is voluntary and will receive a summary of my findings after the study is published.

Research participants should partake freely and willingly in a study, free from harm and apprehension (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Business researchers should follow the National Institutes of Health's (NIH, 2012) guidelines for the protection of human subjects. Hammersley (2015) claimed researchers should observe ethical principles throughout the process of the study, demonstrating principles of respecting participant autonomy and privacy, while remaining composed and mitigating harm. In accordance with NIH guidelines, I avoided physical and emotional harm and protected participant identity and confidentiality.

I upheld participant confidentiality by using identifiers P1, P2, P3, and P4 without mentioning any information leading to the identity of the participant. Ferreira et al. (2015) recommended protecting participant identity by redacting any information that could lead to revealing participant identity. I informed my participants that any collected data will be kept in a password-protected Universal Serial Bus (USB) device in my private home office with restricted access to myself at a minimum of 5 years from data collection. After 5 years, I will shred all hardcopies of notes and reformat the USB device.

**Data Collection Instruments**

I served as the data collection instrument, collecting research data by conducting four virtual face-to-face semistructured interviews with one participant per interview asking five open-ended questions in accordance with an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Yin (2014) offered researchers assume the role of the primary data collection instrument during qualitative studies. I used semistructured interviews to collect qualitative data, allowing participants to describe new ideas from open-ended questions. Qualitative researchers typically use interviews to collect data (Kornbluh, 2015). Yin (2014) purported in-depth interviews in their actual setting help researchers understand the differences within cases to replicate findings. Researchers utilize participant interview responses to detect and develop themes to address a research question (Seidman, 2015).

I augmented the semistructured interviews by conducting document analysis on SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. Bowen (2009) offered document analysis as a systematic collection, documentation, organization, analysis, and interpretation of collected research data. Researchers use document analysis as a data collection method to access information in different disciplines as a single or complimentary data source to answer a research question (Kayesa & Shung-King, 2021). Ritchie et al. (2013) reported researchers conduct document analysis to gain a better understanding of organizational leaders' records and archived information and to substantiate data collected from other methods. I identified themes from recurring terms and phrases contained within the SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks to uncover additional information and expand upon the information gathered during the semistructured interviews. Morgan et al. (2017) claimed

case study researchers rely on various data sources to complement and corroborate other collected sources of evidence. Yin (2018) stated case study researchers use several data sources to realize definitive research findings and confirm their study's reliability and validity.

Morse (2015) and Yin (2018) stated ensuring case study reliability and validity requires employing different research methods throughout varying stages of the research process. I enhanced the reliability and validity of the data collection instrument/process through member checking and triangulation. Birt et al. (2016) and Thomas (2017) described member checking as a method to assure data credibility through the sharing of the researcher's interpretations with the research participants to include reviewing their interview responses. I used a triangulation method of participant interviews, handwritten notes, and review of SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks to support data reliability. Flick (2017) noted researchers use triangulation from multiple sources of evidence to infer comprehensiveness and credibility of their studies.

**Data Collection Technique**

I used an interview protocol to collect data for my study. Percy et al. (2015) claimed study protocols aid researchers in the collection of data for their study. Multiple case study researchers may conduct interviews and review company documents as methods to collect research data (Percy et al., 2015). The initial process for collecting data for this study included 30 to 60-minute semistructured interviews with each of the four study participants seeking to answer the research question.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews took place through Zoom Cloud Meetings. Interviews occurred at my private home office. I began meeting preparations approximately 20 minutes prior to each interview which included adjusting the room lighting, logging into Zoom Cloud Meetings, testing the audio volume, and reviewing the interview questions. To ensure each study participant was asked the same questions in the same order, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Audio recordings by way of Zoom Cloud Meetings and handwritten notes captured the interview responses, ensuring to inform the participants of the audio recordings prior to the interview. I transcribed the audio recordings into typed transcripts and emailed a summary of each participant's interview responses to the corresponding research participant to review for validation.

Semistructured interviews may have advantages. Researchers identified interviews may offer advantages by allowing a researcher to (a) collect information through a personal method linked to individuals' perspectives and experiences, (b) collect information virtually face-to-face, and (c) conduct semistructured interviews to clarify perceived interpretations (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Yin, 2018). A combination of face-to-face interviews and handwritten notes may deliver an accurate assessment of participant's data (Hadi & Closs, 2016; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Sutton and Austin (2015) proposed using a recording device during an interview offers an advantage for a researcher to commit full attention to the participant and effectively manage the collection of data. I used virtual face-to-face semistructured interviews with Zoom Cloud Meetings and note taking to collect participant information.

Semistructured interviews have disadvantages. Researchers noted interviews may (a) create a perception of bias, (b) require the expenditure of resources to conduct the

interviews, and (c) include complications between the interviewer and interviewee involved with selecting a mutually agreed upon time and place for the interview (Cridland et al., 2015; Turner, 2016). McIntosh and Morse (2015) claimed semistructured interviews may produce a perception of bias, hindering participants from free expression and forming skewed responses to what they think the interviewer wants to hear.

I used member checking to ensure data accuracy. Member checking encourages participants to validate the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the data collected from an interview (Birt et al., 2016; Thomas, 2017). Member checking gives participants an opportunity to verify a researcher's interpretation of interview responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I transcribed the audio recordings into typed transcripts and emailed a summary of each participant's interview responses to the corresponding research participant to review for validation. Participants had an opportunity to make corrections to my interpretations should my understanding be incorrect by way of email within two weeks of the initial interview.

## Data Organization Technique

I began data organization with a research log to record date, time, location, and each participant's identifier, i.e., P1, P2, P3, and P4 for each interview. I continued to organize data by transferring the audio recorded interviews by way of Zoom Cloud Meetings, interview transcripts, and acquired SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks into a privately-owned, password-protected USB device. I precisely transcribed the participants' interview responses into Microsoft (MS) Word, protecting participant confidentiality by continuing to use identifiers for each participant. I used handwritten notes taken during the interview meetings with participant

identifiers to support transcription. I maintained participant confidentiality throughout the study. Researchers should maintain participant confidentiality throughout a study (Maramwidze-Merrison, 2016).

I labeled each audio recording file and corresponding MS Word document with an initial label and matching letter and number for consistency, i.e., InterviewP1, TranscriptP1, InterviewP2, TranscriptP2, InterviewP3, TranscriptP3, InterviewP4, and TranscriptP4. I organized the data according to themes. Saldana (2015) purported qualitative researchers review and organize collected data, establish codes for the data, and sort the codes into common themes. I secured the USB device and hardcopies of notes in my private home office with restricted access to myself at a minimum of 5 years from data collection. After 5 years, I will shred all hardcopies of notes and reformat the USB device.

**Data Analysis**

To analyze the data collected from interviews, SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks, I used methodological triangulation for this multiple case study. Cope (2014) suggested researchers use methodological triangulation to increase a study's validity by comparing data from multiple sources, which may include semistructured interviews and company documents. Flick (2017) noted triangulation aids researchers mitigate their bias and substantiate study participants' interview responses. Fusch and Ness (2015) stated qualitative case study researchers can improve their study's findings from evidence through the use of methodological triangulation. Data collected through participant interviews and SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks, as well as member checking, helped achieve methodological triangulation.

Silverman (2017) suggested thorough data analysis confirms the validity of a researcher's interview transcriptions and interpretations. I used thematic analysis to identify themes from recurring terms and phrases from the interview transcriptions and SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. Percy et al. (2015) and Saldana (2015) proposed thematic analysis is achieved by grouping data into themes that answers research problem. A thematic analysis strives to identify patterns of themes in the interview data. The process is to (a) familiarize oneself with the collected data by reviewing participant transcripts, (b) assign initial codes to the collected data in order to describe the content by noting sections related to the research question, (c) search for patterns or themes in the codes across the different interviews summarizing terms and phrases to form similar concepts, (d) review themes by developing a list of major concepts, (e) define and name themes by comparing and contrasting major concepts, (f) comparing and contrasting major concepts and interpreting common concepts to form themes, and (g) produce a report categorizing themes focused at answering the research question. I used MS Word and MS Excel to conduct a thematic analysis.

Silverman (2017) and Yin (2018) recommended using an inductive process as a technique to analyze and code data. Bengtsson (2016) described inductive reasoning as a method researchers use to create inferences by stitching together collected data into theories. I coded collected data through six steps. I reviewed the transcribed interviews and SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. Using MS Word, I highlighted repeating terms and phrases in similar colors, varying the colors as different codes emerge. I used black for SP documentation, blue for SP communication, orange for SP timing, green for candidate retention, red for work with all

nonprofit partners, purple for candidate education/experience, brown for SP task delegation/sharing, yellow for candidate organizational fit, gray for job compensation/location, and maroon for candidate identification. I repeated the process of transcript and document review and highlighting twice more to ensure all relevant terms and phrases had been identified. I transferred the highlighted terms and phrases into a MS Excel spreadsheet to organize the themes and detect commonalities. I sorted and consolidated common themes seeking to provide answers to the research question. I compared and contrasted key themes by reviewing literature findings and the most recently published studies on nonprofit organizational leadership, SP in nonprofit organizations, and HC theory to confirm the key themes and include the findings in my study.

## Reliability and Validity

### Reliability

As a qualitative researcher, I sought to ensure my study's reliability by addressing dependability. Morse (2015) purported a researcher's dependability encompasses an applied research method, design, and concept. Making use of multiple data sources enhances a researcher's case study reliability (Bengtsson, 2016; Hadi & Closs, 2016). To address dependability, I used methodological triangulation to analyze collected data from multiple sources, which included participant interviews and SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks.

Birt et al. (2016) suggested having a study's participants review the researcher's data interpretations to confirm the researcher's understandings, which may enhance their study's dependability. Bengtsson (2016) and Hadi and Closs (2016) claimed addressing a study's dependability allows other researchers to apply the same research design, method, and

protocol to a similar phenomenon and arrive at a similar conclusion. To assure a consistent interview process with each participant, I used an interview protocol (see Appendix A). I improved my study's reliability and address the dependability of my study's findings by using an interview protocol. I ensured the accuracy of my data interpretation through member checking.

**Validity**

Cypress (2017) stated qualitative researchers seek to ensure a study's validity through consistency and trustworthiness associated with its findings. Leung (2015) offered validity in qualitative research seeks to ensure credibility and data saturation and address confirmability and transferability of the researcher's findings. To address the validity of my research findings, I used (a) an interview protocol, (b) audio recorded interviews if permitted by participant(s), (c) precisely transcribed interviews, (d) documented data analysis techniques, and (e) disclose the research method and design, population and sampling, data collection, data organization, and data analysis techniques used in the study.

*Credibility*

Anney (2014) noted credibility is the how confident the qualitative researcher is in the truth of the research study's findings. Bengtsson (2016) argued a researcher may ensure data credibility through member checking interview participant's responses. I ensured credibility through methodological triangulation and member checking. I achieved methodological triangulation through data collected from semistructured interviews, SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. Florczak (2017) claimed a researcher may confirm their research findings and assure validity through methodological triangulation of multiple data sources. I transcribed

interview responses verbatim, develop interpretations, and conducted member checking to verify my analysis represents my participants' intentions.

*Transferability*

Transferability is the ability of a researcher to apply the findings of qualitative research to other settings or contexts (Hadi & Closs, 2016). Transferability occurs when a researcher provides rich, in-depth research context and clearly lists the assumptions identified in the research (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). A researcher seeking to transfer a study's findings to a different context is responsible for assessing the degree of transferability (Yin, 2018). Bengtsson (2016) reported qualitative research transferability addresses the relevancy of the researcher's findings and not the generalization of the researcher's findings to the general population. To establish transferability, I used purposeful sampling to ensure a representative sample and data saturation. Gentles et al. (2015) stated purposeful sampling allows qualitative researchers to select participants with an ability to provide deep and meaningful information to achieve data saturation.

*Confirmability*

Researchers seek to attain confirmability so that their study's conclusions may be corroborated by other readers or researchers (Yin, 2018). Nowell et al. (2017) suggested confirmability occurs when a researcher creates traceability of the data collection and interpretations made so other researchers can duplicate the research process. Researchers use confirmability to demonstrate findings emerge from collected data and not their own biases by describing the research processes and allowing readers to determine the correctness of the data analysis procedures (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). To enhance confirmability, I created an audit trail of processes from semistructured interviews, review

of company documents (e.g., SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks), member checking, and data analysis linking my study's findings to a representation of the research participants' responses leading to my research conclusions. Cypress (2017) indicated audit trails offer researchers a way to record their research-related thoughts and actions. Marshall and Rossman (2016) offered audit trails capture how data were collected, organized, and analyzed such that the rationale behind research design decisions is obvious to interested individuals. My use of an audit trail involved using multiple worksheets within MS Excel which included documenting the research design, assumptions, limitations, repeating codes, and common themes to ensure traceability of the collected data and subsequent interpretations.

*Data Saturation*

In a multiple case study design, data saturation supports a researcher's validity when repeated themes occur, demonstrating a consistency of responses (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Yin (2018) stated data saturation occurs when no new information emerges from additionally collected data. I ensured data saturation through four semistructured participant interviews, whereby all participants were asked the same questions in the same order and follow-up questions for additional clarifications. I also ensured data saturation through a thorough review of handwritten notes, SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks.

**Transition and Summary**

Section 2 of this study described the purpose of this qualitative research study and my role as the researcher. Section 2 of this study addressed the population and sampling, participants, and how I ensured ethical standards. Section 2 of this study detailed the

research method and design, as well as how data was collected, organized, and analyzed. Section 2 of this study proposal concluded with an overview of how I achieved reliability and validity.

Section 3 of this study addressed my findings, how the findings may be applied to professional practice, and how the findings may promote social change. Section 3 of this study included recommendations for action and future research. Section 3 of this study included personal reflections, conclusions, references, and appendices.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

**Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP. Data came from four executives located in southeast Michigan who successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization. The findings showed strategies that the nonprofit organization executives used for effective SP to retain leadership continuity, increase employee productivity, and organizational success. The strategies included (a) a need for a formally documented and accessible succession plan, (b) the importance of identifying and developing candidates, and (c) time to complete the leadership succession transition.

**Presentation of Findings**

The research question for this study was, what strategies do nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP? To answer the research question, I conducted four semistructured interviews using Zoom Cloud Meetings with four consenting participants located in southeast Michigan and who implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization. Data collected from the participants included responses to five open-ended interview questions, handwritten notes, SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks.

I transcribed and transferred the data from each of the participants' interview responses, handwritten notes, and company documents into four separate MS Word documents titled Data OrganizationP1, Data OrganizationP2, Data OrganizationP3, and Data OrganizationP4. Within 2 weeks from the conclusion of each interview, I followed up with each participant by email to conduct member checking by having each participant

review their interview responses and validate my interpretations. The participants responded

with minor written amendments received from P1 and P2. By email, P1 validated my

interpretations noting their organization also supports SP initiatives with an annual budget

for employee professional development. By email, P2 validated my interpretations noting

compensation was not a factor in identifying succession candidates. P3 and P4 each

provided an email response validating my interpretations with no modifications.

Once member checking was completed, I organized each participant's interview

responses, handwritten notes, and company documents into a single MS Word document for

each of the four participants. Each consolidated MS Word document served as a single data

set creating four total data sets. For example, P1's interview responses, handwritten notes,

and company documents were consolidated to form Data OrganizationP1. This was

completed a total of four times for each participant.

I assigned preliminary codes to the collected data noting sections related to the

research question. The preliminary codes were (a) documentation, (b) communication, (c)

timing, (d) staff/external partner retention, (e) work with all partners, (f) education and

experience, (g) task delegation/sharing, (h) organizational fit, (i) compensation/location, and

(k) candidate identification. I looked for themes in the codes across the collected data

summarizing terms and phrases to form similar concepts. I reviewed themes by developing a

list of major concepts. I defined and named themes by comparing and contrasting major

concepts. I compared and contrasted major concepts and interpreted common concepts to

form themes. I produced a spreadsheet categorizing themes focused at answering the

research question. I used MS Excel to organize, sort, and analyze the data and titled the

spreadsheet Data AnalysisP1-4. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were

(a) a need for a formally documented and accessible succession plan, (b) the importance of identifying and developing candidates, and (c) time to complete the leadership succession transition.

Theme 1: A Need for a Formally Documented and Accessible Succession Plan

P1, P2, P3, and P4 confirmed the need for a formally documented and accessible succession plan. This theme is a strategy for leaders to formalize and document a succession plan through an internal/external partner-developed (e.g., board members, organizational leaders, and key donors) process. Theme 1 also includes communicating and making the succession plan accessible to the organization's employees (e.g., executives, managers, and staff). Data collected indicated 130 codes referencing the need for a formally documented and accessible succession plan.

P1 revealed the importance of SP documentation by stating "having something written and knowing that we have a plan, I feel so much better." P1 added "knowing that there is actually a plan and that we have talked internally, both with the board and with my senior staff about what that would look like, just gives us a lot of peace of mind." P2 indicated "we have a succession plan." P2 stated "it's critical to have a plan and it's also critical to have a plan B and plan C." P3 declared "there needs to be a succession plan" P4 mentioned "we look at succession planning and share the entire succession plan."

P1 supported the importance of partner involvement in the development of a succession plan by stating "introduce them [SP candidates] to all of our donors and our foundation partners," P1 stated "it is a challenge when it comes to succession because invariably some donors, some foundations, some partners, some staff are going to bail." P1 added "effective successions, you can minimize that, and really leave in a way that ensures

those relationships continue." P2 indicated the significance of partner involvement with "to replace me, that's actually primarily a function of our board." P2 suggested "we do not want any of our major ecosystem partners to object to whoever that person [SP candidate] is." P2 offered "work with them [external partners] and the board to find a suitable person [SP candidate]." P3 shared "if there's been a [succession] plan, it's usually been secretive at the board level and with the investors." P3 specified "the board needs to constantly have some structure around succession planning." P4 claimed "the compensation committee looks solely at the [executive] positions."

P1 stressed the importance of SP communication by offering "everyone in the organization should know about the succession plans." P1 continued with "people really need to be aware that it [succession plan] exists and know where it [succession plan] is." P2 mentioned "really good [SP] communication." P3 stated "talking to lots of [succession] candidates trying to find a good feel and fit." P4 discussed SP communication by asserting "we [executives] have conversations about them [succession candidates]." P4 included "we try [executives] to be very forthright with individuals that I don't see as successor candidates."

The company documents reviewed focused on SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. Similar to the participant quotes from the semistructured interviews, the company documents support this theme. P1's company documents included terms such as (a) senior staff succession plan, (b) copies of this plan shall be maintained, (c) the Executive Director will connect with partners and inform them as needed, and (d) communicate the temporary leadership structure. P2's company documents included a senior staff succession plan which contained names, current

roles, estimated exit timing, and succession candidates. P2's senior staff succession plan served as an example of a formally documented plan for succession accessible to company leaders. P3's company documents included terms such as (a) employment transfer and promotions, (b) promotions will be made at the discretion and approval of President and CEO, and (c) handbook is provided to all employees at the start of their employment. P4's company documents included terms such as (a) succession, continuity, and progression plan developed by the compensation committee, (b) comprehensive progression, continuity, and succession plans are in place, (c) developed by the compensation committee, (d) work with the respective board of directors to determine a pathway forward, and (e) all employees engage in a discussion with their managers.

A formally documented and accessible succession plan necessitates organizational leaders formalize and document a succession plan making it accessible to the organization's employees. Carlson (2018) noted SP is a systematic method of documenting organizational resources and processes and determining employee responsibilities for the business to continue during or after a succession transition. Carlson and DelGrosso (2021) stated effective SP includes documenting written business practices and revising them over time prior to succession transition. Burke and Erickson (2020) claimed communication and accessibility created a positive plan for mentoring and SP activities. Workforce members benefit from understanding what is contained within a company's succession plan and where to access it for immediate or future use.

Theme 1 supports HC theory that knowledge and know-how are a form of capital derived from purposeful investment, as well as a positive relationship between HC investment and increase in employee earnings. Webb et al. (2017) suggested employees

with a documented career roadmap, which included increased training and hands-on experience, contributed to effective succession transitions and promotions. Bozer et al. (2017) claimed business leaders that formalize leadership development strategies were positively associated with SP activities. Fusarelli et al. (2018) offered organizational leaders that develop strategic, enduring, leadership growth plans significantly reduced risks associated with transitioning personnel. Leaders investing in HC development complement the strategy of having a formally documented and accessible succession plan.

Findings from this theme and the existing literature suggested this theme is an effective business practice. McKee and Froelich (2016) claimed the inability of a firm to have a well-articulated and accessible succession plan might result in a decreased ability to continue organizational activities or a decline in financial performance during a transition. Perrenoud and Sullivan (2017) posited business leaders developing official succession plans enabled effective leadership transitions. Documented and communicated plans for succession exploit potential leaders' knowledge, skills, and abilities to best align to an organization's needs and support its longevity (Jackson & Dunn-Jensen, 2021).

Theme 2: The Importance of Identifying and Developing Candidates

P2, P3, and P4 confirmed the importance of identifying candidates and P1, P2, P3, and P4 corroborated the value of developing candidates. Theme 2 supports a strategy for leaders' purposeful investment in HC through academics, training, and experiences focused on a pool of high potential candidates over a period to retain and prepare the candidates for succession opportunities. This theme also includes candidate consideration, HC investment, timing, and employee retention. Data collected indicated 240 codes referencing the importance of identifying and developing candidates.

P1 did not mention SP candidates or candidate consideration in their interview question responses. P2 demonstrated the importance of candidate consideration by stating "early identification of who those people [SP candidates] are." P2 added "the candidate is likely someone with a professional connection to myself." P3 identified the significance of candidate consideration with "we're [executives] often confidentially searching for candidates, trying to find a good feel and fit." P3 included "I'm grooming candidates for interviews and have a couple of good candidates." P4 supported candidate consideration by offering "we [executives] look at succession candidates outside of the organization." P4 stated "we [executives] catalog and keep track of the individuals [SP candidates]."

P1 highlighted the value of HC investment by noting "we [executives] establish a yearly budget for staff members to enhance their professional development through academics and certification programs." P2's responses on the importance HC investment included "they [SP candidates] should have the right abilities and experience." P2 included "we [executives] look for those [SP candidates] with business experience and education but also offer on the job training." P3 noted "we [executives] invest in things that people want to get training in because they think it'll be an enhancement to them." P3 added "we [executives] look at education and workforce development." P4 stressed the significance of HC investment by offering "we're [executives] looking for individuals where we can begin testing, validating, giving new challenges, new opportunities," P4 declared "we [executives] look for opportunities to cross populate across the organizations in that progression planning and give people projects that will reinforce skills that they have, but more often, we're looking for things where they don't have the skills." P4 continued "there's a fruitful investment into some candidates to be successful executives in the future."

P1's responses provided insight to the value of timing by stating "we [executives] don't want to give so much time nor so little time that the organization doesn't have time to plan and find a good replacement and have some handover." P1 included "we like to have a 3-month overlap so that they [successor] would almost serve as like a deputy for 3 months to learn the ropes." P2 offered "I would say, possibly more than 6 months for transition." P3 quoted "if it's done properly, it takes 3 to 6 months of grooming and succession." P4 supported the importance of timing by suggesting "6 weeks to 8 weeks at the outside is, in my mind, enough to transition." P4 added "but we also look at 1 to 2 years, 3 to 5 years, and then longer-term for planning."

P1 emphasized the value of employee retention by suggesting "we [executives] measure succession planning success through retention rates of our staff, like the executives and other members of the org." P2 did not mention employee retention in their interview responses. P3 said "I never want to lose people out of unplanned attrition." P3 also stated "we [executives] look at employee retention and employee satisfaction at work." P4 supported the significance of timing by positing "it is important to see retention of staff and keep them interested and occupied." P4 included "we [executives] like to keep a candidate in succession interested."

The company documents reviewed focused on SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. Similar to the participant quotes from the semistructured interviews, the company documents support this theme. P1's company documents included terms such as (a) the NPO establishes a yearly budget for staff members to enhance their professional development and (b) metric to measure succession planning success is employee retention rate, donor retention rate, and partner retention rate.

P2's company documents included terms such as (a) estimated exit timing, (b) lead time to replace, (c) 9 senior staff members identified, and (d) candidate replacement. P3's company documents included terms such as (a) when an internal position becomes open, qualified employees will be given the opportunity to apply for the position, however, they will be expected to compete with outside candidates and (b) employee training and development will be paid by [the nonprofit organization] if the training is directly related to the employee's job or enhancement of the organization. P4's company documents included terms such as (a) Succession: Identify permanent successors for strategically important positions to ensure long term organizational capacity and mission fulfillment, (b) Continuity: Identify short term replacements for executive or managerial positions with the goal of maintaining current operational effectiveness during (un)planned vacancies, (c) candidate development takes time, (d) some are near term ready as successors, (e) organizational chart with listed roles and identified succession candidates for immediate, in 1-2 years, and in 3-5 years, (f) alignment of workforce capabilities with the strategic needs of the organization, and (g) mangers crafting individualized development plans for each employee.

The importance of identifying and developing candidates entails organizational leaders recognize high potential succession candidates and investment in their development through education and experience over time to retain and prepare them for succession opportunities. Martin and O'Shea (2021) claimed suitable succession candidates displayed leadership traits, had good performance reviews, received a recommendation from their supervisor, and attained no less than an undergraduate degree in the corresponding business field. Carlson and DelGrosso (2021) suggested effective SP includes leaders identifying

suitable individuals and training them prior to a current leader's departure. Martin and O'Shea (2021) stated developing internal personnel through organized education programs focused on advanced leadership competencies creates a pool of candidates prepared for future organizational leadership opportunities. Organizational leaders benefit from identifying and developing SP candidates by knowing exactly which candidates are suitable for succession transition and what HC development resources (e.g., budget and time) are required to effectively prepare them for succession opportunities.

This theme supports HC theory that knowledge and know-how are a form of capital derived from purposeful investment, as well as a positive relationship between HC investment and increase in employee earnings. Specifically, this theme and HC theory share the common need to invest in HC through academics, training, and professional hands-on experiences. Hajimirarab et al. (2011) suggested effective HC management includes identifying, developing, and retaining employees who may in turn become future business leaders. Binti Zakaria et al. (2020) argued HC development offers employees of all experience levels opportunities to improve their professional abilities resulting in prospects for job retention and promotion. Identifying succession candidates and purposefully investing in their professional development (e.g., education, training, and experience) leads to the increase in career advancement opportunities.

Findings from this theme and the existing literature suggest this theme is an effective business practice. Wiesman et al. (2016) argued the identification of high-performing, high-potential employees coupled with training and exposure to cross-organizational activities succesfully addressed SP activities. Mucherumuhia and Kagiri (2018) claimed HC investment allows organizational leaders to identify and retain high-caliber personnel

leading to effective SP. Jackson and Dunn-Jensen (2021) stated organizational leaders might face a SP crisis if their talent pool is underdeveloped. Purposeful HC investments of SP candidates increase their knowledge and know-how supporting job retention and eventual SP (Jackson & Dunn-Jensen, 2021).

Theme 3: Time to Complete the Leadership Succession Transition

P1, P2, P3, and P4 confirmed the importance of time to complete the leadership succession transition. Theme 3 is a strategy for leaders to outline a schedule (1.5 to 6 months) to transition knowledge, experiences, and responsibilities from predecessor to successor, increasing the probability of an effective transition and internal/external partner confidence of organizational prosperity. This theme also includes timing, partner retention, and transition task sharing. Data collected indicated 94 codes referencing the time to complete the leadership succession transition.

P1 revealed the importance of time to complete the leadership succession transition by stating "2 to 3 months appears to work well." P2 indicated leadership succession transitions may take "possibly more than 6 months." P2 added "we [executives] don't want to do anything [succession transition] too quickly, but taking time to do it [transition succession]." P3 suggested timing was "about 6 months, I would say to transition." P4 claimed timing for leadership succession transition is "6 weeks to 8 weeks at the outside."

P1 demonstrated the importance of partner retention by suggesting "we [executives] track the retention rates of key partners, key foundations, key donors." P2 stated "we measure partner retention through either dollar numbers, or in our case, a number of members." P3 stressed "the retention is important, but it is really around stakeholder satisfaction, so we want to retain all of our stakeholders and keep happy customers." P4

mentioned "retaining our partners' confidence during a leadership change is important." P4 also added "we measure partner retention every year."

P1 did not mention transition task sharing during leadership succession transitions in their interview question responses. P2 demonstrated the significance of transition task sharing by suggesting "during my transition, we'll run the organization as co-CEOs." P3 declared "when they [successors and predecessors] start the transitioning, we expect them to work closely, share responsibilities, and exchange information." P4 stated "the incoming leader shadows the outgoing leader in several strategic and tactical activities." P4 continued "there has to be a clean hand-off of roles and responsibilities if we want a successful new leader."

The company documents reviewed focused on SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. Similar to the participant quotes from the semistructured interviews, the company documents support Theme 3: Time to complete the leadership succession transition. P1's company documents included terms such as (a) establish, maintain, and cultivate relations with donors, foundations, and other resources to support organizational programs and activities, (b) will step in and rely on a number of people to fill the gap, (c) will step in and support, (d) will need to be shared with particular people involved with taking on certain tasks, and (e) will rely on increased support by the wider development team. P2's company documents included terms such as (a) estimated exit timing, (b) lead time to replace, (c) measure membership rates, and (d) executive mentoring and shadowing shall take place immediately. P3's company documents included terms such as (a) key metric of stakeholder satisfaction and (b) will co-lead NPO activities. P4's company documents included terms such as (a) managers will document and

share strategic objectives, (b) managers will document and share list of projects, stakeholders, funding, and schedule, (c) managers will communicate early and often, and (d) organizational chart with listed roles and identified succession candidates for immediate, in 1-2 years, and in 3-5 years.

Time to complete the leadership succession transition involves organizational leaders schedule time to transition predecessor-successor knowledge, experiences, and responsibilities. Martin and O'Shea (2021) posited approximately 1-month to complete a succession transition with an external candidate but having a prepared internal candidate decreases the succession transition time and provides increased organizational stability. Walker (2021) maintained organizational leaders should consider and control the time required to groom successors and the time required to complete a successful succession transition. Business leaders benefit to enhance the probability of an effective succession transition and internal/external partner confidence of organizational prosperity by outlining a succession schedule aimed at transferring information and duties from predecessor to successor.

This theme supports HC theory that knowledge and know-how are a form of capital derived from purposeful investment, as well as a positive relationship between HC investment and increase in employee earnings. Specifically, Theme 3 and HC theory account for knowledge gain, explicitly knowledge sharing, over time supports effective succession transitions. Wahrenburg and Weldi (2007) claimed time spent transferring institutional knowledge during a transition increases the probability of an effective succession. Ali et al. (2017) advised successors work with their leadership to gain necessary training and hands-on experience to aid in their transitions. Desarno et al. (2020) indicated

investing months of HC development through predecessor-successor mentoring supported successful transitions. Business leaders with HC development strategies may increase their succession effectiveness when time is accounted for in their workforce transitions.

Findings from this theme and the existing literature suggest this theme is an effective business practice. Sibbald et al. (2017) suggested scheduling time for knowledge transfer from the predecessor to the successor supported successful SP strategies and increased stakeholder confidence. Mazorodze and Buckley (2020) stated the transfer of tacit knowledge among transitioning personnel significantly facilitated organizational leader's desire to maintain executive-level assurance. Morris et al. (2020) discovered that leadership transition time decreased when leaders had a strategic SP process in place addressing transfer of knowledge and duties. The literature suggests leaders that plan time for a predecessor to transfer knowledge and responsibilities to their successor increased the likelihood of a positive transition while retaining internal/external partner confidence and enhancing their business practice.

## Application to Professional Practice

The findings of this study are applicable to the professional practice by offering nonprofit organization executives with effective SP strategies to improve and retain human talent, transition executive successors, and sustain the organization. The SP strategies nonprofit organization executives may use to improve the professional practice included (a) a need for a formally documented and accessible succession plan, (b) the importance of identifying and developing candidates, and (c) time to complete the leadership succession transition. Chiocchio and Gharibpour (2017) stated approximately 74% of nonprofit organization executives lack SP strategies to transition new leaders. Booker et al. (2016)

claimed SP strategies may improve an organization's ability to transition executives while retaining current candidate employees for future succession opportunities.

The need for a formally documented and accessible succession plan is a strategy for leaders to formalize a succession plan through an internal/external partner-developed (e.g., board members, organizational leaders, and key donors) process. This strategy also includes documenting, communicating, and making the succession plan accessible to the organization's employees (e.g., executives, managers, and staff). The importance of identifying and developing candidates is a strategy for leaders' purposeful invest in HC through academics, training, and experiences focused on a pool of high potential candidates over a period to retain and prepare the candidates for succession opportunities. Time to complete the leadership succession transition is a strategy for leaders to outline a schedule (1.5 to 6 months) to transition knowledge, experiences, and responsibilities from predecessor to successor, increasing the probability of an effective transition and internal/external partner confidence of organizational prosperity.

The findings of this study may also enhance the practice of business by promoting the understanding of the significance of SP and HC development for organizational prosperity. Bozer et al. (2017) claimed organizations with leadership development strategies coupled with internal recruitment were positively associated with effective SP initiatives. Waheed and Zaim (2015) offered SP is effective when aligned with talent management and employee development initiatives. Amodu et al.'s (2017) research demonstrated a positive link between investment in HC and effective SP, whereby workers felt motivated by opportunities to increase their training and earnings. The findings of this study may increase the knowledge of the association between HC investments and effective SP strategies.

**Implications for Social Change**

Communities across the United States depend on the public services offered by nonprofit organizations such as charity, faith, or education to promote equitable opportunities and enhance their well-being (Docka-Filipek & Timmer, 2019). Agarwal et al. (2018) stated a nonprofit organization is dedicated to furthering a community's social enhancement through civic services. Laurett and Ferreira (2018) indicated nonprofit organization leaders may benefit from formalized SP strategies to sustain the organization leaders' civic mission. The strategy for a formally documented and accessible succession plan may increase partner confidence and retain partner memberships whose financial contributions reciprocate through the nonprofit organization back into community services such as youth education. The strategy of identifying and developing candidates may help retain and enhance future organizational leaders who may in turn use their gained skills to lead other initiatives within a community such as politics, policy making, or other nonprofit organizations. The strategy of setting aside time to complete a leadership succession transition increases the likelihood of an effective handover where tasks are shared, partner contributions are maintained, and the nonprofit's public services are sustained.

These SP strategies may help nonprofit organization leaders sustain their organization so that they may continue furthering social improvement. Enduring nonprofit organizations allow for continued or increased community access to employment, health services, faith centers, and other amenities, enabling residents to increase their support of community enrichment. Successful nonprofit organization executives increase their ability to maintain their public services, thus beneficially affecting social change.

## Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP. Researchers working with nonprofit organization leaders claimed 23% of nonprofit organization executives planned and implemented SP strategies to sustain their organizations (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017). The target population for the research were four executives located in southeast Michigan who have successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization. I recommend southeast Michigan nonprofit organization executives integrate the three strategies identified in this study into their firm's SP initiatives to ensure leadership continuity and organizational prosperity.

The first recommendation for action includes having a formally documented succession plan, developed by internal/external partners, and communicated to and accessible by the nonprofit organization's employees. The second recommendation for action includes purposefully investing resources (e.g., time and money) into a nonprofit organization's human capital over a period, specifically focusing on a pool of high potential candidates to retain (e.g., through increased morale, career advancements, and compensation) and prepare (e.g., education and experience) them for succession opportunities. The third recommendation for action includes allocating 1.5 to 6 months to complete a predecessor-successor transition with a focus on knowledge and responsibility transfer to increase nonprofit organizational partner confidence.

Executives from southeast Michigan's nonprofit organizations could use the research results to implement SP strategies into their organization's strategic plan to improve human talent, transition executive successors, and retain leadership continuity. The research results

may aid southeast Michigan nonprofit organization executives preserve their organization's

mission and social impact. The research results may be disseminated in literature about

nonprofit organizations (such as Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly [NVSQ] and

*Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*), conferences for nonprofit organizations (e.g.,

National Association of Nonprofit Organizations & Executives), and nonprofit organization-

focused training specifically managing, budgeting, and fundraising.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The limitations of this study may be improved upon in future studies by uncovering

pertinent information about SP strategies such as requesting access to archived succession

transition documents, HC development strategies/budgets, or accessing pertinent

information about SP strategies through publicly available information. Other limitations of

this study that may be may be participants' inaccuracy and completeness of responses to the

interview questions which may be improved upon by future researchers by expanding the

number interview questions and increasing the sample size which may illuminate different

themes. A final limitation may be participant bias to the interview question responses

negatively impacting the research findings. Future researchers may be able to mitigate

participant bias by using a quantitative or mixed method research method which may alter

future research findings such as measuring the number of succession planning practices

(dependent variable) and factors that may impact the degree of executive succession

planning efforts (independent variables) followed by performing statistical analysis. To

improve the practice in business, I recommend future researchers investigate SP strategies

nonprofit organization executives used during predecessor-successor transitions, i.e., intra-

succession activities. To advance business practice, I recommend future researchers explore

the specific business problem through an alternate theoretical/conceptual framework which may produce different outcomes.

<div align="center">**Reflections**</div>

Reflecting on my experiences with the DBA Doctoral Study process brings about a plethora of mixed emotions. The Walden University DBA Doctoral Study process is challenging yet rewarding, extensive yet structured, and methodical yet illuminating. Through the support of family, friends, colleagues, and Walden University mentors, I was able to persevere and complete the doctoral journey. I strive to use the knowledge gained from the DBA Doctoral Study to improve my skills as a workplace leader and seek opportunities as a professor.

While the DBA Doctoral Study did not affect any personal biases, it reemphasized the significance of the specific business problem and need to identify feasible strategies to address the specific business problem. The data analysis and research findings shed light on the overwhelmingly positive impact HC development plays in the effectiveness of nonprofit organization executive SP strategies. The data analysis and research findings highlighted the importance to formally document and communicate the nonprofit organization executive's succession plans. The data analysis and research findings emphasized the transition timing, to include the impact this strategy has on partner retention, e.g., retaining their membership, leadership and financial support, and confidence. I also appreciated the four participants corroborating their strategic requirement to have partner-developed succession plans.

As the researcher, my possible effects on the participants may have included revealing to them that nearly three quarters of their nonprofit organization peers fail to plan for succession (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017). By conducting semistructured interviews,

asking open-ended questions, and validating my interpretations of their responses through member checking, I may have impacted the participants' reflections on their own organizations, causing them to reassess their current SP strategies. After completing the study, my perceptions of SP have heightened. The study has informed me of the lack of nonprofit organization leaders' plan to transition their successors, putting the public services communities depend on at risk. The study has also illuminated and confirmed the significance to plan for and implement SP strategies to maintain the well-being of a nonprofit organization to continue their civic services.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that nonprofit organization executives use for effective SP. The target population for the research were four executives located in southeast Michigan who have successfully implemented a succession plan in a nonprofit organization. McKee and Froelich's (2016) work with nonprofit organization executives exposed a lack of SP strategies. Booker et al. (2016) stated effective SP may improve an organization's ability to achieve efficient executive transitions while retaining current candidate employees for future succession opportunities.

Nonprofit organization executives have a responsibility for preserving the organization's mission, culture, productivity, and social impact. There is a need for nonprofit organization executives to retain, develop, and transition to new leaders through a concerted SP effort to ensure the organization's success. Nonprofit organization executives need to implement SP strategies, which includes having a formal plan, developing their human capital with a focus on high potential candidates, and outlining a timeline to transition successors. Executives from southeast Michigan's nonprofit organizations could

use the study findings to implement SP strategies into their organization's strategic plan to improve human talent, transition executive successors, and to retain leadership continuity, as well as increase employee productivity, and organizational success.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

Date:

Participant Code:

1. Introduce myself to the participant.

2. Thank the participant for their participation.

3. Remind the participant of their ability to withdraw from the interview at any time

   without penalty.

4. Provide a brief background on the research topic.

5. Remind the participant to save or print a copy of their electronic consent form for

   their records.

6. Review the contents of their consent form.

7. Address any questions or concerns the participant may have regarding their consent

   form.

8. Request the participant's permission to begin audio recording the interview.

9. Note the day and time.

10. Familiarize the participant with the coded identification process and assign a code

    (e.g., P1, P2, P3, or P4).

11. Start the interview by asking the first question.

    a. What strategies did you use for effective SP?

12. Ask each remaining question once the participant has provided a thorough response.

    a. What were the key challenges to implementing the strategies for effective

       SP?

    b. How have you measured the effectiveness of your strategies for SP?

    c.   How have the implemented strategies for effective SP impacted the

        organization?

    d.   What additional information would you like to share about strategies used for

        effective SP?

13. Request copies of SP-related policies and procedures, HC development documents,

    and employee handbooks.

14. Explain the member checking process.

15. Thank the participant for their participation in the interview.

16. Remind the participant may be contacted for follow-up information.

    End protocol.

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate in the Study

Date:

Organization Name:

Organization Address:

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Mohamed Karaki and I am a student at Walden University conducting a doctoral research study. I would like to invite you to participate in the research study. The purpose of this study is to explore strategies that nonprofit organization executives use for effective succession planning. I am reaching out to you today because you are an executive of a nonprofit organization located in southeast Michigan and would like to kindly request your participation. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and the identity of you and your organization will remain confidential. Please review the attached informed consent form and feel free to ask any questions requiring further clarification.

To participate in the study, you must satisfy a set of criteria. You must be a current full-time executive of a nonprofit organization located in southeast Michigan with at least 12 months of experience as an industry executive. You must embody knowledge of effectively implemented succession planning strategies within your nonprofit organization. You must also embody knowledge of effectively implemented succession planning strategies within your nonprofit organization within five years from date of interview. If you meet the criteria and are willing to participate, please reply to this email stating "I consent to participate in this study." If you meet the criteria but are unwilling to participate or if you do not meet the criteria, you are welcome to disregard this email.

If you consent to participate in the study, I will follow-up with an email within 1 week to set up a virtual face-to-face interview on a date and time that is convenient for you. The interview, which may last up to 60 minutes, will be audio recorded. You will be asked five open-ended interview questions seeking to collect rich descriptions of your succession planning strategies. I will also take handwritten notes and request access to copies of succession planning-related policies and procedures, HC development documents, and employee handbooks. You will have an opportunity to review my interpretations of the interview transcriptions for accuracy before they are included in the study.

Very Respectfully,

Mohamed A. Karaki