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

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Leigh Byers

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

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

Generation

by

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MA, Liberty University, 2012

BA, Rollins College, 1989

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

Formal succession planning strategies for retiring Baby Boomer generation of leaders in nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are nonexistent in many NPOs, including faith-based NPOs. Top NPO leaders possess vital organizational knowledge and experience. The lack of strategic succession planning adversely affects organizational sustainability and mission fulfillment. Guided by the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer, the current study supplies a description of succession planning strategies used in faith-based organizations that have Boomer leaders. This multiple case study included 3 faith-based NPOs in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties in Florida and their top-level leaders. They supplied descriptions of formal succession planning strategies through semistructured interviews and through related organizational documents. An inductive analysis of the data revealed that (a) key leaders were the initiators for developing a strategic plan for succession, (b) boards of directors were critical to the process, and (c) leadership transition, planned or unplanned, required preparation and documented policies that must be reviewed at regular intervals. Leadership development is a valuable practice, which contributes to succession planning strategy. Influential leaders and board members of NPOs may receive inspiration to engage in succession planning strategies to maintain capable and prepared leaders at the top levels of the organizations as a means to ensure organizational sustainability and mission fulfillment. Positive social change happens in communities by encouraging a positive societal culture and identity through uninterrupted NPO services and programs. Improving the lives of community members enhances the communities in which they live.

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## Dedication

The dedication of this study is to the leaders who participated in this study by choosing to share their leadership experiences. Faith-based leaders' efforts to make a difference in the communities and people they serve matters and are worth continuing.

## Acknowledgments

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The following study is a qualitative multiple case study on succession planning—strategies of formal succession planning of Boomer generation leaders born between 1946-1964 leading faith-based nonprofit organizations (NPOs). Section 1 addresses the background of the problem, including explanations of the business problem statement, purpose, research question, conceptual framework, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, the significance of the study, and a review of the professional literature. Section 2 contains details regarding the project, and Section 3 presents the results and frames the application to business practice.

### **Problem Statement**

In 2011, the first Boomer business leaders entered into retirement and this trend continues every 8 seconds (Hagemann & Stroope, 2013). By 2029, the last Boomers will turn 65. In a global survey of 381 NPOs in six countries, including the United States, 74% of NPOs did not have a leadership succession plan (Santora, Sarros, Bozer, Esposito, & Bassi 2015). The general business problem is that faith-based NPOs may manifest financial instability, missional drift, and threats to sustainability if Boomer NPO leaders are unable to establish succession plans. The specific business problem is that some faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation lack succession planning strategies.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the qualitative, multiple case study is exploring succession planning strategies used by faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation. The

targeted population was three faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation, with succession plans, whose organizations serve the densely populated and multicultural Southeast Florida counties of Broward and Miami-Dade. According to the U.S. Census (2012), Florida ranked third in the United States in the number of charitable nonprofit filings, indicating a sizable population from which to draw a representative sampling of participants. An expectation as a result of the study is that business practices in faith-based nonprofits may improve through learning about succession planning strategies implemented by Boomer leaders in faith-based NPOs. The resulting information is appropriate for a variety of NPO stakeholders including NPO boards, key leaders, staff, and individuals from the communities who stand to benefit from faith-based NPO services and programs.

### **Nature of the Study**

Quantitative methods require thoughtful pursuits of understanding causes and reasons by examining hypotheses, whereas qualitative thinking requires the pursuit of research related to understanding and motive (Tacq, 2011). A quantitative method is not appropriate because the exploration of a hypothesis is *understanding* or *cause* as the focus of the *research question*. Mixed method studies involve the exploration of the research question via quantitative *and* qualitative measures; researchers test hypotheses (McManamny, Sheen, Boyd, & Jennings, 2015). The current study does not contain a hypothesis.

When a researcher's intention is to explore phenomena in-depth, qualitative research methods, such as interviews, are preferable to quantitative research methods

(Chwalisz, Shah, & Hand, 2008). The qualitative method was ideal for understanding the succession planning strategies of faith-based leaders from the Boomer generation. Using qualitative methods in the current study allowed in-depth exploration of the research question.

The focus of a phenomenological study research question is *what* the phenomenon is as a way to explicate a participant's diverse experiences, reducing the unique individual experience to the common experience and, revealing a universal experience (Van Manen, 1990). Explicating the experiences of faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation was not the purpose of the study; a phenomenological method was not appropriate. An ethnographic study is an in-depth inquiry for forging new theory (Hodson, 1998). The purpose of the study was not to forge new theory; an ethnographic method was not appropriate. According to Yin (2014), in case study research, the researcher examines *how* and *why* questions, for instance, how or why some activity is taking place. Case study research is suitable for the study because a case study was an exploration of what strategies of succession planning faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation use.

### **Research Question**

The central research question of the study is: What succession planning strategies do faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation use?

### **Interview Questions**

1. What factors were evident that indicated a need for a leadership succession plan in your organization?

2. How were succession planning conversations initiated?
3. What succession planning strategies are in place that will ensure your leadership role and responsibilities are fulfilled at your departure?
4. What plans are currently in place to prepare your successor?
5. What are the key decision makers in your organization, for instance, your board of directors, doing in preparation for your succession?
6. What measures are you taking to prepare for your succession?
7. How are the plans for your succession codified?
8. What additional information can you provide that might help me understand succession planning for your organization?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, and Robinson (2013) embraced Stake's view of a more limited application of a conceptual framework to expand the potential for the emergence of new ideas in case study research. Stake (1978) asserted that tacit knowledge was a plethora of unexpressed impressions with the potential of inspiring new knowledge directions out of old. Considering the limited amount of formal succession planning in NPOs (Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011), openness to new ideas applying the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer was the option chosen. The conceptual framework is knowledge transfer within the context of succession planning instead of using succession planning as the conceptual framework.

The concept of knowledge transfer has roots in the research of Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) on how the human mind can learn and improve in an activity.

Subsequent researchers used Woodworth and Thorndike's (1901) study in mental acuity to formulate concepts in learning and training (Belenky & Schalk, 2014). Key concepts of knowledge transfer are Nonaka and von Krogh's (2009) knowledge creation theory (tacit and explicit), knowledge management within organizations (Cardoso, Meireles, & Peralta, 2012), and knowledge sharing between individuals and within organizations and among organizations (Minbaeva, Mäkelä, & Rabbiosi, 2012; Razak et al., 2013). When systematic knowledge transfer activities are not taking place, knowledge attrition is a concern (Durst & Wilhelm, 2012).

As applied to the study, knowledge transfer in the succession planning process is critical. Departing Boomer leaders demonstrated positive knowledge transfer attitudes and activities toward successors in younger cohorts (Appelbaum et al., 2012a). Often understanding leadership roles happened through incidental observation, not through purposeful communication of the leadership role (Renihan, 2012). Leadership development among generations was an important subtheme to knowledge transfer and succession planning (Hageman & Stroop, 2013). Knowledge transfer via succession planning and leadership development was also a strategic planning activity (Hutzschenreuter, Kleindienst, & Greger, 2012).

Knowledge transfer is a necessary component of succession planning. Successors and organizations benefit from knowledge transfer activities, especially in executive leadership positions (Tunheim & McLean, 2014). Knowledge transfer activities were relational yet complex when required across cohorts where communication efforts differ (Appelbaum et al., 2012b; Sanaei, Javernick-Will, & Chinowsky, 2013). The conceptual



framework of knowledge transfer encapsulates the importance of what leaders know and how to capture and not lose knowledge sustaining the organization when leaders leave.

### **Operational Definitions**

The following operational definitions clarify the application of the terms throughout the study.

*Faith-based:* An adjective for a nonprofit organization or activities aligned with Christian organizations (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013a).

*Generational cohort:* Large groups of people born in the same defined periods, for example, the Boomer generation born 1946-1964, that share commonalities of values and whose behaviors differ when compared to people born in other periods (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). A generational cohort has shared qualities manifest in work attitudes and practices, which are important to understanding in human resource management (Amayah & Gedro, 2014).

*Knowledge management:* Knowledge management is an organizational effort to capture tacit knowledge (informally sharing) and explicit knowledge (formally codifying) within the context of the organization's culture and training efforts (Cardoso et al., 2012).

*Knowledge transfer:* Knowledge transfer is the passing of tacit business information and processes from one individual to another cultivated by proactive human resource management practices (Razak et al., 2013).

*Nonprofit organization (NPO):* An NPO is an incorporated organization with financial and operational concerns similar to a for-profit organization; however, an

NPO's purpose is to fulfill a social mission not to generate profits (Sanders & McClellan, 2014).

*Religious:* Religious is a descriptive word, when applied to a nonprofit organization, denotes activities related to any religious belief (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013a).

*Succession planning:* Succession planning is a business process of leadership transition similar to passing a baton in a relay race (Dyck, Mauws, Starke, & Mischke, 2012). The process includes identifying an individual with the right qualifications; transitioning the incumbent's position to the successor; deciding how to organize the leadership transition; and ensuring that effective communication and a collaborative relationship exists between the incumbent and the successor (Dyck et al., 2012).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Perception and reality framed the explicated assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The perspectives and experiences of the participants and my role as the researcher informed the current study. Moreover, the participants' leadership roles, beliefs, gender, and the location of the organizations comprise additional factors to include in the assessment of the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

#### **Assumptions**

According to Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013), the constructs of the world and the agents (individuals and organizations) operating in the constructs are the fundamental elements of assumptions in qualitative research. Researchers' assumptions derive from a view of the nature of reality and values (Chwalisz et al., 2008). An assumption is a belief

something is true, but an assumption is not possible to validate a self-evident belief (Moustakas, 1994).

The first assumption is the importance for religious nonprofits to continue operating in South Florida. The second assumption is leading a faith-based NPO is a calling from God and leaders in faith-based NPOs view the mission to have eternal implications. The third assumption is that formal knowledge transfer is a necessary but an underutilized activity to accomplish a successful leadership succession in a religious nonprofit.

### **Limitations**

Pettigrew (2013) used selective acknowledgment, a process of noting what is actionable in a study, to describe the limitations of a study on qualitative research. By identifying what is actionable in the study, the limitations of the study, essentially what is not actionable, becomes evident. Through participant interviews and documents, I described succession planning strategies of faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation in South Florida. The limitations included what was not in my control.

First, participants could have chosen not to share information relevant to the study for a variety of reasons, such as considerations of confidentiality. Second, unknown participant perceptions about my role as the researcher may have affected the results. The participants in were in predominantly male occupied positions. Perceptions related to my persona as a female researcher in the depth and level of transparency of the male participants' responses may have affected the overall data collection process, as in Poulton (2012). Third, the study entailed interviews with leaders of faith-based

organizations who adhere to a Christian worldview. The expressed succession planning strategies may not apply to secular, for-profit, or nonprofit settings that do not adhere to a Christian worldview. Fourth, because the interviews were at the participants' office locations, interruptions, such as telephone calls, may have affected the flow of information during the interviews and interrupted the participants' course of thought. Interruptions during interviews in the workplace affect the flow of information from the participant (Wiederhold, 2014; Yin, 2014).

### **Delimitations**

Perception and reality define the study's delimitations. Moustakas (1994) refers to the *noema* (perception of the phenomenon) and the *noesis* (the evidence of the phenomenon). For instance, a noema is the necessity for formal succession planning, and a noesis is formal succession planning is not taking place. The noetic delimitations in this study included the age of participants, the geographical location, the leadership position held in the organization, and the differences between faith-based NPOs and secular organizations. Participants' year of birth fell within the specified range of the Boomer generation, 1946-1964. As well, the participants actively led a faith-based, nonprofit operating in Broward County or Miami-Dade County, Florida. The noemic delimitations were the unexpressed information regarding succession planning strategies supplied by the participants. Another delimitation included the how faith-based NPOs and secular organizations differ in the leadership selection processes.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study's results may be valuable to nonprofits organizations. The exploration of the strategies of succession planning might allow faith-based NPO boards and key leaders to address the inevitable replacement of key leaders proactively before the leaders retire. Faith-based NPO's provide valuable services to society, and the faith-based NPO leader leads the organization to fulfill its mission through vision and acquisition of resources.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The expectation is for the study to be foundational to the business practice of formal succession planning for top leadership tiers of faith-based NPOs. Using the resulting information, boards and key leaders could begin strategizing about leadership succession with a greater understanding of the strategies of succession planning used in a similar organization. The expectation is that understanding the succession planning strategies of Boomer leaders at the inception of strategy formulation streamlines the process and increases the possibility that the organization will adopt a formal succession plan. A final expectation for key leaders' is that understanding succession planning strategies will inspire improvement in the business practice of succession planning.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The current study might contribute to strengthening stressed communities through the influence of sustainable, faith-based NPOs that are capable, prepared, and have continuity of leadership. Boomer NPO leaders need to be proactive in succession planning to ensure continued mission fulfillment. Faith-based NPOs counter the negative

effects of societal ills including crime, violence, suicide, substance abuse, broken families, neglected children, and more. For example, faith-based NPOs strengthen communities through vital and relevant services undergirding cultural identities that bind communities together and reinforcing positive values in societal culture. Society benefits when community members receive faith-based NPO services and programs. Social change manifests through faith-based NPO mission fulfillment by strengthening members of the communities through addressing physical, social, and spiritual needs.

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

The retirement exodus of Boomers from the workforce began in 2011 when the oldest members of the generation turned 65 (Hagemann & Stroope, 2013). The last of the Boomer generation will reach 65 in 2029, indicating that the transition is in an early stage of development. Leadership succession with limited or no knowledge transfer activities results in the loss of tacit and explicit knowledge (Durst & Wilhelm, 2012; Joe et al., 2013). The loss of knowledge inevitably affects many organizations at some level (Durst & Wilhelm, 2012; Petter & Ward, 2013). NPOs, including religious NPOs, have no immunity. Moreover, a majority of charitable NPOs such as the NPOs studied by Froelich et al., (2011) and Santora et al., (2015) did not have formal succession plans. Nonprofit leadership longevity contributes to the survival of the NPO (Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010). The loss of a key NPO leader can derail an organization. The unique requirements of the leadership role in religious NPOs (McMurray, Islam, Sarros, & Pirola-Merlo, 2013) and understanding the perspectives of relevant generational cohorts (Appelbaum et al., 2012a; Appelbaum et al., 2012b) inform this study's topic.

Succession planning and knowledge transfer generate exploration of issues related to sustainability (Daub, Scherrer, & Verkuil, 2014), strategic planning (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012), leadership transitions (Black, Oliver, Benson, & Kinghorn, 2013), and ethics (Nieh, & McLean, 2011). The study is in the ethnically diverse setting of South Florida. An examination of multicultural leadership issues is relevant to being a leader in multicultural environments (Slocum, 2015).

The review of the literature synthesizes scholarly works related to the topic of succession planning strategies of Boomer leaders in religious NPOs. Succession planning literature is growing, but succession planning literature related to religious nonprofits, Boomer leaders, and religious nonprofits was scarce (Dollhopf, Scheitle, & McCarthy, 2015). Also, no literature found was specific to succession planning in religious nonprofits in South Florida. I expanded the examination of the literature to for-profit, NPOs in general, and NPO educational settings. The literature reviewed included studies of domestic organizations (Tunheim & McLean, 2014) and global organizations (Comini, Paolino, & Feitosa, 2013; Weerawardena & Mort, 2012).

The literature review is a progressive discussion of the elements revealed in the research. The literature review involved an examination of 107 sources of which 104 were peer-reviewed, one was a government web page, and two were doctoral dissertations. Among the sources, 95 (88.7%), were within 5 years of the study's projected completion date.

The primary source of obtaining documents was through Walden University Library. The search engine was Google Scholar and the use of Google Scholar Alerts for

constant access to the most current scholarly literature on the search terms. Alerts included combinations of keywords including *nonprofit*, *succession*, *succession plan*, *succession planning*, *Boomer*, *Generation X*, *Millennial*, *leadership development*, *knowledge transfer*, *executive turnover*, and *leadership transition*. The research databases accessed included Business Source Complete, Emerald Management, Sage Premier, ScienceDirect, and Taylor and Francis Online. The terms used to search the databases included *sustainability*, *multiculturalism*, *change management*, *organizational change*, *human resources*, *generational cohort*, *religious nonprofit*, *strategic planning*, *leadership longevity*, *founder's syndrome*, *retention*, *retirement trends*, and *board efficacy*. The U.S. Census Bureau supplied the some of the statistical data on generational cohorts and retirement trends.

### **Organization of the Review**

The organization of the literature review begins with a discussion of the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer, including knowledge transfer theory, practice, and applications to succession planning. The overview of NPOs includes topics on performance, leadership, and sustainability. The literature review also contains a discussion of multicultural leadership considerations and leadership transition. The discussion of generational cohorts offers definitions of the cohorts present in today's workforce, Boomer generational work trends, and the multigenerational workforce. The review culminates with a broad discussion on succession planning includes the leader and organization's role, leadership development, board efficacy, and ethics.



The literature review supports the elements encapsulated in the research question and method. The review includes the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer followed by the contextual subject of succession planning. The review of succession planning literature is an exploration of the roles of the leader and the organization, leadership development, board efficacy, and ethics. Following is an overview of NPOs. The topics include NPO performance, leadership, and sustainability in a variety of NPO settings. The review contains some of the vital qualities and qualifications of an NPO leader. As well, the literature review incorporates a discussion of generational cohorts in the workplace including Boomer retirement trends and the multigenerational workforce. The research conduction was in the multicultural setting of Broward and Miami-Dade counties in South Florida. Inclusive was a discussion of correlations to multicultural leadership. The sections contain references to various types of organizations in different industry sectors. The literature review also contains a section on leadership transition.

### **Knowledge Transfer**

Knowledge transfer attitudes, knowledge transfer activities, and generational cohort work ethic considerations were relevant to the discussion of succession planning (Wadeson & Ciccotosto, 2013). Knowledge transfer is a context in which organizations can implement succession planning strategies. Planned leadership succession, including the cooperation of the leader, allowed for knowledge transfer over a lengthy time (years) and was beneficial to an NPO (Elkin, Smith, & Zhang, 2013).

Knowledge transfer theory is the conceptual framework for describing succession planning strategies of Boomer leaders in faith-based nonprofits. Knowledge management

was an organizational effort to capture tacit knowledge (informally sharing) and explicit knowledge (formally codifying) within the context of the organization's culture and training efforts (Cardoso et al., 2012). Knowledge transfer was defined as the passing of tacit business information and processes from one individual to another cultivated by proactive human resource management practices (Razak et al., 2013). Succession-planning strategy necessitates understanding knowledge transfer practices between generational cohorts.

**Knowledge transfer theory.** The concept of knowledge transfer has roots in the research of Woodworth and Thorndike (1901) on how the human mind can learn and improve in an activity. Belenky and Schalk (2014) expounded by applying the research to mental acuity concepts formulated in learning and training. Knowledge transfer theory incorporated tacit and explicit knowledge (Pilotte et al., 2013). Definition of *external knowledge* included *grounded* (prior experience) or *idealized* (no prior experience) *knowledge* (Belenky & Schalk, 2014). The derivation of *base knowledge* was from education differing from the *experiential knowledge* that builds on the base knowledge acquired through practice (Joe et al., 2013).

The introduction of new knowledge in an organization with previous knowledge formulated tension (Nestian, 2013). Knowledge creation took place through a disruption of a leadership transition and manifested through the organization's response (Nestian, 2013). Organizational culture dictated knowledge transfer activities (Pilotte et al., 2013). Intentionally managing knowledge transfer reduced the negative effects of knowledge loss (Joe et al., 2013).

Replacing staff necessitated assessing knowledge retention strategies including, what to keep, what to discard, and what new knowledge to develop for the future (Dumay & Rooney, 2011). When new knowledge was superior to previous knowledge, the organization assimilated that knowledge (Nestian, 2013). Knowledge creation was dependent on the conversion of knowledge, but knowledge conversion was possible without knowledge creation (Nestian, 2013). Maintaining practical experience averted a breakdown in knowledge transfer by accounting for the gap between tacit and explicit knowledge (Dumay & Rooney, 2011).

**Knowledge transfer in practice.** Valuable knowledge of an experienced leader included subject matter expertise, business and social networks, knowledge of the organization and institutional memory, systems process and value chain knowledge, and governance knowledge (Joe et al., 2013). Specifically, knowledge loss affected credibility and performance, lengthened replacement training, and decreased revenue (Joe et al., 2013). Complete knowledge was not easily transferable, especially relational knowledge (Joe et al., 2013).

Virtanen (2013) asserted the ideal in any field is the utilization of central concepts of knowledge management grounded in Polanyi's theory. Virtanen's interpretation of Polanyian theory adhered to the assertion all knowledge contains tacit information. Knowledge concepts derived from the interpretation included conditioned knowledge, procedural knowledge, semantic knowledge, and episodic knowledge (Virtanen, 2013). Joe et al. (2013) asserted a similar breakdown of a leader's knowledge including valuable expert knowledge of the organization as a whole such as knowledge of operations, the

organization's identity, fundraising, function, and history (organizational change experience).

Members of work teams exhibited a willingness to participate in knowledge sharing activities when trust and good relational conditions existed (Ehlen et al., 2013). Relational and social network knowledge (knowing people by reputation and engaging in a productive relationship) was almost exclusively tacit (Joe et al., 2013). Face-to-face tacit knowledge was a preferred method of knowledge transfer (Pilotte et al., 2013). The organization benefitted if a worker that departed shared business contacts and provided advice (Joe et al., 2013). Relational competence contributed to the effectiveness of knowledge transfer activities in leadership succession (Hatak & Roessl, 2013).

Knowledge transfer was a necessary component of succession planning. The circumstances of how an incumbent left, including death, voluntary move, demotion, or promotion, dictated what knowledge was transferable to the successor (Grusky, 1960). Successors and organizations benefitted from knowledge transfer activities, especially in executive leadership positions (Tunheim & McLean, 2014). The intangible knowledge loss was evident when an ineffective leader succeeded an effective leader (Duffield et al., 2011).

Organizational size had an effect on knowledge transfer. Formal knowledge transfer practices were less common in small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) than in larger organizations (Razak et al., 2013). A description of religious nonprofits such as churches included the phrase small-to-medium-sized organizations (Voelker, McDowell, & Harris, 2013). The organizational categorization correlated to the for-profit descriptive

term SME. Due to the paucity of literature on knowledge transfer in religious nonprofits, a review of the for-profit literature was necessary to describe the differences of knowledge transfer in relation to organizational size.

Small-to-medium-sized enterprises had a unique challenge in knowledge management because SMEs were not as formalized, relying on individuals over formal processes to share knowledge (Joe et al., 2013). Small-to-medium-sized enterprises lost highly knowledgeable talent to larger organizations (Razak et al., 2013). Knowledge transfer was a skill to resolve unique problems not addressed by training (Belenky & Schalk, 2014). Knowledge conversion and creation systems required resilience (Nestian, 2013).

**Knowledge transfer, succession, and generational cohorts.** The aging workforce entering retirement led to some unique implications in knowledge transfer of business processes (Petter & Ward, 2013). Knowledge transfer activities were relational yet complex when required across cohorts where communication efforts differed (Appelbaum et al., 2012a; Appelbaum et al., 2012b; Sanaei, Javernick-Will, & Chinowsky, 2013). Wadeson & Ciccotosto (2013) included intergenerational change as a factor detracting from a successful transition by referencing Sambrook's model of succession over time. Millennials, Boomers, and Generation X communicated using technology at different levels and in different ways, which affected knowledge transfer (Appelbaum et al., 2012a; Appelbaum et al., 2012b). An exploration of how different generations prefer to communicate suggested Millennials' preference for technology influenced how an entire industry communicated (Pilotte et al., 2013). The crisis of an

aging workforce was not as dramatic as anticipated (Auerback et al., 2014; Dumay & Rooney, 2011).

The generational cohorts were less proactive in connecting with each other via knowledge sharing than the cohorts perceived (Sanaei et al., 2013), which is a potential succession planning obstacle. In certain fields, technological advances in knowledge management allowed younger workers to learn concepts and processes in months rather than years with a projection of as much as 80-90% more organizational process knowledge captured and retained from the outgoing generation because of technological advances (Dumay & Rooney, 2011). Job satisfaction aligned with effective communication; pre-retirees were motivated to work and transfer knowledge to younger generations (Appelbaum et al., 2012a; Appelbaum et al., 2012b). In general, social engagement was a stronger motivator for individuals than a financial incentive to practice knowledge transfer (Minbaeva et al., 2012). The small percentage of the tacit knowledge younger workers needed was from experience and guidance from the older workers (Dumay & Rooney, 2011). Experience influenced an individual's prioritization of problems and projects and was not applicable to knowledge transfer because experience was unique to each person (Joe et al., 2013).

### **Succession Planning**

Succession planning was a business process of leadership transition similar to passing a baton in a relay race (Dyck, Mauws, Starke, & Mischke, 2012). The process included identifying an individual with the right qualifications, transitioning the incumbent's position to the successor, deciding how to organize the leadership transition,

ensuring effective communication, and a collaborative relationship existing between the incumbent and successor (Dyck et al., 2012). A strategic organizational succession process contributed to organizational sustainability by identifying and retaining talented and ethical leaders through leadership development (Nieh & McLean, 2011). A succession plan resulted in a successful leadership transition (Cocklin & Wilkinson, 2011; Prestia et al., 2014). When a succession plan was in place, the expected crisis of losing a key organizational leader, including the loss of tacit knowledge, was possibly far less than anticipated (Dumay & Rooney, 2011). Boomer retirement trends necessitated proactively addressing succession planning (Nieh & McLean, 2011).

**The leader's role.** Consideration of sequence, timing, baton passing, and communication in evaluating the experience of the incumbent and successor correlated effectively to the succession process (Dyck et al., 2002). In general, experienced leaders had a succession plan (Richardson, 2014). The experienced Boomer NPO leaders made efforts to preserve organizations through corporate social responsibility sponsorship activities (Liston-Heyes, & Liu, 2013). A lack of potential successors experienced in development activities could be a perceived obstacle to passing the baton of leadership. In the literature, attracting talented leadership was a superior succession strategy than finding a leadership heir (Renihan, 2012).

Succession planning resulted from coaching and mentoring by existing leaders (Prestia et al., 2014). Successful succession management required the self-leadership and role transparency by the departing leader (Gothard, & Austin, 2013). Mentoring was a succession practice benefitting the participants involved and the organization (Prestia et

al., 2014). Purposeful leadership development required identifying candidates with high potential and providing mentoring to prepare potential successors for leadership roles (Gothard, & Austin, 2013). Conflicting understanding of control and responsibility were the primary factors in failed succession (Dyck et al., 2002). Leadership style required flexibility and tolerance, not the style of command and control (Eversole et al., 2012; Hagemann & Stroope, 2013). Ideally, successful leadership succession was evident when the incumbent released control, nurturing and not crippling the succession process (Jaskiewicz, Combs, & Rau, 2014).

Smaller faith-based organizations without umbrella organizations displayed diminished engagement in recruitment functions such as leadership training (Wittberg, 2012). The limitation left the organization vulnerable to decline, or even extinction when the founding generation ages, retires, or departs for new opportunities (Wittberg, 2012). Santora, Sarros, and Esposito (2014) identified four types of the *founder as leader* profiles in the succession process. The *destroyer* identified and undermined the successor using autocratic control (Santora et al., 2014). The *conscientious* incumbent identified and mentored the successor with board involvement using autocratic control (Santora et al., 2014). The *maverick* offered no leadership or development of candidates and selected an external candidate using autocratic control (Santora et al., 2014). The *controller* oversaw the succession process including identification and appointment of a successor using autocratic control (Santora et al., 2014). Only the conscientious leader was successful (Santora et al., 2014). Founders wanted the final say in the selection of successors (Comini et al., 2013; Santora et al., 2014). A self-interested founder may act



to preserve a leadership legacy; moreover, a founder's continued presence was the main hindrance to a smooth succession (Comini et al., 2013; Santora et al., 2014).

**The organization's role.** Strategies for succession planning in organizations included proactive efforts to identify internally and develop leaders with high, emerging potential (Hagemann & Stroope, 2013; Nieh & McLean, 2011; Prestia et al., 2014), but succession planning often lacked structure (Comini et al., 2013). Levels of succession instability corresponded to the amount of control the organization held over the process; more control meant more stability and less control resulted in less stability (Grusky, 1960). Organizational knowledge and influence affected the level of instability (Grusky, 1960). Regular succession plan assessment was necessary (Santora & Sarros, 2012). Skill in complex situations, the extension of effort, attitude, and actions were considerations in successor identification (Comini et al., 2013). When NPOs did not articulate a strategy for succession, NPOs could not implement a proper succession in the event of an unplanned departure (Santora & Sarros, 2012). Leadership development was a possible strategy to identify and prepare a successor (Liston-Heyes, & Liu, 2013; Nieh & McLean, 2011; Renihan, 2012).

**Leadership development.** Intentional leadership development in an organization was a succession planning strategy (Nieh & McLean, 2011). Understanding what leaders need to make sense of the new roles was how organizations improved the selection of leadership successors (Browning & McNamee, 2012). Formal leadership development was necessary to convey the requirements of leadership as well as to support existing leaders with the tools necessary to feel more equipped in the positions (Renihan, 2012).

Implementation of leadership development strategies included evaluation of organizational commitment to leadership development and the assessment of resources for leadership development (Miodonski & Hines, 2013). Development of leadership identity and self-regulation as in goal orientation were integral to leadership development (Murphy & Johnson, 2011). Researchers suggested individuals interested in leadership growth should proactively identify and create opportunities, owning the process of succession into leadership positions (Miodonski & Hines, 2013).

Mentoring was a tool for identifying future leaders and for helping others to divert careers to alternate paths if not suitable to the new responsibilities of leadership positions (Prestia et al., 2014). According to Miodonski and Hines (2013), mentoring strategy involved formal and informal career growth opportunities; identification of potential leaders and mentors; articulation of the desired leadership traits; development of a plan including available resources and strategies with an experienced leader to champion the effort. A mentoring experience allowed the mentor and mentee to focus on the how to do things rather than solely why certain activities were necessary (Prestia et al., 2014).

In succession strategy, the focus was on whether a new leader drives strategic change or if the circumstances of the succession influence the leader to make changes (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012). The discussion of internal and external succession and board involvement proved relevant to succession planning efforts (Klein & Salk, 2013). Exploration of the difference in the incumbent and successor's mentality in the succession process was relevant (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012). Over the decades, the literature on leadership succession, regardless of whether the succession was internal or

external, affected organizational stability and organizational stakeholders (Grusky, 1960). More recently, similar effects of internal and external leadership succession were also evident in religious nonprofits such as church congregations (Dollhopf & Scheitle, 2013).

**Board efficacy.** Board efficacy was to be either part of the problem or part of the solution in NPO leadership succession planning. Board governance was a potential inhibitor to succession planning (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012). Boards needed to discuss the issue of succession planning more than the average of 2 hours per year, and personnel management was necessary to the process (Comini et al., 2013). Implementing strategic activities and written plans positively affected the board's responsibility fulfillment, operations, and general leadership (Petrescu, 2013). Age, years of service, and the incumbent leader being a member of the board were predictors of success in succession planning of NPO executives (Richardson, 2014). Incumbent leaders often took part in the succession process including selection and training, which can also be negative if the leader was the organization's founder (Santora, Sarros, & Esposito, 2012). In general, researchers contended boards should not permit a founder to remain active in the organization after retirement because personnel and external stakeholders were reportedly unclear of leader roles (Santora et al., 2012). Founders caused unity of command issues, and positive work would unravel if founders remained after the appointment of a successor (Santora et al., 2012). Identifying and supporting an interim successor was often necessary during the search for a successor (Browning, & McNamee, 2012).

**Ethics and succession planning.** The topic of business ethics is evident in the strategy of leadership development and succession planning. According to Nieh and

McLean (2011), if organizations wanted ethical leaders, succession planning and leadership development strategies were effective ways to identify ethical leaders . For leaders, succession planning was a quality management practice. Succession planning was a system of positive reinforcement to cultivate ethical values. Selecting ethical employees proved more beneficial to an organization than high performance because employees modeled behaviors of the organizational leaders.

Different generational cohorts displayed different ethical value systems (VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2012). A generalization about cohorts was made with caution (VanMeter et al., 2012). For example, comparison of Boomers and Millennials yielded that Boomers articulated concerns that organizations needed to be socially responsible and Millennials wanted to make a difference through by working (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Millennials were less altruistic than other cohorts were (Leveson & Joiner, 2014). Millennials were moral relativists possessing situational ethical values (VanMeter et al., 2012). Millennials knew ethical behavior work was necessary and were capable of learning and applying ethical principles in that context (VanMeter et al., 2012). Passing the baton to the Millennial cohort had ethical implications. Consideration of how Boomer leaders will manage the transition is necessary. VanMeter et al. (2012) asserted organizations could compensate for Millennials ethical relativism and preferences for team-oriented work environments by addressing ethics in groups and setting standards.

### **Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs)**

An NPO is an incorporated organization that had financial and operational

concerns similar to a for-profit organization; however, and the definition of an NPOs purpose was a means to fulfill a social mission and not to generate profits (Sanders & McClellan, 2014). The study's lens was on religious nonprofits and specifically included faith-based organizations. Religious NPO activities correlated with any religious belief (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013). The activities of faith-based NPOs aligned with Christian organizations (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013). A nonprofit organization's performance measurements, leader roles, and responsibilities are critical to understanding leadership succession. NPOs formulated human resources practices to meet challenges in external (financial resources and commercialization) and internal (values and mission) environments (Ridder, Piening, & Baluch, 2012).

**NPO performance.** Measuring performance in any NPO must include the component of mission fulfillment. Adopting for-profit practices met with criticism in an NPO setting (Daub et al., 2014). Few NPO leaders conducted a formal organizational needs assessment, perhaps due to being founders of the NPO (Carman & Nesbit, 2013). Reduced professionalism in many NPO settings inhibited succession efforts (Comini et al., 2013). Many fell short of collaboration with other NPOs, and some NPOs did not survive because of competition (Carman & Nesbit, 2013). Financial sustainability diverted focus from succession planning, as well (Comini et al., 2013).

Social enterprises measured performance management in unique ways by evaluating financial performance, social effectiveness in the communities served, and institutional legitimacy verified through mission fulfillment and compliance with the law (Bagnoli & Megali, 2011). Transparency and accountability were necessary performance

measures to ensure sustainability of a religious organization (Payer-Langthaler & Hiebl, 2013). In faith-based organizations such as churches, attendance and giving patterns were performance indicators of a correct course (Shirin, 2014). In NPO performance management, incorporating the terms stewardship and sustainability displayed the inherent tension between being financially responsible and maintaining the social mission of the organization (Sanders & McClellan, 2014).

Researchers asserted that NPOs exist in a market-driven environment indicating employees are the key to achieving market-driven goals (Carman & Nesbit, 2013; Ridder, Piening, & Baluch, 2012). NPOs differed from for-profit settings; however, human resource strategies incorporating high-performance work practices such as recruiting and retention efforts exemplify NPOs' adaptability to for-profit human resource strategies (Robineau, Ohana, & Swaton, 2014). Partly attributable to a lack of professional training, few founders are conducting formal needs assessments (Carman & Nesbit, 2013; Comini et al., 2013). Increasing professional practices helps NPOs to be more competitive in the midst of trying financial circumstances and an increasingly competitive NPO sector (Robineau et al., 2014). Nonprofit organizational leaders formulate human resource efforts to meet external challenges, for example, financial resources and commercialization, as well as the internal challenges of values and mission (Ridder et al., 2012). Nonprofit leaders must navigate between organizational management and motives in leading organizations

Nonprofit leadership encompasses a variety of leadership styles and practices in the literature. For example, innovative leadership contributes to NPO performance

(Beekman, Steiner, & Wasserman, 2012), and NPO leaders must keep abreast of competitive business practices for survival (Fonseca & Baptista, 2013; Petrescu, 2013). Knowledge, experience, and creating organizational culture proved to be a leader's contribution to successful, innovative behaviors (Beekman et al., 2012). Leadership tenure is an indicator of how an NPO leader exercises innovative behavior but not necessarily what level of innovation. Leaders with less tenure had less innovative strategies because of the limited exposure to the organization, inability to connect resources to opportunity, and shorter and fewer necessary relationships (Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010). Nonprofit leaders with more tenure possessed significantly more innovative leader behavior because of higher satisfaction with the status quo (Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010). Ultimately, leadership in the workplace affected the organizational climate more than innovation did (McMurray et al., 2013).

Effective leadership qualities and style of an NPO leader vary by position (Klein & Salk, 2013), tenure (Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010), commitment, and task (Fonseca & Baptista, 2013). The organizational mission dictates what type of leadership is necessary for each organization. For instance, in a nonprofit educational setting, the organizational leader is the college president, which requires a broad skill set to fulfill the mission of the organization. The NPO leaders' skills included fundraising, being a skilled communicator, and time management (Klein & Salk, 2013). Nonprofit organizational leadership entails responsibilities that extend beyond the for-profit realm of maximizing profit to include mission fulfillment. For NPOs, knowledge and innovation were core to competitiveness, global adaptation, and performance (Fonseca & Baptista, 2013). NPOs

benefitted from innovative leader behavior (Beekman et al., 2012). Leadership longevity had an effect on innovative behavior (Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010).

NPOs had unique operational challenges, such as reliance on volunteers, because of the organizational missions (Fonseca & Baptista, 2013). Servant leadership is prevalent in certain types of organizations, including nonprofits (Shirin, 2014). Putting followers first, for example, staff and volunteers, is a distinctive quality of servant leadership, but not the only effective leadership style in an NPO, nor is servant leadership necessarily Christian (Shirin, 2014). Leaders' motives are central to understanding the disparity. The perception of leaders' motives when implementing change and sustainability measures influenced stakeholder engagement (Lin-Healy & Small, 2013). Leaders who served the interests of the organizational owners could not fully embrace serving the interest of followers, as required by servant leadership (Shirin, 2014). When the perception of change was not for the greater good because a leader received a benefit, a reduction in stakeholder engagement was evident (Lin-Healy & Small, 2013). Leaders were better off delaying change efforts until a positive work climate was evident (McMurray, 2012).

Transactional leadership showed a greater effect than transformational leadership on the workgroup climate in religious NPOs (McMurray et al., 2013). Transactional leadership effects workgroup climate was possibly due to the number of volunteers who required instruction and to the sensitivity religious persons had to avoid punishment from God (McMurray et al., 2013). Effective NPO leaders may need to incorporate transformational and transactional leadership practices to be effective.



NPOs participated in collaborations with other organizations including for-profits and other NPOs (Larson, Boyer, & Armsworth, 2014; Milliman & Grosskopf, 2013). Nonprofit collaborations required unique leader attributes. Nonprofit leader commitment, not the reputation of the NPO, drove relationships with community partners (Larson et al., 2014). The NPO leader should establish networks and innovate at the beginning of leadership tenure (Fritz & Ibrahim, 2010). In establishing community partnerships, collaborative leadership skills include shared leadership style, ability to promote trust, and the capacity to conduct transparent and efficient meetings (Milliman, & Grosskopf, 2013).

### **Generational Cohorts**

Generational cohorts are large groups of people born in the same defined periods who share commonalities of values and behaviors that differ when compared to people born in other periods (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). The qualities of generational cohorts are not the same across cultures and continents, but researchers applied standard definitions to the generational cohorts (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Dumay & Rooney, 2011; Goodman, 2013, Roongrerngsuke & Liefoghe, 2013). A generational cohort has shared qualities manifested in work attitudes and practices and proved important to understand in human resource management (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Wesner & Miller, 2008).

The focal generational cohort of the study was the Boomer generation. The presence of younger cohorts into the workforce is also relevant to the discussion of succession because the successors who replace the incumbents will logically come from a younger cohort (Sherman, Dyess, Hannah, & Prestia, 2013; Tang, Cunningham,

Frauman, Ivy, & Perry, 2012; Wesner & Miller, 2008; Zopiatis, Krambia-Kapardis, & Varnavas, 2012). A majority of the literature since 2011 on the multigenerational workforce addressed the exodus of Boomers from the workforce, and the priority of how, or why to attract and retain the Millennial cohort as successors (Wesner & Miller, 2008; Zopiatis et al., 2012). Scarce literature was evident on Generation X as successor into the vacated Boomer leadership positions (Sherman et al., 2013). Understanding the younger generations' values, both Generation X and Millennials (Leveson & Joiner, 2014; Mencl & Lester, 2014; Tang et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2012) inform the concern of Boomer leaders in passing the baton of leadership. Moreover, the values of the younger cohorts affect business practices to recruit, train, and retain younger talent (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012; Roongrerngsuke & Liefoghe, 2013).

**Boomer generation retirement.** Boomers are retiring in record numbers (Appelbaum et al., 2012a; Appelbaum et al., 2012b; Petter & Ward, 2013). The retirement exodus is universally evident and includes diverse professions such as entrepreneurs (Forster-Holt, 2013) and engineers (Pilotte, Bairaktarova, & Evangelou, 2013), as well as diverse industries such as healthcare (Prestia, Dyess, & Sherman, 2014; Stringer, 2014) and information technology (Petter & Ward, 2013), and different types of organizations as in higher education (Tunheim & McLean, 2014), the public sector (Dumay & Rooney, 2011), and NPOs in general (Richardson, 2014). For example, nearly half of college and university presidents will be retiring by the year 2025 (Tunheim & McLean, 2014). Regardless of the size of the organization (Joe et al., 2013), the Boomer retirement exodus is an inevitable reality.

Across the Boomer cohort, retirement attitudes and efforts differ (Appelbaum et al., 2012a; Appelbaum et al., 2012b; Forster-Holt, 2013; Post, Schneer, Reitman, & Ogilvie, 2013). Individuals in mid-career and the final years of a career held different perceptions of retirement; individuals in the late career viewed retirement more negatively (Post et al., 2013). Post et al. (2013) found the expectation of retirement to be at age 62 instead of the expected norm of age 65. Regardless of when Boomers preferred to retire, Boomers postponed retirement due to factors including level of education, level of physical exertion, and personal finances (Auerbach, Buerhaus, & Staiger, 2014; Taylor, Pilkington, Feist, Dal Grande, & Hugo, 2014). Religiosity manifested as a factor also (Sturz & Zografos, 2014). Additional factors to Boomers postponing retirement were concerns about the identification of suitable replacements (Duffield, Roche, Blay, Thoms, & Stasa, 2011). Other concerns included the loss of tacit knowledge after departure (Petter & Ward, 2013). Health and gender held little bearing on expected retirement age (Post et al., 2013).

**The multigenerational workforce.** Three generations of workers are present in today's workforce including Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). Boomers are the oldest generation exiting the workforce in large numbers (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Wesner & Miller, 2008). Millennials are the youngest generation entering the workforce in large numbers, and both generations represent the largest segments of the three populations (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Wesner & Miller, 2008). The Boomer and Millennial cohorts each outnumber Generation X by approximately 30 million people (more than 60 million people

combined), which was a significantly larger number of people than the total Generation X population of 48 million (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). The disparity in population distribution is sizable and merits the attention given to the comparisons of Boomers and Millennials in the literature including the underrepresentation of Generation X in the academic literature on succession (Sherman et al., 2013). Members of Generation X may be successors to Boomer leaders; however, based on the population deficit not enough qualified members of Generation X exist to fill the positions Boomers are vacating.

Several studies provided a comparison of the Boomer and Millennial cohorts, which revealed the differences (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012; Michailides & Lipsett, 2013) and similarities (Wesner & Miller, 2008). For Boomers and Millennials, similarities existed in the levels of education, parental experiences, impact technology, employee commitment to the employer, and meaningful work (Wesner & Miller, 2008). For the three generations, notable similarities were decision-making and autonomy, teamwork and collaboration, and financial reward (Mencel & Lester, 2014). Mencel and Lester (2014) described notable differences of career advancement, diversity climate, immediate recognition, and feedback between Millennials and the two older cohorts. Boomers and Generation X expected quicker advancement opportunities, entered a more diverse workforce than the preceding generations, and needed more feedback and attention at work (Mencel & Lester, 2014).

Some commonalities exist between Boomers and Millennials that did not align with the era of Generation X. In the area of education, Boomers and Millennials were the most highly educated generations upon entering the workforce (Wesner & Miller, 2008).

The parenting experiences of each generation influenced each generations' behaviors (Wesner & Miller, 2008). For the Boomers, life experience meant a penchant for challenging authoritarian structures; for Millennials, the experience meant unprecedented attention from parents (Wesner & Miller, 2008). In contrast, Generation X became more self-reliant due to the mothers pursuing careers and having children later in life. In general, Millennials' early family life experiences manifested in the cohort's preferences for collaborative work settings (Dannar, 2013), while Generation Xers preferred more autonomy in work settings.

Technology had a significant effect on the cohort values of Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Dannar, 2013; Wesner & Miller, 2008). Boomers experienced the availability of television and the world entering the living rooms, as well as the introduction of computers (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Technology resistant attitudes from Generation X and Boomers were not evident, but both cohorts considered using work-related technology during off-duty time intrusive (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). Millennials experienced similar technological innovations and are adept in a variety of technology tools, which Millennials constantly use throughout daily life (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Wesner & Miller, 2008). Generation X also grew up with access to technology, but Millennials did not consider using technology because high technology was always an integral part of life experience (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Millennials had a virtual mobile work capacity; office space was of less concern (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Human resource managers need to respond by

accommodating Millennials through social media recruiting and training (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Wesner & Miller, 2008).

Millennials and Generation X view work priorities differently than Boomers, with more value on leisure (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). Generation X and Millennials, although committed to the organization, will not sacrifice for work at personal cost (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Mencl & Lester, 2014). In particular, Millennials are mobile in work settings with diminished loyalty to the employers, and a desire to accommodate personal preferences (Wesner & Miller, 2008). Generation X is skeptical of authority, and members preferred an autonomous, flexible work setting (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007).

The perceptions of Millennials and Generation X were that organizational training and development efforts represent the concern and care of the organization for employees (Amayah & Gedro, 2014). Boomers experienced increased organizational engagement because of training and development efforts (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012). Researchers suggested mentoring as an approach to address multigenerational succession (Sherman et al., 2013; Zopiatis et al. 2012). Programs such as reverse mentoring where the younger worker was the mentor to the older protégé was a unique strategy used to engage today's multigenerational workforce (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012).

The value of age whether young or old was a factor in training, and the affinity of the younger generations with technology increase the value of younger generations to an organization (Goodman, 2013). The necessary ingredient for the successful leadership of a multigenerational workforce is considering each cohort's work values (Mencl & Lester,

2014; Michailides & Lipsett, 2013; Tang et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2012). The value of familial priorities held in common by all three generations (Amayah & Gedro, 2014; Kwok, 2012; Michailides & Lipsett, 2013). An effective leadership strategy was to manage each cohort in consideration of differing values between each, not managing the cohorts in the same way (Eversole, Venneberg, & Crowder, 2012). Even though the older and younger cohorts had similarities and differences (Mencel & Lester, 2014; Tang, 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2012), in the literature, the younger cohorts, Millennials in particular, will heavily influence human resource and organizational development practices (Wesner & Miller, 2008; Roongrerngsuke & Liefoghe, 2013; Zopiatis et al., 2012).

Diversity and multiculturalism were high values in the Millennials profile, including lifelong access to technology, which reinforced the diversity and multicultural values (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012; Tang et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2012). The multigenerational workforce was not the only variable to identifying, training, and retaining a key leader in an organization. Understanding the unique preferences of each generation combined with diverse cultural backgrounds was an edge in attracting and retaining a desirable candidate with high-level skills (Roongrerngsuke & Liefoghe, 2013). Researcher asserted human resource efforts should be refocused on how to retain the talent needed by an organization not reacting to the overestimated effects of an anticipated crisis (Dumay & Rooney, 2011; Tang et al., 2012; Zopiatis et al., 2012).

### **Multicultural Leadership Considerations**

Succession-planning strategies may correspond to the challenges of a multicultural region that may correlate to the ethnicity of a leader, which contributed to

slightly increased and decreased instances of succession planning (Richardson, 2014). Contemporary leaders need strategies to cross not only generational divides but cultural ones as well (Srinivasan, 2012). The multicultural setting of South Florida may exhibit both low context cultural expectations in the United States and the high context cultural expectations of Latin American countries living in one community. The combined population of Miami-Dade and Broward Counties is above 4 million people (U.S. Census, 2014a). Miami-Dade County, the larger county, has over 2.5 million people with a Hispanic population of 65%; Broward County's population is nearly 27% Hispanic; in comparison to the entire U.S. population that is 17% Hispanic (U.S. Census, 2014a). The white non-Hispanic population is 15.2% in Miami-Dade and 40% in Broward County (U.S. Census, 2014a).

A leader's ability to assimilate into an organization and community with a multicultural population like Miami-Dade and Broward Counties may present relevant considerations for succession planning. Acceptance, adaptation, and integration were the progressive stages toward assimilating cultural values and behavior (Cushner, 2012). Worldview informed multicultural work behaviors (Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2012). Cross-cultural leadership efficacy could include skills such as naïve dialecticism, which was the ability to navigate contradicting thought patterns sometimes evident in people of bi-cultural descent (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2012). Developing appropriate cross-cultural behavior and internalizing cultural practices such as moving freely between cultural groups was evidence of advanced cross-cultural efficacy (Cushner, 2012).



The prospect of identifying a suitable successor may require looking beyond the local market. Migration to another culture for work resulted in rejection experiences by members of the host culture (Kwok, 2012). An effective multicultural leadership practice included allowing employees to learn about other cultures and observing lifestyles while giving the employees' time to process the experiences (Hawala-Drury & Hill, 2012). Processing may result in improved cultural awareness (Hawala-Drury & Hill, 2012). As well, training in the context of the country or region was a best practice to incorporate individualized diversity and inclusion practices to the area where the organization operated (Goodman, 2013). Cross-cultural work experiences supplied relevant perspectives to leaders in the leaders' country of origin (Slocum, 2015).

### **Leadership Transition**

Leadership change matters to an organization (Rowe, Cannella, Rankin, & Gorman, 2005). The unexpected departure of a Boomer leader is a traumatic event (Vivian & Hormann, 2015) affecting staff behavior, organizational performance, and ultimately the organization's survival. Both novice and interim leaders have challenges to overcome. Novice leaders replacing experienced Boomer leaders needed greater organizational support, training, and assistance with navigating human resource processes (Stringer, 2014). Individual characteristics, choices, and experiences contributed to interims making sense of the roles as either caretakers or trailblazers (Browning, & McNamee, 2012).

Leadership transition, which influences organizational culture, was a sensitive time in an organization's existence (Yin et al., 2014). The executive leader, such as a

Chief Executive Officer (CEO), is the party most responsible for the strategic change of an organization (Hutzschenreuter et al., 2012). The consequences of executive turnover include the cost of paying off the old CEO and the expenses of conducting a search for a new CEO, and instability in the organization (Duffield et al., 2011). The transition can also have negative effects on the leader. The more effective the leader, the better for the development of the organization; ineffective leader takeover led to decline regardless of the other efforts in the organization (Duffield et al., 2011).

The sensemaking process for a leader's transition to a new administrative leadership role experienced inhibition by the isolation from honest conversation, the inability to process thoughts aloud for fear of misunderstandings, and the lack of reflection time (Smerek, 2013). Leader burnout might have resulted from a conflict between values and the challenges of a leadership role (Austin et al., 2013). For instance, fulfilling a selfless mission such as feeding the poor was in direct conflict with attending a fundraising event (Austin et al., 2013). Education and training facilitated a smoother transition by providing a reference group for the leader to connect with during the transition (Austin et al., 2013). Interview sessions between incumbents and successors were a strategy for successful leadership transition (Peet, 2012). The interviews resulted in knowledge generation that, over the long term, benefitted the organization through the succession (Peet, 2012). Planned leadership transition was the essence of succession planning. Research in different NPO sectors reported a significant lack of succession planning (Comini et al., 2013; Froelich et al., 2011).

## **Summary and Transition**

The current study was a case study description of the succession planning strategies in faith-based NPOs leaders of the Boomer generation. Recruitment of NPO leaders as participants was through my professional network of faith-based NPO leaders from Miami-Dade and Broward Counties in South Florida who meet what Yin (2014) refers to as a replicable sample. Exploration of the research phenomenon was via the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer. Following an explanation of the conceptual framework is the discussion on succession planning. The literature review includes topics on NPOs, including performance, leadership, and sustainability. Additionally, the discussion extends to generational cohorts, including Boomer work trends, the multigenerational workforce, and multicultural leadership considerations. The review culminates in the overarching topics of knowledge transfer and leadership transition.

Section 2 explains the role of the researcher, participants, research method, and design. Section 2 also includes details of the focal research population, sampling strategies, ethical research, data collection analysis, and data organization. The conclusion of Section 2 has an explanation of reliability and validity strategies.

Section 3 is the presentation of the findings, including how the results apply to professional practice, the implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and my reflections.

## Section 2: The Project

Section 2 includes an explanation of the foundational methods and processes. I discuss my role as the researcher and the identification and recruitment of participants, including interview techniques. Further details include an explanation of the qualitative research method and multiple case study design. Section 2 includes an articulation of the specific strategies for data collection and analysis as well a discussion of reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the qualitative, multiple case study is exploring succession planning strategies used by faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation. The targeted population was three faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation, with succession plans, whose organizations serve the densely populated and multicultural Southeast Florida counties of Broward and Miami-Dade. According to the U.S. Census (2012), Florida ranked third in the United States in the number of charitable nonprofit filings, indicating a sizable population from which to draw a representative sampling of participants. An expectation as a result of the study is that business practices in faith-based nonprofits may improve through learning about succession planning strategies implemented by Boomer leaders in faith-based NPOs. The resulting information is appropriate for a variety of NPO stakeholders including NPO boards, key leaders, staff, and individuals from the communities who stand to benefit from faith-based NPO services and programs.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My residence in Miami-Dade County involves living and working in different areas of the county since 1994. As a ministry director since 2003 in a religious NPO (church) encountering faith-based nonprofit leaders is normal both within my organization and in the community. I consult and train leaders from local churches independently and through the Miami Baptist Association and the Florida Baptist Convention, coordinated programs and activities with other faith-based nonprofit leaders, and worked on a team whose role was to conduct a yearlong search for a Senior Pastor for my organization. These professional experiences have resulted in connections directly or indirectly with participants of the current study.

The role of the researcher in data collection and analysis according to Yin (2014) is to recruit participants, conduct the interviews, and transcribe the interviews. In the data collection process for this study, I used a semistructured interview and reviewed company documents. The interview process included an interview protocol (see Appendix A) and a prepared list of interview questions (see Appendix B). Reviewing company documents from the faith-based leaders' organizations augmented the interview data (Boblin et al., 2013; Stake, 1978; Yin; 2014).

Following the data collection, Yin's protocol included identifying and coding the themes and then analyzing them. I recruited and interviewed participants, transcribed summaries of the digitally recorded interviews, and reviewed documents from the leaders' organizations. Identified themes resulted from coding and analysis. When analyzing the transcripts, the researcher derived the intended meaning from the

interviewee to reduce researcher bias (Yin, 2014). Bias and power imbalances were evident between the interviewee and researcher, but mitigation of bias and power imbalance was possible by understanding the perceptual slants in worldview each role possessed (Anyan, 2013). The interviewer and the interviewee can derail a study with an imbalance of power driven by personal biases (Anyan, 2013). Moreover, the researcher needs to recognize bias of worldview and culture on a study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I considered feedback from the participants through member checking of the transcripts to limit my bias, and I was also aware of the participants' biases reflected in feedback during the member checking process.

I applied the Belmont Report's ethical framework. Data collection included the basic tenets of *respect for persons*, *beneficence/or no maleficence*, and *justice* according to the Belmont Report (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). The Belmont Report supplies standards of how to treat study participants ethically, including vulnerable populations, as explicated in Greaney et al. (2012). The participants had to be over 18, not in prison, and not mentally incapacitated. Participants considered to be elderly (65 or older) by International Review Board Standards were possible because the first of the Boomer generation was born in 1946. Greaney et al. (2012) explained in order for researchers to be compliant with the Belmont Report to disclose to participants the purpose of the research and sign an informed consent of participation including the right to withdraw at any time. Participants received full disclosure of the purpose of the study and signed an informed consent of participation and the right to withdraw at any time. Greaney et al. (2012) also discussed not excluding participants who meet the research

study requirements nor any participants that stand to benefit from the research. I did not exclude participants meeting the study requirements or participants standing to benefit from the research.

According to Yin (2014), the researcher guides the conversation for accomplishing research goals through an unbiased inquiry. Phone and in-person interviews manifested different behaviors between the interviewer and interviewee, but neither type of interview technique diminishes understanding of the substantive content provided by the interviewees (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2013). The recording of the interviews were in person for up to 1 hour.

### **Participants**

Yin (2014) suggests the researcher choose case studies meeting the qualifications for a study. I described the succession planning strategies of faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation in Florida's Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. Five criteria are necessary for participants. First, the participants must be willing to participate. Second, the participants must be from the Boomer generation born from 1946-1964 as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (2014b). Third, participants must be leaders of a faith-based NPOs. Fourth, the leaders must have succession plans in place for the organizations. Fifth, the organizations and leaders must operate in Miami-Dade or Broward Counties. Each of the criteria aligns with the central research question.

The selection of the Boomer generational cohort leaders as the subject of the study was because beginning in 2011 some Boomers reached the retirement age of 65 and began exiting the workforce according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014b). For NPOs, the

leadership deficit is a serious concern (Elkin, Smith, & Zhang, 2013; Froelich et al., 2011; Starks, 2013). Reybold, Lammert, and Stribling (2013) conducted research in the same geographical location of residence for the convenience of time, access, and resources. Miami-Dade and Broward Counties was the geographical choice for the convenience of time, access, and resources for myself as a researcher who resides in the same area as the participants.

The relationship between the researcher and the selected participants manifests tension because of the need for accountability in that relationship (Reybold et al., 2013). The choice of a participant reflects tangible and intangible realities (Reybold et al., 2013). Tangible realities include researcher resources and participant availability while intangible realities include shared relationships, personal rapport, and timing (Reybold et al., 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2014). Tangible realities entail limitations that do not always entail solutions. As a researcher, I must maximize the intangible realities. Yin (2014) suggested establishing a rapport with the participants based on commonalities of religious beliefs, professional connections, and making an effort to conduct the interviews at the convenience of the participants (Yin, 2014). Establishing a rapport with the participants based on commonalities of religious beliefs, professional connections, included an additional effort to conduct the interviews at the convenience of the participants. I made an effort to establish a rapport with the participants.

Participant identification was from my professional network to identify participants that met the research criteria and were experiencing the phenomenon. Participant identification was through professional relationships and affiliations in



Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. The participants' abilities to make contributions to the purpose of the study dictated participation.

### **Research Method and Design**

This qualitative study used a case study approach to address the research question. The case study design provided a description of the succession planning strategies of faith-based NPO leaders from the Boomer generation.

### **Method**

The exploration of the phenomenon of Boomer retirement and succession planning was through a qualitative research method. A primary benefit of qualitative research is the capability to view the phenomenon holistically (Fletcher, Massis, & Nordqvist, 2015). Qualitative inquiry is ideal for describing succession plans of faith-based Boomer leaders. Qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to derive common themes and then provide a multi-dimensional description of the participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Although qualitative methods cannot capture data from as many participants as a quantitative method, the depth of the inquiry counterbalances the lack of breadth in the data collection. A mixed method is not appropriate because mixed methods would limit the opportunity to explore the topic at the level of depth to satisfy a case study inquiry. Mixed method studies limit the depth of inquiry. A researcher's intention of a mixed method is for a comprehensive inquiry (McManamny et al., 2015) versus a qualitative inquiry leading to a rich enough description of the phenomena. The intention of the case study of Boomer leaders' strategies for succession planning is to gain an in-depth understanding of the leaders' experiences, using a qualitative approach.

## Research Design

According to Van Manen (1990), the meaning assigned to a research question entails the researcher drawing the reader into the question so that she or he wonders about the question in the same way the researcher did. The diversity of how NPOs operate makes the leader's role critical to its function. Operational diversity in NPOs is a counterbalance to the succession planning strategies of faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation. How an NPO functions informs strategic efforts such as succession planning for the organization's leadership. In the tradition of case study research design, the current study contains descriptions of Boomer leaders' succession plans. According to Yin (2014), the researcher examines *how* and *why* questions in case study research, for instance, how or why some activity is taking place. Case study research is suitable because a case study was an exploration of what strategies of succession planning faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation use. The phenomenon is very few faith-based NPOs have a formal succession plan. Examining cases that have strategies is relevant to the research question and purpose of the study.

Other research designs such as ethnography and phenomenology are not adequate. A description of an ethnographic study is an in-depth inquiry, but the design is time-consuming (Yin, 2014). Ethnographies are suitable for forging new theory (Hodson, 1998), which was not the purpose of the study. Phenomenology is an approach with many nuances and addressing subjective experiences (Gill, 2014), such as perceptions of an organizational leader about succession. Phenomenology is a way to explicate diverse

experiences, reducing the unique individual experience to the common experience and revealing the experiences as universal (Van Manen, 1990).

Company documents support interview data (Yin, 2014). Data collection included semistructured interviews and company documents including codified succession plans, employee handbooks, bylaws, and records of leadership development activities. Participant interviews continued until no new information emerges relevant to the research inquiry ensuring data saturation. According to O'Reilly and Parker (2013), inductive qualitative inquiries guide the data collection process, and the boundaries of interest pursued in the study allow for evident saturation. The derivation of focal themes was from Boomer leaders' strategies to succession planning in religious NPOs. Saturation was evident with the exhaustion of all related themes to the research topic.

The number of participants affects saturation. Fewer participants (less than 10) can provide categorical saturation, but more participants provide the researcher additional novel statements regarding the experience (Schitter, Nedeljkovic, Baur, Fleckenstein, & Raio, 2014). Two or more case subjects enhance the quality of a study (Yin, 2014). I interviewed leaders from a minimum of three organizations until participants were not providing novel information.

### **Population and Sampling**

The relevance of the data were indicative of an adequate sample size (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). In qualitative research, as few as three participants are sufficient (Shepherd & Nelson, 2012), and as many as 20 participants are equally acceptable although requiring more work (Englander, 2012). The number of participants in a

qualitative study as opposed to a quantitative study is fewer because the intention is to find meaning, not the number of people with a shared experience (Englander, 2012). According to Yin (2014), two or more case examples are adequate, and selection is at the discretion of the researcher, as long as the participants met the research objectives of the case study. The multiple case study included a minimum of three Boomer NPO leaders of faith-based organizations.

Researchers use purposive sampling for identifying participants that meet the research criteria and experienced the phenomenon (Bond, 2014; Jasimuddin, Connell, & Klein, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Purposive sampling is a valid approach to identifying key leaders in unique seasons of leadership (Stringer, 2014). Leaders know other leaders and who provide referrals (Bond, 2014). My employer is a faith-based organization, and most of my professional affiliations are with the same type of organizations. Because of the affiliations, I employed purposive sampling to recruit participants. Purposive sampling via snowball sampling was necessary for qualified participants not available through seeking referrals in my existing professional network. The participants must be key leaders of faith-based NPOs located in Miami-Dade and Broward County, Florida, from the Boomer generation cohort. Gender and religious affiliation were not factors in the selection.

Englander (2012) contacted participants a week prior to the interview to establish rapport and to confirm meeting at the participants' organization. Contacting the participants a week ahead of time contributed to establishing rapport by confirming meetings at the participants' organization. Scheduling of interviews was at the location of

the participants' organizations in a meeting environment chosen by the participant (see Interview Protocol in Appendix A). To enhance rapport with participants, Wiederhold (2014) incorporated a mobile interviewing technique, by asking for tours of the organizations to evoke a more inspired response from the participants. The participants received cues to relevant information inspired by the surroundings by interviewing the participants at work settings (Wiederhold, 2014). Incorporating a mobile interviewing technique included asking for tours of the organizations.

Keeping the recording device in view, the researchers informed the participants the interview was confidential and voluntary (Cocklin & Wilkinson, 2011). During the interviews, the recording device was in view to record the participants' acknowledgment the interview was confidential and voluntary. Cocklin and Wilkinson (2011) limited the interviews to approximately one hour. I limited the interviews to approximately one hour.

The basis of an inductive inquiry is a conceptual understanding by the researcher of the research topic (Yin, 2014). I have a conceptual understanding of Boomer leaders in religious nonprofits due to professional interactions as a result; the current study was an inductive inquiry. Inductive qualitative inquiries guide the data collection process, and the boundaries of interest pursued allow for evident saturation of the data (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The standard of interviewing additional participants ensures thematic saturation (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Confirmation of data saturation is viable when researchers establish the themes consistent among participants, and no new emerging themes were evident (Shepherd & Nelson, 2012). Data triangulation via member checking and redundancy of themes suggests data saturation (Shepherd & Nelson, 2012).

Researchers need transparency when measuring saturation, including evidence of saturation and details of the recruitment of participants (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). With the intention of interviewing additional participants as needed and member checking, I ensured thematic saturation.

### **Ethical Research**

Some ethical research practices include specific communication efforts. The participants receive an introductory email with a study description, confirming the role of the researcher, explaining the participation commitment, and reassuring confidentiality of the participants identities, and the confidentiality of affiliated organizations (Moustakas, 1994; Pelgrim, Kramer, Mokkink, & van der Vleuten, 2012). The introductory email described the study, an explanation of the participation commitment, and provision of reassurance to maintain the confidentiality of the participants including participant identities and affiliated organizations. When the participants agree via phone or e-mail to participate, provide the participants with a consent form (Greaney et al., 2012). The participant received a consent form when participation verified. (Walden University's IRB approval number for this study is 12-15-15-0445602). Pelgrim et al. (2012) suggested confirming participation with the participants by asking for a statement of cooperation at the beginning of the recorded interview I asked for a statement of cooperation at the start of recording the interview. Greaney et al. (2012) explained to novice researchers about the requirement of the Belmont Report to disclose to participants about the ability withdraw from the study at any time. Participants received information about the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Choosing to

withdraw from the study was acceptable via phone, email, and in person. Participants did not receive incentives to participate in the study.

My intention was to maintain participant confidentiality. Shepherd and Nelson (2012) suggested assignments of pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants and organizations. The current study did not contain any information that could identify the participants or the organizations. The organizations and participants received an assigned of pseudonym.

Greaney et al. (2012) explained the need to disclose the data confidentiality and storage procedures to the participant. I disclosed data confidentiality and storage procedures to the participant. Secure maintenance of the data will extend for 5 years. Maintenance of digital data is in a password-protected storage USB device for 5 years. Storage of hard copy data is in a locked file box for 5 years. The purpose of the steps to secure data collected is the protection of the confidentiality of study participants and the affiliated organizations.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process for the qualitative multiple case study entailed interviewing three Boomer generational leaders of faith-based nonprofits and reviewing codified succession plans, employee handbooks, bylaws, and records of leadership development activities. The prepared questions served as a guide for the interview. The conduction of in-depth interviews was face-to-face at the leaders' workplaces, but telephone and employment of Skype interviews may also have been necessary if participants had scheduling difficulties. According to Yin (2014), documents enhanced

the data collected from the interviews by supplying additional details to the information gleaned in the interviews.

### **Instruments**

Qualitative research explores topics from a human perspective at a deeper level than other methods (Stake, 1978; Yin, 2014). Researchers gain situational descriptions when serving as the data collection instrument by conducting face-to-face, semistructured interviews (August, 2011; Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). To gain a situational description of Boomer leaders' succession planning strategies, I, as the researcher, was the data collection instrument using face-to-face semistructured interviews and collecting documents to enhance the descriptions.

The data collection strategy includes eight interview questions (see Appendix B). I used an interview protocol ensuring consistency of my conduct with each participant during in the interviews (see Appendix A). Recommended research practices include obtaining permission from the participant to record the interview (Moustakas, 1994; Tunheim & McClean, 2014; Yin, 2014). In addition, recommended practices include obtaining a participant's statement of voluntary participation, informing the participant about maintenance of confidentiality, and communicating participant withdrawal was acceptable at any time (Greaney et al., 2012; Stiles & Petrilu, 2011; Yin, 2014). Researchers obtain consent through digital recording (Pelgrim et al., 2012). Member checking involves asking the participants to review the interview summaries to enhance reliability and validity (Harper & Cole, 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Participants verify the information provided and the context of the statements (Cole & Harbour, 2015;



Harper & Cole, 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). At the beginning of the recording, I informed the participants participation was voluntary, confidentiality was maintained, and withdrawal was acceptable at any point during the data collection process. A recorded affirmation of the participants' consent was solicited. After the interviews, the participants received a written summarization of the interview responses to review for validation of the context of the information and statements.

### **Data Collection Technique**

A data collection technique in qualitative research was semistructured face-to-face interviews at the location of the participants' places of work or agreed upon location (Englander, 2012; Wiederhold, 2014; Yin, 2014). The advantage of a face-to-face interview is exploring the topic in-depth with the participant and experiencing the nuances of the participants' responses (Chwalisz et al., 2008; Englander, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Another advantage of a face-to-face interview is the opportunity to observe the participants' body language, emotional responses to the questions, and other impressions (Appleton, 1995; Chwalisz et al., 2008; Moustakas, 1994). The first data collection technique was to conduct semistructured face-to-face interviews at the location of the participants' places of work or agreed upon location.

Broad questions enhance the researcher's ability to obtain detailed and thorough descriptions of the participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994; Turner, 2010). The basis of the interview is eight prepared questions (see Appendix B). The interview questions are inquiries about the leader's role in planning and preparing strategies for succession. The interview questions are the tool to extract information from the leader about the strategies

of succession planning and the type preparations for a successor by the participant or other key leadership of the organization, for example, the board of the organization. The ability to reassure a participant or rephrase a question for clarity is an advantage (Appleton, 1995). Completing another's sentences, verbalized acknowledgments, and length of the interviews are higher in face-to-face interviews (Cole & Harbour, 2015; Irvine et al., 2013). As necessary, rephrasing questions enhanced clarity of the interview responses. I also affirmed my understanding of the responses as needed with verbal acknowledgments during the interviews.

Data collection using a face-to-face interview technique is a disadvantage if the interviewer loses control of the interview, allowing the participant to divert from the question making the interview extend beyond the scheduled time and not finishing the questions (Cole & Harbour, 2015). As well, a researcher can lead the participants' responses instead of waiting for the responses (Cole & Harbour, 2015). Scheduling an interview in person can sometimes be difficult to coordinate due to distance or scheduling conflicts and can result in the use of Skype or telephone (Irvine et al., 2013). In the event participants' responses drift off topic, I politely guided the participants back on the topic of the interview question by restating the question. As well, if participants' schedule had not permitted a face-to-face interview, an arrangement for an interview via Skype or telephone may have been necessary.

A data analysis strategy concurrent with the data collection process is transcribing summaries of interviews immediately after the interview conduction (Elo et al., 2014; Fletcher et al., 2015; Lee & Cassell, 2013). I transcribed summaries each of the

interviews as completed. Asking for additional feedback about the interview summaries is a form of member checking (Cole & Harbour, 2015; Harper & Cole, 2012; Thomas & McGilvey, 2011). Member checking included returning the interview summaries to the participants and asking for feedback. Employing verification strategies such as member checking and data analysis throughout the process, maintain the research focus and allowed the researchers to adjust performance as a data collection instruments (Lee & Cassell, 2013; Pezalla et al., 2012). By employing member checking and data analysis throughout the process, adjustments to my performance as a data collection instrument maintained the research focus.

Allowing participants to validate the emic data has benefits adding to the study's trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014; Thomas & McGilvey, 2011; Tunheim & McLean, 2014). The researcher reviewing the interviews with the participants is therapeutic, allowing the participants to review and learn from the interview experience (Harper & Cole, 2012; Thomas & McGilvey, 2013). Member checking reveals a transformative result for the participants by participating in the study such as assessment of the effectiveness of the existing succession plan, which supplies further evidence of validity (Koelsch, 2013). Participants may have received positive therapeutic and transformative results by participating in the study.

In case study design, researchers collect and review relevant company documents to augment data gained from interviews (Boblin et al., 2012; Stake 1978; Yin, 2014). Documents supply specific, accurate details about the case and augment the information gleaned from interviews (Yin, 2014). The second data collection technique was a review

of company documents including codified succession plans, employee handbooks, bylaws, and records of leadership development activities augmenting the data from the interviews. Codified succession plans supplied accurate details for a thorough description of the organizations' succession strategies. Employee handbooks, bylaws, and records of leadership development supplied information and policies related to incoming and departing employment policies and leadership development practices. Information about employment policies, the provision for leadership turnover in the organizational bylaws, and leadership development practices added additional details to the description of succession planning strategies implemented by the case study participants.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

The data organization technique included storage and protection of the raw data obtained through interviews and company documents. Maintaining a chain of evidence ensures documents are readily available for inspection or review (Yin, 2014). Auditable trails of evidence include efforts such as a recorded notebook of data collection (Cole & Harbour, 2015), secured digital storage of the data collected (Stiles & Petrila, 2011), or an annotated bibliography of collected documents (Yin, 2014). I created a log of data collection including an annotated bibliography in Microsoft Excel of collected documents and the interview log stored in a password-protected USB memory drive for easy retrieval and security.

Disclosure of measures to protect the confidentiality of participants and affiliated organizations was ethical (Greaney et al., 2012; Stiles & Petrila, 2011; Yin, 2014). Using a word processing program such as Microsoft Word to transcribe interviews and

handwritten notes is an accepted practice (Appleton, 1995; Cole & Harbour, 2015; Englander, 2012). I transcribed a summary of the interview data and any handwritten notes into Microsoft Word.

De-identification of the data is a way to protect participant identities (Stiles & Petrilá, 2011) by eliminating certain demographic information (Appelbaum et al., 2012a) as well as using pseudonyms (Cole & Harbour, 2015). Saving the names of the individuals and organizations was by pseudonyms. Creation and containment of an encrypted record of the files was in an Excel spreadsheet listing the name of the participant, the assigned pseudonym, the date of the interview, and coded interview content. Secure maintenance of the raw data was for 5 years. Maintenance of data including digital recordings and transcribed documents and other digital documents collected was in a password-protected storage USB device for 5 years, and storage of the drive was in a secured locked box. Storage of hard copy data were in the same locked file box for 5 years.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

The use of multiples sources for data collection known as methodological triangulation ensures data saturation in the data analysis process (Anyan, 2013; Bekhet & Zauszniewski 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation in data analysis process included me as the researcher, collection of interview data, and reviewing company documents. I conducted a review of company documents and interview data for common themes related to succession planning strategies of Boomer leaders in faith-based nonprofits as well as the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer.

Transcribing the interviews after conduction is a standard practice to prepare for data analysis (Fletcher et al., 2015). After each interview, a summarization of the interviews was input into Microsoft Word. As well, I asked participants to supply company documents (see Data Collection Technique) for review.

Matching patterns is a way to define themes (Cole & Harbour, 2015; Trexies & Sims, 2013; Yin, 2014). Color-coding instances of the themes is also a means to measure data (Cole & Harbour, 2015). I matched and clustered similar expressions and identified relevant themes from the interview content and company documents. The analysis included the use of a color coding process of matching patterns for easier identification of dominant themes. In the Excel spreadsheet, coding of the interview content and other documents was by theme.

Identification and exploration of the themes was through the conceptual framework of knowledge transfer in the context of succession planning. The conceptual framework of knowledge transfer includes themes that reflect the importance of what tacit and explicit knowledge a leader possesses. Knowledge transfer activities are efforts that will equip a successor and sustain the organization when the incumbent departs and serve as the source of identification of the study's key themes.

### **Reliability and Validity**

A researcher grounds validity in the accurate account of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon and the basis of credibility of the information gleaned from the data (Appleton, 1995; Englander, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Thomas and McGilvey (2011) describes the practices of reliability and validity

(trustworthiness) according to Lincoln and Guba's interpretation of qualitative reliability and validity, including dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility. Measurement of reliability and validity (trustworthiness) was by Lincoln and Guba's interpretation of qualitative reliability and validity, including dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility. Measurement of reliability and validity is viable internally through taking precautions during the construction and design of a study and is viable externally by proactively preparing for how generalizable the findings will be (Yin, 2014).

### **Reliability**

Reliability via dependability was through data triangulation conduction consisting of member checking, review of documents, and coding consistent themes. Clustering the data collected by common themes and patterns is another validation tactic (Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990; Yin, 2014). The process includes putting responses to questions into categories that emerge from the review of the interview data (Appleton, 1995; Cole & Harbour, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). The research questions serve as a guide to formulate categories (Appleton, 1995). Member checking the transcript summaries with the participants (Appleton, 1995; Harper & Cole, 2012; Moustakas, 1994; Thomas & McGilvey, 2011) establishes data credibility. To ensure validity, after member checking the transcribed interview summaries with the participants, the research questions and company documents guided my categorization and clustering of common themes and pattern identification.

## **Validity**

Validity via confirmability, transferability, and credibility efforts was evident. O'Reilly and Parker (2013) ensure confirmability through data saturation by interviewing additional participants beyond thematic saturation. Confirmability through data saturation includes interviewing additional participants until reaching thematic saturation. No emergence of new themes among participant interviews is consistent with evidence of data saturation (Prendergast & Maggie, 2013; Shepherd & Nelson, 2012). Data triangulation methods of member checking and themes redundancy are also evidence of data saturation (Shepherd & Nelson, 2012). I articulate detailed explanations of participant recruitment in the Population and Sampling section and conducted member checking (see Validity). An articulation of saturation attainment is in the Research Design section, which also demonstrated confirmability strategies.

Transferability is evident via clear explanations of the data collection process (Appleton, 1995; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Yin, 2014). Demonstration of transferability was through a clear explanation of the data collection process to ensure consistency for transferability of practice described in detail in the Data Collection Technique section. Implementation of the interview protocol ensured consistency for transferability of practice (see Appendix A). As well, the study's purpose was to describe the succession planning strategies of faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation. Evaluating the research process by making minor adaptations as needed ensures adherence to the research question (Yin, 2014). Reviewing and evaluating the research process by making minor adaptations as necessary ensured adherence to the research question. As well,



employment of member checking is a common practice with research participants (Appleton, 1995; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Yin, 2014). I employed member checking with the research participants.

Initiation of credibility efforts involves selecting participants with the experience (Appleton, 1995; Moustakas, 1994; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Ensuring credibility included selecting participants that have the experience with succession planning strategies as described in Population and Sampling. The effect of a researcher's interpretation of the data is part of etic research (Pettigrew, 2013). As well, the reader has a role in interpreting the data (Harper & Cole, 2012; Pettigrew, 2013). The plausibility of a study is via the researcher's common sense assessment of the study's credibility (Andrews, 2012; McLeod & Doolin, 2012). Plausibility assessment drifts into researcher bias (Andrews, 2012). Limiting personal bias through the use of a reflexive journal helps the researcher bracket attitudes and beliefs about the participants, organizations, and activities (Moustakas, 1994; Pezalla, 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Personal bias limitations through the use of reflexive journal allowed for bracketing my attitudes and beliefs about the participants, organizations, and activities of the study. Asking well-constructed interview questions relating to the participants' experiences (Stuckey, 2015; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Yin, 2014) where the questions are open-ended, neutral, clearly worded (culturally sensitive), and do not lead the participants' responses (Turner, 2010) limits bias. I limited bias by asking well-constructed interview questions related to the participants' experiences.

### **Summary and Transition**

Section 2 was an explication of the role of the researcher as the data collection instrument. The participants were Boomer generation leaders of faith-based NPOs in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties in South Florida. The research method was qualitative with a multiple case study design. Section 2 has an explanation of ethical research standards including participant consent, confidentiality, and IRB review and approval. Data collection through semistructured interviews was analyzed by establishing themes and coding. Protection and storage of the data were for 5 years. Establishing reliability and validity was through member checking and thorough descriptions of the execution of the research study. Section 2 also included an explanation of the use of an interview protocol as a tool for transferability.

Section 3 is the presentation of the findings. Section 3 includes how the results apply to professional practice and implications for social change. The section culminates with recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and my reflections.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore succession plan strategies used by faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation. Section 3 includes the presentation of the findings, applications to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, a summary of the study, and study conclusions. The findings include four themes: (a) the timing of succession planning, (b) reasons for succession planning, (c) preparation efforts for succession, and (d) a description of the organizations' succession plans as well as correlating themes to the literature include knowledge transfer. The applications to professional practice include initiating discussion on the topic of succession planning, leadership development, and successor qualifications.

#### **Overview of Study**

Three faith-based NPOs comprised this qualitative multiple case study on succession planning. Commonalities were evident in interviews with key leaders and reviewing documents of three faith-based organizations succession plans, bylaws, and other leadership documents. The focus included documented and actionable plans to identify and pass on leadership responsibilities from the key incumbent leader to a successor. A notable difference included whether a successor was present within the organization. Active knowledge transfer and leadership development activities were evident. The organizations had a formal succession plan to meet the needs of the organization for a leadership transition in the event of the key leader's departure.

The study entailed semistructured interviews with each key leader of each organization at its location. The intent was to discuss the organizations' formal succession plans, including knowledge transfer and leadership development activities. A review of documents from the organizations included codified succession plans, bylaws, organization manuals (including employee and board manuals, if available), and leadership development sources and activities. Each organization provided a copy of the organizational bylaws and the employee handbook. The corporate websites of the organizations supplied supplemental information about the organizations, including histories and mission statements. The online information reflected the same information available in the documents provided. Pseudonyms used for the organizations in the study were Organization 1 (O1), Organization 2 (O2), and Organization 3 (O3). O3's employee and faculty handbooks were accessible via the organization's website, and the key leader sent the board manual electronically. The bylaws and the employee manual of O1 were hard copies sent in the mail. O2 provided bylaws and the employee manual electronically.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The central research question was: what succession planning strategies do faith-based NPO leaders of the Boomer generation use? Through a multiple case study of three faith-based NPOs, which included semistructured interviews of key leaders and the review of documents related to succession planning and leadership development activities, four themes developed: (a) the timing of succession planning strategy, (b) reasons for succession planning, (c) preparation efforts for succession, and (d)

descriptions of succession plans for each organization. The conceptual framework of knowledge transfer elucidated how each organizational leader viewed succession planning efforts via leadership development efforts intended to create a legacy of the leadership supplied during the leaders' tenure at the organizations.

O1, O2, and O3 are faith-based organizations, adhering to a Christian worldview and mission with a primary focus on families with children. O1's mission is devoted to providing support and counseling for children and families, which includes residential facilities. The organization receives no government funding. Fundraising and foundations resources supply operational funds. O2 also supports a mission to families and children and has multiple programs. However, the source of funding is primarily government grants. O3 is an independent Christian educational setting not affiliated with a church. O3's operational budget is primarily from tuition and includes fundraising and donor contributions. I used the pseudonym executive education director for O3's key leader title in all document quotations and text for the purpose of confidentiality.

The common demographics of each case organization included white male leaders of the Boomer generation born from 1946-1964. All three leaders were in their mid-to-late 60s. O1 and O2 leaders were at the standard retirement age of 65 or older. O3's leader is within 1 year of retirement age. The key leaders of O1 and O3 had worked within the organizations for more than 4 decades. O1's organization had never had any other key leader, although the key leader was not a founder. O3's leader had the longest tenure than any previous leader by multiple decades. O2's leader was the founder of the organization and has been the key leader for nearly 2 decades.

### **Timing of Succession Planning Strategy**

The timing of succession planning strategy for each organization held themes in common. Each leader specifically identified the timing of the introduction of the topic of succession planning and the influencers of succession planning strategy in the organizations. As well, the key leaders were the initiators of succession plan discussions to the organizations' board of directors. The key leaders' initiation of the topic aligns with Hutzschenreuter et al. (2012) wherein the executive leader was most responsible for the strategic change of an organization.

For O1, the initial discussions began in 2002 in tandem with the acquisition and development of a new property. For O3, the leader initiated discussion with the board 10 years ago in consideration of age and progress for the organization. For O2, initial discussions began 3 years ago, through working with a professional coach and mentor. Each leader brought succession planning as a topic to the board of directors of the organizations. However, the actual formulation of a formal succession plan involved additional time and development. O1's plan development began in 2011, as indicated in a document provided the key leader titled Succession Plan for the President. O3's key leader introduced the concept to the board 10 years prior to the interview, and the formulated plan is review annually. Reviewing the need to assess succession plans was evident in the literature (Santora & Santos, 2012). According to Santora and Santos (2012), regular succession plan assessment is necessary. O2's key leader intent was a formal introduction of the concept and plans to the organization's board including a timeline and framework in at the beginning of 2016.

A notable difference in the timing the succession plans was the leaders' exit plans. O3 had no stated timeframe to leave. However, O1 and O2 both had a specified written timeline for the transition. The O2 key leader stated changes were necessary to the anticipated exit. O1's key leader stated, "There is a timeline in place. The board helped me to move beyond the 2014 expectation I held and adapt to a more realistic timeline when third person [*sic*] is in place." O1's succession plan was nearing the end of the succession process and the leader indicated in the interview the necessary changes in pace. O2's timeline of succession was only at the beginning, and the need to accelerate or decelerate the pace of the plan at a later point is unknowable.

According to Nieh and McLean (2011), Boomer retirement transitions required actively addressing succession planning. The key leaders of the organizations had no specific plans for retirement from the organizations. None of the organizational leaders stated a planned departure from the organization, only from the positions held. O1 and O2 planned to continue working with the organizations after vacating the leadership positions held while O3 did not discuss any information regarding future work after vacating his position and no timeline was in place for a departure. Lack of specific retirement plans by the key leaders aligns with Auerback et al. (2014) and Dumay and Rooney's (2011) assertion the crisis of the aging workforce is not as dramatic as anticipated. The key leaders planned leadership transition will not be sudden, and the key leaders will be present in the organizations, even if working in a different capacity for the organization.

Codified succession plans did not have a bearing on the timing of departure from the key leadership position. O3 had the most detailed and formalized planning. However, formalized planning was not an indication of imminent departure. The leader indicated no specific date of vacating the key leadership position and conversely did not indicate planning to continue in another role. Whereas O1's key leader planned to vacate the key leadership position by 2017 and continue with the organization in the new supporting role. As well, O3's leader indicated vacating the key leadership position completely by 2020 with plans to continue in a similar role in the new organization in another location, while providing ongoing leadership support to O3.

### **Reasons for Succession Planning**

Interview data supplied the primary source of information regarding reasons for a succession plan for the individual leaders. The organizations' documented succession planning strategies were the direct result of the leaders' articulated descriptions of how succession planning began in each organization but were not sources for the reason for succession planning. Document review was not a source for the topic of reasons for succession planning. According to Carman and Nesbit (2013), few NPO leaders conduct a formal organizational needs assessment, perhaps due to being founders of the NPO. The leader of each organization indicated age and retirement as considerations for succession planning. Aging leadership and retirement considerations are evident in the research of Appelbaum et al. (2012a), Petter and Ward (2013) and Richardson (2014) indicating Boomers are retiring in record numbers. O1 and O2 have had the same leaders for more than 4 decades, and both the key leaders had the longest leadership tenure of the



organizations' histories. The key leader of O2 founded the organization in 2000. Although only one key leader of the three was a founder, the tenure of multiple decades may evoke a similar mentality as that of an organizational founder. Each leaders' age was from the middle to late 60's and of the Boomer generation. Retirement as a mode of vacating the currently held position of key leader was a viable consideration for the leaders in planning for succession. However, the leaders also expressed considerations of ongoing organizational development through succession planning. The consideration of organizational development via succession is also evident in Duffield et al. (2011) indicating an effective successor improves organizational development.

The leader of O1 had the imminent timing of executing the organization's succession plan. The expressed purpose of the succession was "to take what I do and make it better." Likewise, the key leader of O3 indicated beyond age was the required "development of the program" and for the organization to "be fully staffed at all times." O2 had several reasons beyond being retirement age including aging family members and the "sense of responsibility for their care," "a desire to give back to his home community," "opportunities to launch another organization," and "opportunities for our current staff to assume more responsibility in leadership roles."

O1's leader shared the story of what inspired the pursuit of succession planning as a strategic planning activity. O1's leader witnessed first-hand two prominent, and nationally known Christian ministries experience sustainability issues due to the poor execution or lack of succession planning. O1's leader stated a large national ministry organization had recently laid off more than 200 people. In a conversation with

leadership from a national family ministry, the O1 leader made the assumption the ministry had money problems. According to the national family ministry's leadership, the ministry had found the right successor, but the incumbent who founded the organization would not "get out of the way." Comini et al. (2013) and Santora et al. (2014) indicated a founder's continued presence was the main hindrance to a smooth succession. In the other recounted story, the key leader of a large church organization died and kept no "potential nexts" (potential successors), which resulted in a ministry "tailspin." Not having "potential nexts" was contrary to research findings wherein leadership development was a possible strategy to identify and prepare a successor (Liston-Heyes, & Liu, 2013; Nieh & McLean, 2011; Renihan, 2012). The O1 leader immediately returned to begin succession discussions with the organization's board of directors.

O2's leader had an encounter with a professional coach and mentor. The coach encouraged O2's leader to "begin thinking about the future, personally and professionally." Because of the experience, O2's leader laid out a 5-year plan for a new venture similar in mission to O2 in the leader's hometown in another state.

Two of the leaders referred to other resource influences on succession planning. O1's leader discussed multiple years of experience as an interim pastor at nearly two dozen churches. "I have the opportunity to participate in something that is not biblical, such as, there is not an interim in the Bible, nor a Search Committee" (a team of individuals in a church charged with finding a new pastor). Referring to the Bible, O1's leader further stated, "Obviously, God picked Moses and then Joshua. A pastor should be raising his successor." O1's leader additionally explained an example of a large and local

ministry organization the faced the unanticipated resignation of the longtime leader and founder, “God ordered the [church organization’s] succession, but that is rare.” As well, the O1 leader then explained in detail a successful and planned succession of another leader of a ministry organization.

O3’s leader discussed other influences. After receiving the “blessing” of the board to move forward with succession planning, the O3 leader did the necessary research and supplied the information to the board. “I did research books and online documents to get ideas of what others have faced specifically Christian organizations and schools and narrowed it down.” Via O3 leader’s research, much of the information the key leader gleaned was in the board member policy manual.

### **Preparation Efforts for Succession**

Richardson’s (2014) predictors of success in succession planning of NPO executives included age, years of service and the incumbent leader being a member of the board. The key leaders of the organizations were nearing or at retirement age, had lengthy years of service, and had active roles on the boards of the case organizations. The board of directors held different levels of responsibility in the succession planning process. The different board roles may have been a factor in the amount and type of codified succession planning and knowledge transfer activities. Leadership development and training activities were evident in the concern for explicit and tacit knowledge transfer activities. The process of knowledge transfer manifested at different levels of the organization from the board of directors to senior level leaders, to the organization’s staff.

**Board involvement.** Comini et al. (2013) asserted lack of structure in succession planning in NPOs. Hutzschenreuter et al. (2012) noted board governance was a potential inhibitor to succession planning. The organizations exhibited organizational structure and board governance. The role of the case organizations' boards of directors in succession planning strategies was evident via the bylaws. The bylaws detailed how the organization functions by defining the mission, supplying details on the delegation of responsibility within the organization, and how the key leaders and boards operate within the boundaries of the bylaws. The organizations' bylaws defined the roles in the decision-making process.

The bylaws provided for establishing boards of directors. The relevant information the bylaws contained included the mission of the organization and a statement of faith because the organizations are faith-based as indicated in the literature religious NPO activities correlated with religious belief (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013). In addition, the bylaws contained policies on how the boards are to operate, the selection of board members, the removal of board members, board conduct, ethics, the role of the key leader in the organization, and the role of the key leader to the board. Each bylaw document had differences affecting succession planning. The primary factor was the role of the board and the role of the key leader.

For O1, O2, and O3 the key leaders initiated succession planning discussions with the boards of directors of the organizations. However, initial conversations were not indicative of the expressed role of the board in the succession process. In O1, the key leader described the board as "a governing body, not a managing body" and the bylaws of

O1 the board's role was the "management of the business and of affairs of this corporation." In O3, the key leader and the faculty handbook described the board's role as a "policy-making body." The by-law specifically stated the role was the "The oversight and all business and affairs of said Corporation." The O2 leader did not describe the board as a governing body. The O2 bylaws stated the board "shall direct and manage the affairs of the Corporation" similarly stated in the other organizations' bylaws.

The description of the role of the board appeared to be less relevant than the description of the roles of the key leaders in the bylaws. In O1, the description of the key leader's role as the president stated the key leader was a nonvoting, ex officio board member. In O2, the key leader was the elected president of the board and concurrently held the position of CEO. In O3, the description in the faculty manual stated the key leader "is responsible to the [O3] Board."

In the succession planning process, O1's leader organized a committee outside of the board to assist with the formal succession plan. The organization had two organizations for one operation. One organization held the assets (property, finances) with a board that managed the assets. Another part was the mission organization charged with executing the programs of the organization. The board presidents of each organization and a board member with experience in a succession of a large business enterprise functioned as an ad hoc committee organized by the key leader to prepare a succession strategy. Each case organizations' bylaws provided for the formation of ad hoc committees to search for a successor.

O3's leader brought the need for a succession plan to the board and the resources. However, the bylaws of the organization decreed the board's responsibility to establish a succession plan for the organization, both emergency and planned succession. After the O3 leader introduced the topic and provided the resources, the board president executed the strategic plan and had an ongoing responsibility to review the plan annually. The key leader was also responsible for recording and annually updating explicit information regarding the position, such as passwords and access to organizational resources. In O2, the CEO was the board president and the responsibility to bring the issue to the board was two-fold. The bylaws state the president was the CEO and the president presided over board meetings and was a member of all committees and board. Consequently, the O2 leader was initiating and executing a succession planning strategy.

**Codified succession plans.** Research in different NPO studies indicated a significant lack of succession planning (Comini et al., 2013; Froelich et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2015). The organizations served as an exception to the research. The organizations codified succession strategies in multiple ways. The three case organizations' bylaws dictated responsibilities to the board to terminate or replace a key leader when necessary. As well, O1 and O2 had a separate informal document explaining the succession plan. O1 had a six-stage explanation. The key leader of O2 had a 5-year timeline indicating the percentage of the succession strategy completion by year. The timeline included specified tasks for the key leader phasing out and tasks for developing an organization in the new area.

Of the three case organizations, O3 had the most detailed plan. The leader indicated, but could not supply me with a document referred to as the “red folder” specifically listed in the board manual. The folder contained sensitive information related to passwords, files, and other instructions in the event of a planned or unplanned departure of the key leader. O3 specifically addressed emergency succession in the board member manual. As well, only O3 had a mandate in the board manual expressly describing the succession planning responsibilities of the board. A full description of the organizations’ succession plans was in Description of Succession Plans. Each organization had a detailed employee manual with detailed explanations of retirement benefits, medical, and personal leave. O2’s handbook contained a specific statement of adherence to the Age Discrimination Employment Act. In the early stages of development of O1’s succession planning the discussion was to have a “Success plan as opposed to a Succession Plan.”

**The successor.** Identifying internal and external successors involved different considerations. Prestia et al. (2014) identified coaching and mentoring by existing leaders as succession planning. However, the presence of a successor already working in the organization was not the reason formal succession plans existed. Succession plans were present in the three case organizations, but only O1 had a successor present to assume some of the responsibilities of the incumbent’s position in the organization.

The division of O1’s key leader responsibilities was into three positions at the vacation of the leader from the current role. As a result, the key leader’s role would change.

In O2, the key leader had a general idea of a potential successor within the organization. However, the individual was unaware of the consideration. Research indicates purposeful leadership development required identifying candidates with high potential and providing mentoring to prepare potential successors for leadership roles (Gothard, & Austin, 2013). The leader said consideration of the individual was very recent and required some additional time and thought. In O3, the key leader's response was whether internal or external; the board was responsible for finding a successor and a consensus on whether the successor was an external or internal candidate would be necessary.

If someone is identified internally or externally... in the perfect scenario to shadow me, the board would have to plan for that process. Potential candidates have been discussed as well as methods to find candidates.

In O3, the board dictates the succession process, and the key leader defers to the board's decision-making role via succession policy defined in the board member handbook. However, the key leader was active in annually evaluating and updating information contained in the red file with the board president and was preparing to do so the day following the case study interview. Part of the updated information included publications and networks to advertise the key leader position as a means of identifying potential successors. Strategically advertising for an external successor aligns with Renihan's (2012) assertion attracting talented leadership was a superior succession strategy to finding a leadership heir. The annual evaluation was also a directive of the succession policy. "The Board President will review the succession process each year prior to the



*Executive Education Director's* evaluation and report to the Board.”

**Leadership development and training activities.** Leadership development and training activities entailed tacit and explicit elements. Gothard and Austin (2013) and Renihan (2012) assert leadership development through mentoring prepares potential leaders. The O3 employee manual specifically mentioned the goal to see employees experience professional growth. The O3 introduction in the employee manual stated the organizational commitment “to providing an environment that is pleasing to the Lord and that is conducive to spiritual, personal, and professional growth.” As well, the three case organizations’ employee manuals included explanations of the performance evaluation policy. In preparation for the emphasis on the upcoming succession process, the O2 key leader “has met personally with each staff member in the last few months.” The inquiry included “interviewing each staff member and inquiring about their goals, ‘dreams’ and how the organization can help them get where they want to be, life ‘challenges’, ways to improve the organization.” Miodonski and Hines (2013) confirmed mentoring strategy involved formal and informal career growth opportunities; identification of potential leaders and mentors; articulation of the desired leadership traits; development of a plan including available resources and strategies with an experienced leader to champion the effort.

The three key leaders met with the boards, senior staff, and mid-level staff on a regular basis. The meetings were weekly, bi-monthly, or quarterly, depending on the leadership level and the preference of the key leader. During the meetings, the key leaders imparted tacit situational information acquired from the experiences of the key

leader. The O3 leader explained the result of the regular meetings, “The relationship with my principals to supervisors is that they do reflect my philosophy of how to operate because I do trust them.”

The O1 leader implied a 7-week absence in the summer was a tool for training because the organizational staff needed to become used to the key leader not being present and allowing the staff to interact and solve with each other. The O1 leader’s intention was to be absent from the office 1-week per month in the next fiscal year. The O2 key leader expressed confidence the organization can function properly without the leader’s presence, and the senior staff is comfortable with the frequent travels to the new area. Similarly, O3’s key leader stated, “I have a strong administrative staff I meet with weekly and trust that whether present or not that they know how I feel about issues and responsibilities on a daily basis.”

In the context of developing a successor, O1 and O3 used the term *shadow* as a means of training. Peet (2012) asserted interview sessions between incumbents and successors were a strategy for a successful leadership transition. Although not the same strategy as an interview, shadowing for the organizations entailed the successor spending time with the key leader over an extended period learning from the incumbent on the job. In O1’s case, the period working with the identified successor had been 5 years with the expressed intention the successor would assume the key leader’s role and title by 2018. For O3, having a successor shadowing the key leader on the job would be a “perfect scenario” and the “board would have to plan for that process.” O2 did not overtly discuss

shadowing. However, the succession timeline included staff and board development as high priorities on the task list.

Leadership development and training activities were also a regular component of each organizations' culture. Leadership development and training activities were evident in the employee handbooks, board member manuals, and documented succession plans. O1 and O3 had provisos of mandatory in-service training requirements in the employee handbooks. O3's employee handbook listed a Graduate Work Benefit, which was a financial reimbursement incentive for staff interested in pursuing a graduate degree. The key leader of O2 provided a personal growth and professional training resource database to the staff via online training programs and shared cloud-based files. The leader explained the reason, "In response to their requests for various training to assist in their personal and professional growth, we have offered our staff practical training and team-building activities that have gotten positive feedback."

An example of explicit leadership development and training activities included O1 and O2 key leaders meeting with staff at every level with a prepared agenda. In some circumstances, as in O1, tacit leadership development activities included meeting daily with the successor because the successor was present and already assuming responsibilities held by the key leader. In O2, the key leader explained, "Leadership development is an ongoing activity at every level. More intentional efforts began in summer 2015 with practical staff training on issues such as conflict management and specialized computer skills." In a staff-training meeting agenda provided by O2's key

leader, senior and mid-level leaders participated in and led the training in the different areas.

Board member development and training were also a focus for the case organizations. The codification of leadership development standards and activities provided evidence leadership development was a priority in the case organizations. Succession planning is a quality management practice (Nieh & McLean, 2011). In the employee handbook for O1, the Ethics Policy included a codified explanation of ethical expectations directed to staff and board members. Succession planning can be a system of positive reinforcement for cultivating of ethical values (Nieh & McLean, 2011). The policy states, “Employees and Board member shall dedicate themselves to carrying out the mission...by following the ethical standards...” The standards included the statement “Strive for personal and professional excellence and encourage professional development of others.” The inference is board members are versed in the Ethics policy via the employee handbook or the board members receive the policy in some other form.

For two of the three organizations, the company documents had an articulation of the development of the board. On the succession timeline for O2, board development was a high priority in the leader’s succession strategy. The board member manual for O3 had a proviso for a board development subcommittee with the responsibility of training and developing the board.

Under the guidance of the executive education director and designated members of the Board Development Committee, new Board members will be given training in the history of [O3], principles of policy governance, and a copy of the Board of

Directors Members Manual.... Periodic training will occur for the Board as directed by the Board Development Committee.

As well, the manual included a provision for a line item budget for board training. “An annual Board retreat will be budgeted.” Evidence of board development as a strategy implied relevance of board effectiveness in decision-making and strategy, which are necessary for succession planning. Petrescu’s (2013) findings confirmed implementing strategic activities and written plans positively affect a fulfillment of board responsibilities, operations, and general leadership.

### **Description of Succession Plans**

The purpose of the qualitative multiple case study was to answer the research question: What succession planning strategies do Boomer leaders of faith-based NPOs use? The description of the details of each case organizations’ succession strategy, not the process addresses the research question. The descriptions separated rather than synthesized to explicate the strategies of O1, O2, and O3.

**O1.** The written succession plan for O1 involved a six-stage process over the course of more than a decade. The first two stages included phases involving the development of a large project including relocations with the full attention of the leadership before discussions could continue about succession. During the beginning stages, the board and key leader made no public mention of succession planning discussions in order to protect the project.

The third phase involved the establishment of a succession committee. The committee evaluated the key leader and the key leader position. As well, the team

examined the organization's history and the future. The team evaluated what leadership was necessary to direct the organization toward the future. The written succession plan contained a list of qualifications for a successor including a strong faith, marriage, and family. As well, the successor needed the ability to do public speaking in church pulpits and for giving seminars. The successor qualifications also included leadership skills, education, ability to raise funds, and a commitment to "the priority of serving the local church." The key leader's delegation of responsibilities to the successor did not include the current responsibilities of the incumbent. The qualifications that the incumbent had but could train other staff for included broadcasting duties, counseling, writing, and leading an established group in a weekly Bible study.

The conclusion of the third phase included a shift in the leadership paradigm "from a person to a team" according to the codified succession plan. The succession plan necessitated identifying and hiring two other senior level leaders to assume responsibilities formerly the sole responsibility of the key leader. The succession planning team honed the position description in the fourth phase to the necessary qualifications of a key leader versus the other responsibilities the key leader could train other staff members to do. O1's staffing for a new leadership paradigm aligns with Browning and McNamee's (2012) conclusion leaders making sense of new roles is how organizations improve the selection of leadership successors.

I asked the key leader in follow-up to Question 1 (See Appendix B) if three leaders were necessary as the replacement for one leader and the response was "Not three leaders replacing me, but [taking] little ministries God has done and each of them [the

three leaders] taking the ministries way passed what I ever dreamed.” The key leader noted in the interview and in the succession planning document that the key leader’s leadership style was entrepreneurial. “I have an entrepreneurial leadership style and those are great builders, but not great expanders of what has been built.”

The intention of adding other leaders to assume the different leadership responsibilities was the development of existing ministries to the maximum potential. Whereas the key leader’s inclination as an entrepreneurial leader was starting new ministry ventures, the leadership approach detracted from improving current ministries because the organizational focus was on the new venture. The key leader recounted how the board had “rescued me from myself” on an occasion where the leader cast a vision to the board to start another new ministry. The board challenged the key leader noting the need to reallocate limited resources to start the ministry. As well, the board challenged the key leader about the limited experience working with the population focus of the ministry.

The approach of changing the leadership paradigm also aligned with the key leader’s intention to remain with the organization and in the fundraising and development role. In the new role, the leader would continue certain duties helping the organization in a manner best suited to the key leader’s interests and talents. As well, the role capitalized on relational connections developed during the leader’s tenure as head of the organization for over four decades. The strategy of maintaining the key leader’s presence with the organization after succession is contrary to research findings where the unity of command and positive work unravel if founders remain after the appointment of a successor

(Santora et al., 2012). Horiuchi, Laing, and Hart (2015) asserted the incumbent with long-term service in a political position made the position difficult for the successor to follow primarily because of stakeholder expectations. Although O1's leader was not technically a founder, the organization had no other key leader in over 40 years. The stakeholders' expectations for the successor to be like the incumbent could be a hindrance to the acceptance of the successor. In contrary findings, the key leader's presence in a planned leadership succession included the cooperation of the leader allowing for knowledge transfer over a period of years proving beneficial to the NPO (Elkin et al., 2013). Moreover, Santora et al. (2014) defined a conscientious incumbent as an incumbent leader mentoring the successor with board involvement using autocratic control. O1's incumbent key leader behavior aligned with Santora et al.'s (2014) conscientious incumbent definition.

The fifth stage of the plan involved the staffing of the three positions. The fulfillment of hiring the successor to the key leader and making the announcement about the incumbent's successor was in the third year the successor was on staff. The second leader would be subordinate to the successor and was already on staff and in the position via promotion. At the time of the interview, the conduction of a search was taking place for the third leader in the new paradigm, also a subordinate to the successor. The hiring of the third leader completes the leadership team. The sixth and final stage of the succession was when the final hire shadowed the incumbent for a year. At the completion of the shadow leadership period, the incumbent would assume the new role in fundraising and development.



**O2.** The succession plan for Organization 2 as described in the 5-year succession timeline was in process. The key leader had a plan to vacate the position and role in the current location to start a similar type of organization in the key leader's hometown in a different state. The planned relocation is an articulated motivation for developing a succession plan in tandem with the consideration of the key leader's age. The key leader did not intend departing to disrupt the current organization's programming. A successor was part of the plan. As well, the promotion of an internal candidate was highly possible as the key leader had an individual in the organization with many of the leadership qualities needed for the position. The qualities given by the key leader for the position included a growing Christian, emotionally healthy, committed to the goals and vision of the organization, the knowledge, and skills for tasks including the "ability to inspire and motivate employees to accomplish the agency's vision and mission, organizational administration and financial" considerations.

The key leader's succession timeline listed 5 consecutive years. The calendar year heading listed beneath the number of weeks to complete the key tasks and the anticipated completion percentage of the goals set. The document displayed the "key tasks" as resources, staff and board development, capacity building, and community engagement for the current location and a comparable list alongside for the new location.

Similar to the plan of the key leader of O1, the key leader of O2 planned on maintaining a leadership role, but not as the title of CEO in O2. In the first 3 years of the plan for O2, building resources was the top priority and then in the last 2 years, staff and board development were the top priority. In the first year, incorporation was the top

priority for the new organization timeline and resources were the lowest priority. For the new organization, resources and board development were the 2<sup>nd</sup> year goal, then resources and program expansion in the final 3 years leading up to succession completion at 100%.

The key leader traveled to the new location frequently. The staff was aware of the travels and the purpose. However, the leader stated the formal presentation of the timeline to the staff and board would begin at the start of 2016. The succession of the incumbent key leader by an internal successor correlated to the priorities of the board and staff development in the succession timeline. The intention of the key leader to emphasize the succession plan formally to the board and staff at the start of the year of the timeline supplied evidence of the plan moving forward. The key leader's Chief Operating Officer (COO) was also the spouse of the key leader. The COO's departure was also part of the succession plan. According to the key leader, the COO observed, "the formal timeline of exit being discussed now seems to be moving much more deliberately" and "more involvement from senior staff will be necessary in the coming year and beyond."

**O3.** The succession plan for O3 differed from O1 and O2 in two areas. First, O3's succession plan is a part of the board manual. The board manual did not provide for the succession of a specific key leader, as did the other two case organizations. The board manual addressed succession planning for the organization as a position. The board manual listed the qualifications of the leader. The qualifications included "being a born again Christian who shares a testimony which is in agreement with the school's

Statement of Faith,” the ability “to effectively manage a multi-tiered organization,” classroom teaching experience, school administrative experience and “the ability to lead and oversee the ministry in a positive and skillful manner.” The educational standard for the position was a Master’s degree and mastery of the English language. The specification of English language ability may be relevant to the multicultural location of South Florida.

The structure of the succession plan was an explanation of the process not specifically formulated to the current leader with decades of tenure. The intention of the formal explanation of the succession of the key leader was in the first sentence of the section on succession. The policy was “In order to protect [O3] and School Board in the event of a sudden loss of executive education director services, or assist the Board in the planned ending of executive education director tenure....” The design of the formalized succession plan, although initiated by the key leader with multiple decades in the position, provided to fill the key leadership position and did not specifically replace the current key leader.

The succession plan had two provisions. The first provision was for an emergency succession. In the emergency scenario, the current key leader designates an individual on the current staff to serve as an interim key leader. The current key leader must maintain a To Do List annually of the day-to-day duties of the key leader. The Emergency Succession red folder contains the list. The plan entails a schedule. The president of the board contacts the interim to confirm the succession plan is in place. The president instructs the designated interim to assume the key leader role. The length of time as

imparted to the interim is as long as necessary to select a new key leader or as long as the board designates, which may extend into the contract period of the next year.

Implementation includes a transfer of executive education director files contained in the red folder including hard copy, computer files, and passwords go to the interim. The information also goes to the board president to assist with the leadership transition. The senior leadership including principals and department supervisors continue to oversee the individual areas with the assistance of the interim.

The second provision of the formal succession plan was “in the case of a planned retirement or departure, known in advance” by the key leader and the board. In a planned scenario, the instructions were for the key leader to groom “potential candidates within the ministry” for a future senior leadership position or possibly the key leadership position. A prepared job description for a “future staff” position would serve as a “grooming place for the successor” to the key leader. The position title would be the key leader’s “salaried designee.” The board would interview the salaried designee as a possible successor before the assumption of the position. Once approved, the successor would shadow the current key leader “on a daily basis and become familiar with the responsibilities of the position.” In addition, the key leader would annually survey other institutions with succession experience for direction and provide recommended updates to the board with about the process.

The board activity in the event of planned or unplanned departure was the final part of the formal succession plan. The first action required for the board president would be to call a board meeting “to review the succession plan and determine whether to

nominate a Search Committee” to begin the succession process or determine if the Board will offer” the key leadership position to the Salaried Designee.” If the board determines a Search Committee necessary, the composition would be the board president and a minimum of three at-large members of the board or corporate board. The current key leader’s recommendations for a successor will be in the red folder.

The Search Committee has five responsibilities. First, ensure the interim contacts the accrediting organizations and other “viable agencies for prospects” to fill the key leader position. Second, the committee would update the current profile of the key leader position with board members’ input. Third, the profile is made accessible to prospective candidates. Fourth, the committee would interview prospective candidates. The fifth directive would be for the committee to “bring a candid to the board recommended for the position.” After the plan, a detailed job description of the key leader followed in the board manual. The level of detail in O3’s succession planning strategy indicates a positive leadership transition when the time arrives. According to Cocklin and Wilkinson (2011), succession planning in NPO educational settings resulted in a successful leadership transition.

### **Knowledge Transfer Themes in the Described Succession Plans**

The conceptual framework of the qualitative multiple case study was knowledge transfer. Explicit knowledge transfer was evident. O3 had a red folder also available in a digital file containing documentation of critical information needed for a successor to assume leadership. The ongoing red folder updates by the key leader align with the findings of Elkin et al. (2013) wherein planned leadership succession with the

cooperation of the leader of a longer period benefitted the NPO. The three organizations also mandated in-service training for the staff. Specifically, O2's leader provided an agenda of a leadership development activity including training imparting operational skills, processes, and procedures required for the program operation, as well as training in management skill such as conflict resolution. The resources were also available in digital format. (The primary source of funding for O2's programs is government grants, so transferring of explicit information via leadership training meetings are critical to comply with grant specifications and maintenance of funding).

O1, O2, and O3 had detailed employee handbooks explicating organizational policies and missions of the organizations. Descriptions of the boards' responsibilities were in the organizational bylaws. In addition, O3 had other formal documents included a board and faculty manual which supplied additional detail for the operation of the organization. The board manual included an emergency and planned succession procedure.

Tacit knowledge transfer practices were also evident in the case study organizations. The case organization leaders' captured tacit knowledge through informally sharing and explicit knowledge through codifying responsibilities and position qualification within the context of the organization's culture and training efforts similar to the description in Cardoso et al. (2012). O1's leader met with the successor daily and the second leader in the paradigm. As well, the key leader met with the board at regular intervals, and with the entire staff of the organization weekly. The leader also intended for the leader assuming responsibilities not included in the successor's role (not yet

hired), to shadow the incumbent for a 1-year period. O2's leader has prioritized board and staff development in the 5-year succession plan. O2's leader indicated intentional efforts to discuss succession commenced in the coming year. O3's leader met weekly with the organization's senior staff and expressed confidence the information shared in the weekly meetings ensured the leadership team manages the organization according to the standards set by the key leader even when the key leader was not present. The practice of regular meetings by the three key leaders confirmed the findings of Pilotte et al. (2013) of the preference of face-to-face meetings for knowledge transfer activities.

In the event of a planned succession, the key leader will shadow the successor for a period. The purpose of shadowing in O1 and O3 aligned with the description of valuable knowledge by Joe et al. (2013) including the sharing of subject matter expertise, business networks, social networks, and organizational knowledge. Although shadowing was a tacit knowledge transfer activity, the codified succession plan lists incumbent shadowing as part of the succession process. In the case of O3, the practice of leadership shadowing had tacit and explicit knowledge transfer elements.

### **Correlations to the Literature**

The correlations of themes in the scholarly literature included succession as a strategy for sustainability. In addition, board considerations are notable. Finally, succession planning via leadership development practices is another evident theme in the literature.

**Succession for sustainability.** In a global survey of executive succession Santora et al. (2015) found serious neglect of succession planning. Specifically, the United States

had a poor succession planning rate at 16% with only 7% having a formal succession plan (Santora et al., 2015). The low statistic aligns with a previous survey of Boomer nonprofit leaders, 95% of charitable nonprofit leaders studied were eligible to retire in 10 years or less, but only 18% of the organizations had formal succession plans (Froelich et al., 2011). Moreover, lack of succession planning can affect sustainability, especially in smaller organizations (Santora et al., 2015).

Succession strategy may be a means to organizational sustainability to prevent the organizational trauma of the loss of a key leader due to lack of succession preparation. Traumatized organizations did not necessarily fail, but continued operating and adopting dysfunctional practices due to an inability to change or absorb new information (Vivian & Hormann, 2015). Organizational instability through staff turnover fueled insecurity and resource depletion (Vivian & Hormann, 2015). In a survey of 362 NPOs in the United States and Canada, 33% of NPOs indicated hiring staff is the biggest challenge faced and 35-53% of small-to-medium sized organizations reported formal strategies in recruitment, which suggested the smaller the organization increased the challenge of finding qualified and quality staff (Nonprofit HR, 2015).

The organizations correlate to the small percentage of NPOs with a formal succession plan. The size categorization of the organizations was not small but was small-to-medium depending on organizational comparisons aligning with Voelker et al. (2013) description of religious nonprofits using the phrase small-to-medium sized organizations. O1 had 38 employees. O2 had 60 employees. O3 had 120 employees.



The organizations had qualifications prepared to evaluate a successor. Christian character and commitment a Christian mission dictate the cultures of the organizations' as Christian, entailing adherence to the authority of the Bible in the activities and operations of the organizations. For NPOs, the ideal scenario was for organizations to have a plan in place to preserve the character and culture of the organization (Santora et al., 2015). With formal succession plans in place, the organizations have a higher probability of adhering to the organizations' missions and Christian cultural values. The correlation between the values and culture and the organization's sustainability are also notable. Succession planning can supply a smooth succession outcome, and enhance sustainability by providing a continuity of valued cultures in organizations (Santora et al., 2015). In a survey of Israeli NPOs, Bozer, Kuna, and Santora (2015) asserted that organizational leadership development and succession planning ensured continuity and sustainability of leadership in the sector. The evidence in the literature suggests the case organizations, through succession planning, are improving chances for sustainability of the organizations after key leadership departure.

**Board considerations.** Board involvement was vital to the process and health of the organization and considered a major item on the agenda of a board's fiduciary and governing responsibilities (Bozer, Kuna, & Santora, 2015). Few key leaders provided education or advisement to organizational boards about the necessity of executive succession planning (Bozer et al., 2015). The three organizations' key leaders discussed board involvement as part of succession strategy. The key leaders brought the topic of succession to the boards of the organizations as a primary step in the planning process.

The level of responsibility for succession planning and strategy formulation differed. O1 created an ad hoc team to develop a succession strategy, but the key leader held the authority to dictate the timeline in planned succession. The structure of O2's board required the CEO to be a board member. As such, the key leader, as part of board responsibility, strategized for the succession of the key leader position in cooperation with the rest of the board. In O3, the key leader participated in preparation activities to ensure succession strategies were in place and up to date, but the board was responsible for dictating the succession process.

In O1, the key leader noted the reservations expressed by the board when the key leader initially introduced the topic of succession planning. The key leader surmised that the reason was the board members' similarity in age. Succession planning assessment through the evaluation of board members' ages was a consideration (Director, 2015). By board members addressing succession for the key leader, the key leader's view was the topic drew concern from the board members about their own retirement from leadership positions in their individual professions and organizations.

**Internal succession.** In addition to board leadership, utilization and cultivation of internal recruitment of successors were a vital part of the process of succession planning (Bozer et al., 2015). Evidence of internal succession opportunities in the organizations is a possible indicator of effective leadership. Succession planning was not accounted for in less effective leadership because the void overburdens the leaders in the present and negatively affects the retaining quality talent due to limited opportunities for advancement (Van Dusen, 2015).

In O1, the internal successor had been with the organizations for 5 years. The incumbent key leader actively cultivates the successor's interaction with the board. The incumbent and successor attend board meetings and sit at each end of the conference table, and now the board members look in the successor's direction for answers to the questions discussed. According to the leader, "Now when they ask the questions at a board meeting where I sit at one end of the table and [the successor] sits the other, they are looking at [the successor] and not me. It's because [the successor] has the answer. I am talking while I am thinking about the answer, but [the successor] really has the answer. He's done his homework better." The key incumbent leader noted a donation check recently delivered to the planned successor, not the incumbent, implied the establishment of the internal successor's leadership.

In O2, the key leader noted identification of a potential internal candidate. The potential successor's leadership was evident. However, the key leader had not communicated to the potential successor any information related to the topic of assuming the key leadership position. The consideration was at an early stage. For O3, the succession plan includes the intentional development of an internal successor. The key leader "should be grooming potential candidates within the ministry" at senior leadership levels and "possibly" for the key leader position according to the board manual.

**Succession planning via leadership development.** Strategic thinking was lacking at every level of development in organizations including program and overall development (Goldman, Scott, & Follman, 2015). In the Bozer et al. (2015) review of the literature, most NPOs did not incorporate leadership development as a strategy worth the

investment to supplying suitable internal successors. Studies indicated the Boomer exodus from the workforce highlights the need for leadership development in organizations (Corwin, 2015; Van Dusen, 2015). Leadership investment correlated to leadership effectiveness across every level of an organization (Van Dusen, 2015). Knowledge transfer through formal mentoring programs was key to development (Corwin, 2015). Van Dusen's (2015) categorization of leadership investment included the financial component of budgeting for development; strategic commitment of supplying professional leadership training and development practices; and performance and feedback. Creating an infrastructure that supports leadership development and succession planning required human resource efforts, including learning activities that are formal and informal and a consultant can be helpful (Bozer et al., 2015).

Formal and informal leadership development was evident in the case organizations. Professional development activities and formal training activities were evident in the case organizations also. The employee handbooks of the organizations codified activities through policy such as in O1 and O3 including in-service training, as well as O3's graduate education benefit. The three case organizational leaders used regular meetings with staff and leadership teams as a means of leadership development. The O2's leader supplied a sample agenda of a recent meeting, and O1 stated the weekly staff meetings included a written agenda revised in collaboration with the successor. Leadership shadowing was a part of O1 and O3's succession plan. O1 would step down from the key leader role after shadowing the final leader to complete the leadership paradigm designed for the key leader's succession. In O3, shadowing the key leader was

a part of the formally planned succession process, “the potential successor will shadow the current executive education director on a daily basis and become familiar with the responsibilities of the position.”

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The current study explicated the succession planning strategies of three faith-based organizations in preparation for a future departure of the key leader in the organization from the Boomer generation cohort. The literature revealed concerns about the Boomer generation’s exodus from the workforce in the coming years (Bozer et al., 2015; Corwin, 2015; Van Dusen, 2015) and a significant lack of succession planning in NPOs (Comini et al., 2013; Froelich et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2015). The applications to professional practice included the articulation of the specific succession planning activities of each organization and documentation of the activities. The formalized succession plans are unique to the needs of the case organizations, and yet common best practices are evident as well as policies unique to faith-based nonprofits. The evident common practices in the organizations included the initiation of discussion on the topic of succession planning, leadership development, and successor qualifications.

#### **Initiation of Discussion on the Topic of Succession planning**

Key leaders’ initiation of succession planning discussion and strategy was consistent in the three case organizations. The primary activity applicable to business practice was the initiation of succession planning discussion. The key leaders assumed the responsibility of preserving the work of the organizations by initiating the discussions about a time in the future where they key leader will not be leading the organization any

longer and planning for succession. O3's leader stated, "Succession planning is not a priority, but a necessity" and O1's leader stated succession planning is "the most important thing for the church of Jesus Christ today." However, the topic was also a challenging one because the idea of an effective and long-term leader's departure sparks difficult thoughts of change. O3's key leader further stated, "The concept is difficult because I am planning not to be here and yet at the same time this organization is not about me at all." O1's key leader described push-back as a response from the board with the initiation of the topic because of board members display discomfort with the possibility of transitioning out of professional life as well.

The results correlate with the findings of Goldman et al. (2015) wherein strategic thinking was an elite activity, and religious and educational organizations did not display a direct approach to strategic thinking utilizing content in scholarly literature. However, succession planning was a strategic planning activity for the organizations. The case organizations' key leadership used available resources in the forms of experience, experienced counsel, and available written resources.

### **Leadership Development**

Joe et al. (2013) asserted the need to manage knowledge transfer intentionally to reduce negative effects of knowledge loss and an adverse effect on mentoring when older workers leave. Leadership development is an applicable practice to develop a succession strategy. The organizations engaged in tacit and explicit knowledge transfer activities to develop the staff and leadership of the organizations. Regular meetings, training, and

shadowing entailed leadership development for successors, and “potential nexts” as described by O1’s key leader.

Letting go is part of the leadership development process. O3’s key leader stated, “Part of leadership is knowing when to back off, it’s not about you but being effective.” O1’s key leader’s stated an intention to be absent for 1-week per month so the staff would not have to deal with the key incumbent leader, but rather with each other and the future successor to the key leader. O2’s key leader staff was comfortable with the frequent travels of the key leader. Absence or the backing off of the key leader allows other leaders and staff in the organization to develop as indicated in Jaskiewicz et al.’s, (2014) findings in which the key in successful succession is the incumbent releasing control to foster and not cripple the succession process.

### **Successor Qualifications**

Establishing the qualifications for a successor is an applicable professional practice in succession planning. Comini et al. (2013) articulated multidimensional areas to evaluate a successor including the ability to navigate complex situations, focus and energy to obtain results, and behavioral expectations of appropriate attitude and actions in the work environment. As faith-based NPOs, the organizations held one common qualification. The key leader must exhibit a strong Christian faith and lifestyle. How the case organizations’ key leaders derived qualifications of a successor for the organizations differed.

For O1’s key leader defining the current leadership style and the style influence on the direction of the organization informed a new leadership paradigm and

qualifications for a successor. For O2, the process of identifying a successor was the potential to develop into a leader by exhibiting leadership qualities as well as time, reflection, and prayer if the potential successor is the right candidate. For O3, qualifications were codified in a board manual along with a detailed job description. The professional practice of defining successor qualifications is the relevant activity; successor qualification should not solely rely on the qualifications of the incumbent. An organization can fill a key leadership position, but the incumbent leader's unique qualifications are not always replicable. The needs of the organization should dictate the qualifications of a key leader.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The current study contributes to strengthening stressed communities through the influence of sustainable faith-based NPOs that are capable and prepared for leadership continuity after a key leader transition. Founders of NPO's form organizations to meet societal needs in response to failures of government as noted in the public school system; failures of market achieved through community improvement efforts; failures of contract such as serving underserved populations; and failures of expressive needs such as supporting the arts (Carman & Nesbit, 2013). Faith-based NPOs counter the negative effects of societal ills including crime, violence, suicide, substance abuse, broken families, neglected children and more by strengthening communities through vital and relevant services through serving communities motivated by Christian faith. The unexpected departure of a Boomer leader could be a traumatic event affecting staff behavior, organizational performance, and ultimately the organization's survival (Vivian



& Hormann, 2015). Providing Boomer NPO leaders of faith-based organizations with real-life strategies of succession planning supplies motivation for proactive efforts in succession planning to ensure continued mission fulfillment. The case study organizations serve Miami-Dade and Broward communities through vital services to children and family through education, counseling, life-skills training, including family and community building programs.

For O2, the support included a program for inmates to remain connected with the children and family on the outside. For O1, providing at-risk middle school age children a safe place to learn life skills as well as a ministry to support and educate single mothers. O3 is an education organization providing education, sports, and pro-family activities for children from preschool through high school. The services provided by faith-based NPOs undergird positive societal culture and identity. The world would be a different and more difficult place without the presence of the organizations in society.

Society benefits when community members receive faith-based NPO services and programs, not just the individuals with immediate access to the services provided. When community members receive the support necessary to deal with spiritual, emotional, educational, or physical needs, social change manifests. The question remains not if the efforts of faith-based nonprofits matter, but what kind of world would exist without the efforts made by such organizations to address societal ills. Preservation of the work through planning and strategies preserves the necessary leadership to continue to meet existing needs as well as future needs.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Organizations need to grapple with the Boomer retirement exodus by planning for the future via leadership succession strategies to ensure organizational sustainability and mission fulfillment. Succession strategies should include the proactivity of the key leader to introduce the topic of succession planning and board inclusion. Tacit as well as explicit knowledge transfer activities should be a part of the organizational planning efforts.

Organizational preparation for a leadership transition, planned or unplanned, requires documented policies and timelines reviewed at regular intervals. As well, incorporating leadership development efforts is also a recommendation.

Key leaders need to meet with the boards of the organizations to begin discussions on leadership succession. In preparation for introducing the topic, the key leaders should be versed in the organization's bylaws pertinent to a leadership transition. As well, key leaders should research relevant succession planning literature and resources on how to engage in succession planning as a strategic planning activity. Board members tasks should include planning and research to prepare a strategy catering to the needs of the organization. Succession strategy should include a timeline of transition if the key leader is already planning to depart. If no planned timeline exists, a map of the sequence of leadership transition including interim leadership and the development of a leadership search plan are ideal.

Once the topic of succession planning reaches the boardroom, the next step is for key leaders and board members to document a strategic succession plan formally. Succession planning should include explicit knowledge transfer of information including

a log or file that may include resources, passwords, and a calendar of the leader's activities. Tacit knowledge transfer activities should include leadership mentoring such as shadowing and regular face-to-face meetings to gain an understanding to gain a sense of how the key leader functions in the organization.

Incorporating leadership development as part of the organizational culture prepares for the possibility of a successor. Leadership development activities like regular staff meetings, formal training, and mentoring prepare other members of the organization for a leadership transition. In addition, leadership development may serve as preparation for an internal successor.

Harris (2014) asserted that organizations benefit from scholarly literature, but are without access to scholarly literature. Strategic thinking resources include scholarly literature (Goldman et al., 2015). Key NPO leaders from the Boomer generation and members of NPO boards need to pay attention to the study results. In addition, key leaders of different generations, as well as other types of organizational boards, may benefit from a study on succession planning strategies also.

Scholars need to make efforts to supply research information to the organizations as a benefit (Harris, 2014). Boards of NPOs, especially faith-based NPOs, need to access the study results. A primary step toward supplying access to the information is a distribution in modified form. Editing the study for professional journals directed at NPO's, especially faith-based organizations and leaders is an ideal approach to accessibility. As well, by accessing my profession network, I will market consultative services through conferences and leadership training to organizations and leaders needing

assistance with a strategic plan for succession planning. Finally, I will make efforts to share the paper in academic settings with students and faculty as a guest speaker.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

In Section 1, limitations included considerations of confidentiality, withheld succession strategies, the response of male participants to my persona as a female researcher, and unanticipated interruptions causing a disruption in the flow of the interview. I did not encounter any issues of concern from the participants about the confidentiality of the information provided to me. The leaders readily cooperated in supplying interviews as well as the bylaws, employee handbooks, and other documents related to the study topic. Although the leaders may have withheld information about specific succession strategies, as in disclosing the identity of a specified successor or a specific date of retirement, the information was not necessary. The case organizations' leaders supplied sufficient data to complete the current study. Finally, I did not sense my female persona was an issue of concern. Each leader was a part of my professional network and the leaders openly shared information in a professional manner making concerted preparation efforts to participate. My impression was the key leaders' desired to participate to support my doctoral journey and to have an opportunity to help organizations.

Recommendations for further research themes include some themes not evident in the literature. For instance, the three key leaders' spouses work for the organizations in focal roles. Further study of how the retirement of a key leader in a faith-based NPO may

also involve the loss of the spouse in a key role the spouse fills in the organization. What formal or informal succession plans exist to address the loss of a key leader's spouse?

Another recommendation for further research includes themes evident in the literature, but the studies do not incorporate research conducted in faith-based NPO settings. For instance, an examination of the mentoring relationship between the incumbent, and the successor in a planned succession is relevant. Examining the tacit knowledge transfer strategies via mentoring in faith-based NPOs is a recommended topic.

Finally, the contention of Santora et al. (2012) boards should not permit a founder to remain active in the organization after retirement because personnel and external stakeholders were reportedly unclear of leader roles are contrary to what was happening in O1 and O2. The key leaders were planning to remain with the organizations in another capacity. Dean Lee, Zikic, Noh, and Sargent (2016) noted a reduction in mandatory retirement globally and the need for human resource managers to negotiate new terms of employment with older workers. In family-owned firms, succession planning plans were determined by evaluating the motives of the leader and the long-term aspects of the business (Levin & Sarros, 2014), similarly evident in the case organizations, especially O1 and O2. Research is necessary to examine cases of faith-based NPOs with a leadership succession where the leadership transition involved the key leaders remaining in different roles.

### **Reflections**

The journey of completing the current study is an affirmation of the need for strong and strategic leadership in faith-based organizations. Contrary to research statistics

about the paucity of succession planning in NPOs (Comini et al., 2013; Froelich et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2015), I quickly identified organizations in my professional network with succession plans. However, I asked the participants for referrals to other faith-based organizations with key leaders from the Boomer generation that had formal succession plans, and the leaders were not aware of any. In my observation, the opportunity to conduct a multiple case study on a statistically small strategic planning activity such as succession planning in a localized region was unique. A final reflection is the case study organizations' leaders did not express a desire to retire although two were of accepted retirement age and one within a year of reaching 65. The leaders appeared concerned for the future of the organizations and did not speculate during the interviews about retirement from professional life.

The experience of conducting a research study on succession planning strategies in faith-based organizations supplied a fresh perspective on the ongoing need to improve professional practice in faith-based NPO settings. The leaders agreeing to participate exemplified the value of strategic leadership as a legacy to the successors. Prior to conducting the study, I had firsthand knowledge of the positive professional reputations of the case study organizations in the Miami-Dade and Broward communities. My previously held impressions may be biased; however, after reviewing the strategic succession plans and holding interviews on succession planning with the key leaders, my positive impressions remained the same, if not elevated. The organizations are applying professional practices to preserve the work done by the leaders in the communities in which the organizations serve. Through a willingness to engage in succession planning,

the leaders exhibited an understanding the work of the organization should extend beyond the abilities and knowledge of a single person. The desire to transition what the leaders know and do to successors was evident and priority.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

The qualitative multiple case study contains an explanation of the succession strategies from three faith-based organizations with key leaders of the Boomer generation in Miami-Dade and Broward counties in Florida. The derived explanations of the case organizations' succession planning strategies included information gleaned from semistructured interviews with the key leaders and review of company documents. Succession strategies included proactivity of the key leader to introduce the topic of succession planning, board inclusion, and tacit as well as explicit knowledge transfer activities including leadership development. NPOs and specifically faith-based NPOs anticipate a sustainable future when succession plans are a part of organizational strategy. Key leaders are the driving force behind developing a strategic plan for succession. Boards of directors are critical to the process. Preparing the organization for a leadership transition, planned or unplanned, requires preparation and documented policies reviewed at regular intervals. The reality of the Boomer retirement exodus requires leadership succession planning for the future to ensure the beneficial community services of faith-based NPOs continue.

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### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Before the interview begins, participants received appreciation for participating, and then asked for permission to record the interview, and hear a reiteration of the nature of the study.
2. Obtaining verification of the receipt of written consent and confirmation participant consent was through digital recording. I restated to the participant that participation was voluntary. Included in the recording were statements to the participants withdrawal was acceptable at any time and confirming the participant's identity and of the organizations were kept confidential.
3. The questions asked of the participants were from the interview questions listed in Appendix B.
4. After the interview was complete, I employed member checking by going back to the participants to review the interview summaries. The participants verified the information provided and the context of the statements.



### Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What factors were evident that indicated a need for a leadership succession plan in your organization?
2. How were succession planning conversations initiated?
3. What succession planning strategies are in place that will ensure your leadership role and responsibilities are fulfilled at your departure?
4. What plans are currently in place to prepare your successor?
5. What are the key decision makers in your organization, for instance, your board of directors, doing in preparation for your succession?
6. What measures are you taking to prepare for your succession?
7. How are the plans for your succession codified?
8. What additional information can you provide that might help me understand succession planning for your organization?

## Appendix C: Email Invitation

Dear <Key Leader>,

I have a request for your consideration. I have been pursuing a Doctorate of Business Administration in Leadership from Walden University over the past couple of years. My proposal to conduct the study is approved and I hope to finish by the end of 2015.

My research study includes faith-based nonprofit leaders and strategies of succession planning of their organizations. You, as the key leader of <Name of Organization> make this an ideal organization to approach as a potential case study. My study needs to include faith-based organizations where the key leaders have established succession plans. The leaders must be born between 1946-1964 and the organizations must be located in Miami-Dade or Broward County. By learning about organizations that are proactively implementing succession strategies, I am hoping that this study will inspire many more faith-based organizations to engage in formal succession planning so their good works will continue effectively after their key leaders step down.

At this point, I am reaching out to leaders in organizations that meet the research criteria, such as you and <name of organization>. The time commitment would involve a short interview (1 hour or less) with you and the opportunity to review any relevant company documents such as documents including codified succession plans, employee handbooks, bylaws, and records of leadership development activities. I would be obligated to keep all of this information confidential and would supply consent forms and other information to that effect. An agreement would not be binding, so withdrawal can be done at any point. If you agree to participate, I would like to schedule an appointment with you during <date range>. I can be available at your convenience to meet at your facility or a location of your choice. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,