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# Effects of CEO Changes on Senior Management Leadership Teams of U.S. Airports

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# Walden University

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2016

Abstract

Effects of CEO Changes on Senior Management Leadership Teams of U.S. Airports

by

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JD, Michigan State University School of Law, 1999

MSA, Human Resources, Central Michigan University, 1995

BA, Human Resources, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

Changes in the top leadership position in U.S. airports occur frequently. The purpose of the present phenomenological study was to understand the shared, lived experiences of senior managers who work in a U.S. airport and who have undergone a change in the top leadership position. Airports are of critical importance to their local regions and communities and are economic engines for their respective regions. The results of the study may provide positive social change for airport staff and the surrounding community by drawing attention to the complexity in leadership transition. The study was grounded in organizational stress, uncertainty theory of stress, and person-environment fit theories. A purposive sampling method was used to recruit 11 participants who were senior managers at a U.S. airport and experienced a change in the top leadership position within the last 6 years. The interview data were analyzed using interpretive phenomenological reduction methods of epoche, eidetic reduction, and imaginative variation. Findings revealed that transitional leadership resulted in positive effects such as self-efficacy beliefs, commitment, and job satisfaction; it also resulted in negative effects such as disengagement, which appeared to be mediated by the active roles leaders took in meeting employee needs. Participants who valued their skills and contributions were better able to cope with changes and were more confident about their employment ability. This study contributes to positive social change by providing information for airport board members and staff to improve the process of hiring a CEO.

Effects of CEO Changes on Senior Management

Leadership Teams of U.S. Airports

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Psychology, Organizational Behavior

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to George Mabon and my wonderful HR colleagues in the airport industry.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the current study, I explored the effects of a change in chief executive officer (CEO) leadership and the effect of the change on the senior management leadership teams at various U.S. airports. I conducted the research using a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry method. Chapter 1 contains information concerning the importance of this topic, the sociological implications of a change in the top leadership position in a specific U.S. airport, where successors are likely to come from (e.g., internal or external candidate), and how these different types of successors may affect the leadership transition. I also discuss job instability for the senior management group and the senior manager's ability to manage a change in leadership.

Further, I outline the background or environment in which the U.S. airport industry functions, and I describe the purpose of the study, which is to understand the shared experiences of senior managers who have undergone a transition in the top leadership position (i.e., CEO) in a U.S. airport. I frame two seminal research questions, and I discuss the theoretical basis of the study and the uncertainty theory of stress (Beehr et al., 1985). Included are operational definitions and the significance of the study, including a discussion of potential job loss and its consequences.

### **Background of the Problem**

The U.S. airport system employs thousands of employees, many of whom are senior management leaders (Smith, 2012). It is important to understand the dynamics involved with a top leadership change and the effects on senior management teams of U.S. airports, as these changes occur frequently. Topics contained in the research literature include general information concerning the airport industry and the dynamics of

that industry in terms of how airports operate, the importance of airports to the U.S. and the local economy (Smith, 2012), and the governance of the airport (Bacot et al., 2006). Airports are also important from a sociological aspect. Parker (2005) stated that airports are complex sociotechnological networks. Any disruptions to the efficient management of an airport can lead to sociological problems and issues, because many people are employed by airports or by the industry surrounding airports (Smith, 2012).

Disruptions, such as loss of jobs for the local community or a reduced level of service to the residents of the region, which includes the ability to travel to other locales or to effectively receive travelers, would negatively affect tourism that generates income for the region. Higher levels of stress may result among those who are employed by the airport, because this type of disruption negatively affects the workers and, potentially, their families.

Another major theme in the research literature is the amount of turnover that occurs in the top leadership position (Duffield et al., 2011). As this trend continues, the topic of the effect of that turnover on a senior management team is a recurring event that should be addressed to lessen the negative ramifications of that turnover. The effect of the turnover on the organization is a key topic in the literature. If the transition of the CEO is well managed, there may be little to no negative consequence on the organization; however, if the transition is not well managed, there can be a disruption in the efficient operations of the airport (Barrett, 2011).

The elements of fear, stress, anxiety, and change during the organizational transition are important elements cited in the literature. Managing ambiguity and remaining flexible and agile are traits that will assist the senior manager in effectively

working within the circumstances of a transition to a new CEO (Bond et al., 2011).

Uncertainty about how the manager's job may change, either for better or for worse, is a critical factor in exploring a change in leadership (Gallagher et al., 2009).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research problem that I addressed in this study was the potential negative ramifications that may result from a change in top leadership (i.e., CEO) at a U.S. airport, affecting the senior management team and other stakeholders in the organization. My research objective was to explore these types of events, building on other researchers who studied similar leadership changes in the workplace. Factors such as stress, uncertainty, resiliency, and types of CEO change and selection were evaluated to provide a basis for future research to reduce the stress and anxiety that senior managers may experience who are undergoing a change in the top leadership position.

U.S. airports are either governmental or quasi-governmental agencies. A quasi-governmental agency is one that is supported by the government but managed privately. A governmental agency is wholly owned and operated by a government, which could be a city, county, state, or federal agency. In these types of agencies, changes in leaders tend to occur more frequently than in private sector businesses. Gilmore (2012) stated that government entities are so prone to changes in leadership that the leadership of these entities may lose sight of performing the real work of the agency. In the U.S. airport community, changes in the top leadership position occur frequently, as evidenced by many executive searches that are conducted regularly to replace the top leadership position of various U.S. airports (The American Association of Airport Executive, 2013). Limited research concerns changes in the top leadership position and how it affects senior

management teams who work for U.S. airports or in other industries. I explored top leadership changes and their effect on the senior management team that were nonspecific to U.S. airports, but I could find little research performed on this issue. The lack of research warrants further consideration.

I found no literature or research concerning the phenomena of the effects of a change in the top leadership position on the senior management team or topic in the setting of U.S. airports and little literature or research outside of the airports industry. Although research has been conducted on the effects of a top leader change in an organization (Thompson, 2002; Manderscheid et al., 2008), few researchers have examined the effects of leadership change on the senior management team in a U.S. airport setting.

Brief (2002) suggested that the organizations in which people work significantly affect the employee's life in terms of their emotions and actions, both in the workplace and away from the workplace. When a new CEO steps into a leadership position at a U.S. airport, change will ensue and a transition process will occur. Employees who are working with a new CEO must transition or psychologically adjust to the new situation (White, 2008). A transition that is as least disruptive as possible to airport operations is desirable, because airports are an important factor in terms of the economic health and strength of a community. James Cherry, President and CEO of Aéroports de Montréal (2006), stated that airports are economic engines and that the levels of passenger traffic and cargo volumes are a direct reflection on the amount of economic activity in the community. Any potential distraction in the operations of this essential industry caused



by a top leadership change should be minimized to lessen any potential negative outcome on the vitality of the community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to research the shared, lived experiences of senior managers who work or have worked in a U.S. airport. A change in top leadership is a stressful event that affects an employee's psyche, either negatively or positively. A change in top leadership more than likely alters an employee's status in the organization, as the new leader will usually have different priorities and viewpoints than the prior leader's (Gilmore, 2003). The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine the dynamics involved and the effect on a senior management team of U.S. airports when a top leadership change occurs.

Two primary components of the postpositivism philosophical paradigm are as follows: (a) a common reality is created by those who participate and share in it, and (b) although this reality is shared, the reality is nonetheless constructed differently by each individual (Dills et al., 1997). Each participant of this study has experienced the transition to a new top leader in their airport.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of senior managers who work at a U.S. airport when a new CEO joins the organization. I also sought to understand how well the senior managers were able to transition under a new leader. The answers to these questions may further assist airports and other industries to develop an effective process to transition a new CEO into an organization, as well as assist the senior management team in a successful changeover to a new CEO.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the shared lived experiences of senior managers who have experienced a change in their top leadership position (i.e., CEO)?
2. What are the shared lived experiences of senior managers who successfully transitioned to working under a new CEO?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that I used in the present study is the uncertainty theory of organizational stress (Beehr et al., 1985). This theory contains the concepts of stressors, strains, and the degree of uncertainty an individual experiences as a result of these factors. The feeling of uncertainty is a primary generator of psychological strain when an organization is undergoing change (Bordia et al., 2004). When an organization has a new CEO, a senior manager may experience psychological strain arising from his or her feelings of uncertainty. The theory is grounded in the Person-Environment (P-E) fit approach. The theoretical concept of this model is that the employee's experience of stress is connected to the difference between the employee's abilities and the demands of the organization (Harrison, 1978, 1985). The basis of P-E fit theory is formed on the idea that how well or poorly the person fits within the environment may generate stress for that person (Edwards et al., 1998, p. 2). In the instance of a change in top leadership, stress may arise from a lack of fit or congruence between the employee and the new CEO.

Stress will be the outcome of the employee's capability to cope, the demands placed on the individual, the importance of the issue, and how long the situation continues (Beehr et al., 1985). The authors of the P-E theory caution that this concept is

based on what the employee perceives and will differ from employee to employee, even if they are experiencing similar circumstances. The uncertainty theory of stress was an appropriate theory to apply in the current study, as an employee may experience stress from a change in top leadership. The interview template that I created for this study contains questions designed to elicit the amount of uncertainty the participant experienced during the change in leadership and the amount of time the feelings were experienced. The uncertainty theory of stress model uses these two factors to determine the amount of stress the participant experienced during the transition period. A more detailed explanation of these concepts is in Chapter 2.

The factors and elements contained in the uncertainty theory of stress are the basis for the types of questions that I created in the interview template. In particular, the element of uncertainty is one that warrants further exploration. The current study contributes to the uncertainty theory of stress by applying the theory to a new group of participants, the senior management employees of U.S. airports, and by examining the elements of uncertainty, as expressed by the participants. The theory had not been previously applied to this particular stratum of participants. The goal of theory enhancement is linked to improving elements of the theory, such as applying the old model to a new setting (Whetten, 1989).

I investigated the factor of uncertainty with the goal of exploring various types of uncertainty and its effect on stress. A theoretical contribution does not necessarily mean that a researcher needs to develop an entire new theory, but that it should somewhat alter the research practice of that theory. O'Driscoll et al. (1994) applied the uncertainty theory of stress (Beehr et al., 1985), to find that managers play a significant role in the amount

of the stress and uncertainty their subordinates may experience. The incident of a transition in manager may be linked to stress and uncertainty the employee encounters. Role ambiguity and role conflict, which are both stressors, have been linked to uncertainty in a study that explored uncertainty as a factor in occupational stress (Beehr, 1990). I gathered information from the participants to understand whether the participant faced role ambiguity or conflict in the transition. In addition, Fenlason et al. (1994) found that social support for employees who experience stress and uncertainty helps to reduce the amount of stress and strain the employee experiences, especially if the support comes from the employee's manager.

Again, the role of the manager in an employee's work life is significant. This study contributes to the body of knowledge of the uncertainty theory of stress by applying the theory to a new group of participants, mainly the senior management employees of a particular U.S. airport. The interview questions were designed to ascertain the participant's thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to the transition. The collection of this information and the relation of the information to the elements of the uncertainty theory of stress are detailed as part of this study and expanded in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

I conducted this qualitative study by employing a phenomenological design to investigate, comprehend, and illustrate the experience of undergoing a change in top leadership from the viewpoints of senior managers who work or worked at three U.S. airports. I selected the participants by using the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling or judgment sampling is nonrandom and nonprobable; I chose this method for

the present study to deliberately choose informants or participants for the qualities they possess or the experiences they have undergone (Tongco, 2007).

I created an interview template by crafting questions designed to elicit from the participants their experiences during the leadership transition. The interview questions were discussed with each participant in person.

I employed triangulation of the data to increase the accuracy of the findings (Cutcliffe et al., 1999). I used this method by observing the uniformity of various data sources within the same method (Patton, 1999). I outline the research methodology, interview questions, protection of the participants, and procedures for data analysis, and interpretation in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

***Postpositivism.*** A type of research philosophy that emphasizes meaning and creation of new knowledge, with an application toward social good (Ryan, 2006).

***Psychological Contract.*** The unformalized understanding of responsibilities and obligations between an employer and an employee. Examples of a psychological contract include working conditions, how things get done, or other expectations (BusinessDictionary.com, 2013).

***Resiliency.*** The ability to recuperate or adjust easily to change.

***Socio-technology.*** The intermeshing of the people aspects and technical aspects in the organizational context, including processes designed to improve the quality and technical performance of employee's work (Seel, 2012).

*Successor Type.* The characteristics of the person who replaces the outgoing top leader. These traits include leadership style, where the person came from, and their background and skills (Helmich et al., 1972).

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

Assumptions are basic to a study; if assumptions are not made, likely no research problem exists (Simon, 2011). My first assumption was that all participants, senior leaders in various U.S. airports, would be truthful and candid in their responses to the survey questions. My second assumption was that there would be subjectivity in the study and that participants would share information that was from their own unique perspective. Fundamentally, I assumed that the participant(s) underwent a transition experience when working with a new CEO.

The study had limitations. The first was that I addressed major patterns of shared experiences from senior managers; I did not explore individual, subtle differences. Second, I solicited senior management volunteers to share information; there was little incentive to participate, other than the promise of shared information once the study was complete. A third limitation was the ability to replicate the study. I conducted the present study using a qualitative method and qualitative methods are generally difficult to replicate (Wiersma, 2000). A fourth limitation was time constraints. Senior managers are generally busy and may not have had time to complete the interview. A final limitation was that this study concerned only those individuals who were in a senior management role in a U.S. airport; I did not explore the experiences of employees generally or of airports outside of the United States.

The scope of the study consisted of those individuals who were or are in a senior management role at a U.S. airport. The criterion for participation was that the senior manager must have experienced a change in a CEO while working at a U.S. airport.

### **Significance of the Study**

One of the risks for a senior manager with a new CEO is job instability. A recent study by the University of Michigan found that the fear of losing a job was worse than actual unemployment (Work-Life Newsbrief & Trend Report, 2009). An individual who experiences this state of uncertainty for a long period may develop health problems due to stress and anxiety. Other effects of fear of job loss include lower employee morale and productivity, mistrust, an inability to engage in any decision making that involves risk, and lower organizational commitment (Dowden, 2009). In addition, an employee's home life and family may suffer. Financial concerns may impede on healthy family conversations and can lead to stress for the employee's spouse and children. The children may also develop a conception of the workplace as a place of mistrust and unease (Dowden, 2009).

Employees usually depends on their job to earn money to support themselves and their families. In many cases, an individual's job gives a person a sense of self-worth (Hirsch et al., 2009). Any risk to these factors is a cause for concern on the employee's behalf. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that "to take away a man's job is to commit psychological murder" (Butts, 1997, p. 114). Prolonged job loss can lead to psychological problems, including low self-worth, embarrassment, and self-destructive acts. Job loss may lead to poverty. In turn, poverty is a key factor in disease, death, family problems, violence, and crime (Butts, 1997).

McFadyen (1995) noted that people who found themselves unemployed could suffer threatened self-identities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) reported a significant link between job loss, a poor economy, and higher suicide rates. In addition, Baarda (1983) linked a father's unemployment with a decrease in his children's academic achievement.

The present study is socially significant, as an employee's job is an important part of their life. Work provides a social context, a sense of purpose, and a means of making a living to provide necessities of life for an employee and their family (Morse et al., 1955). At a societal or community level, the significance of a well-run airport can be described as direct, indirect, or induced. Direct community effect derives from the economic benefit of the business the airport conducts at the airport, such as parking revenue, concessions revenue, airline rents, and fees. These types of activities produce jobs for people in the community and are also an infusion of cash to the local economy, (i.e., an induced effect) (Waterbury-Oxford Airport, 2011). Indirect economic effect relates to money that is generated by businesses not on airport property, but by businesses in the airport. This indirect economic effect provides people in the community with jobs and also infuses cash into the local economy (Waterbury-Oxford Airport, 2011).

### **Summary**

Changes in the top leadership position of a U.S. airport can create positive or negative experiences for the senior management team of that airport. The who, what, where, and when of that change are important regarding the type of effect the change will have on the senior management team of the airport. The successor may come from within the airport or may be an external candidate. Either way, there is likely to be change in the



way the airport is managed and employees will be affected by that change. Senior managers must be ready to effectively cope with this change to remain on the senior management team and employed by the airport.

This is a significant topic, as changes in leadership at U.S. airports occur on a frequent basis, as revealed by several executive searches happening at any point in time. Airports are important to the community. Waters (2007) write that “An airport is a gateway to a city” (p. 3). The airport is the first impression that visitors who travel by airplanes have of the city in which it is located, and the premises can leave a lasting impression on people who visit that city. It is important for the city to have a positive first impression on visitors. Airports are economic engines for the regions in which they reside (Cherry, 2006). A standard of measure is that for every 1 million passengers passing through an airport, 1,000 jobs will be created (van Ham, 2013). This ratio supports the importance of an efficiently functioning airport. It is also an indication of how sociologically critical an airport is to a community or a region. The potential disruption caused by a change in top leadership should be mitigated to ensure the continued successful operation of the airport.

In Chapter 2, I review literature concerning the following topics: the operations of U.S. airports, leadership transition, organizational change, and the stakeholders including the board of directors and employees of the organization who are affected or involved when a change in the top leadership position of a U.S. airport occurs. In addition, I outline the research strategy for the study. I explore the uncertainty theory of stress in the context of its application to measure the amount of stress experienced by a senior manager when he or she is undergoing a change in the top leadership position.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential effects of changing the highest-ranking corporate officer (i.e. chief executive officer, or CEO) on the job satisfaction and subsequent performance of the senior management leadership team of a U.S. airport. I chose the topic for this study due to the frequent occurrence of this type of change in U.S. airports and previous findings that this change has an effect, either positive or negative, on the people who work at the airport. Datta et al. (1998) described the change in the top leadership position as significantly affecting the organization due to the various functional backgrounds that CEOs serve for their organizations.

At any time, many CEO searches take place in the airport industry (Favaro et al., 2011). Reasons for turnover may involve changes in board structure (Borokhovich et al., 2006), as well as the CEO's retirement, transition to another job, local politics, poor job fit or performance, or death or serious illness (Gilmore, 2003). If the CEO leaves because of malfeasance, there may be ill effects on the organization due to ethical issues (Farquhar, 1996).

Another purpose of the study was to understand the shared lived experiences of senior managers who have experienced this change and to find out how it affected them, what their perceptions of their experiences were, and whether they made a successful transition under their new leader. If the participating senior managers made a successful transition from old to new management, the means through which they did so was also investigated in this study.

A key concept that I used in this study is stress and anxiety. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) (1999), 40% of employees that they surveyed considered their jobs very or extremely stressful. The stress and anxiety experienced in the workplace may be heightened by several factors including flawed relationships with coworkers, workplace conditions, and occupational destabilization (i.e., when an individual feels that they are at risk of losing their job) (NIOSH, 1999). Uncontrolled stress and anxiety could affect the employees' job satisfaction levels which have further organizational implications (Ismail et al., 2009). Psychological conditions such as ergophobia or the fear of going to work may develop as a result of the stressors and traumas experienced in the workplace (Belcastro et al., 1984).

In addition, job insecurity may result from organizational change. Ashford (1989) found several outcomes of job insecurity that affect organizations negatively. Reduced levels of trust and commitment to the organization as well as intentions to quit result from job insecurity generated by uncertainty attached to organizational change.

The main themes that I describe in Chapter 2 are the environments in which U.S. airports operate, how airports have a sociological effect on people, and the typical structure of a U.S. airport. The literature review also covers the events and issues that could potentially arise in various industries including—but not limited to—the airport industry when a new leader is appointed. Included in the study are the causes of turnover in the executive rank, the types of successor candidates, and how this change affects the various stakeholders of the airport, specifically, the senior management team. I also discuss organizational change, stress, anxiety, and resiliency in Chapter 2.

### **Background of U.S. Airports**

As of 2012, 378 primary airports supported public scheduled commercial air service operating in the United States (U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration, 2012). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) estimated that approximately 139,450 individuals were employed by airports in 2012, flying fields, and terminal services in the U.S. In the United States, airports contribute \$1.3 trillion d in economic output; are approximately 5.2% of the gross domestic product; and creates 10.5 million jobs (Smith, 2012). U.S. airports support 70,000 flights per day and facilitate the movement of 2 million passengers per day. Of the 5,000 airports in the U.S., 500 provide commercial air service. Commercial U.S. airports are divided into three categories, depending on how many passengers use the facility; the measure used for this purpose is called boardings.

The Federal Aviation Administration (2013) divided the types of airports into classifications for funding purposes as follows: (a) the nonhub primary classification in which an airport does not have a major airline stationed at the airport and handles more than 10,000 but less than 5% of the United States' annual passenger boardings; and (b) the hub primary status classification in which an airport has airlines that fly in an out on a regular basis. The hub primary classification has further subclassifications: the small hub primary classification that handles 5% to 25% of the United States' annual passenger boardings; the medium hub primary classification that handles 25% to 1% of the United States' annual passenger boardings; and the large hub primary classification that handles more than 1% of the United States annual passenger boardings. The more passenger activity an airport manages, the higher the likelihood that there is an administrative

structure in place that includes a CEO or an airport director position and a senior management team to oversee and regulate airport services (Bel et al., 2007).

The governance of U.S. airports are run by either city, county, or other types of municipal, governmental, or private authorities (Bacot et al., 2006). Key stakeholders of U.S. airports include airlines, concessionaires, tenants, fixed base operators, and the community or passengers. Regulators of U.S. airports include the Federal Aviation Administration, the Transportation Security Administration, Customs and Border Protection, and state aviation agencies.

### **Sociological Implications of Airports**

Airports have a significant bearing on the community that surrounds it and the infrastructure of the area in which it sits. Airports are also responsible for facilitating business, and also make the possibility of traveling anywhere in the world available to people (Parker, 2005). Airports are “complex socio-technological networks” (Parker, 2005, p. 18) that require proper governance to operate efficiently. In airports, “boundaries were to be broken down, distances eradicated and the world brought closer, giving rise to a new global citizenship and community” (Knox et al., 2008, p. 7). In addition, information contained in a report issued by the Federal Aviation Administration to the U.S. Congress, 98% of the U.S. population lives within 20 miles of an airport. Airports provide safer and faster means for transportation services that enable the maintenance of their communities’ quality of life; and airports play a vital role in the proper function of various aspects of society (Schaar et al., 2010).

Sociological implications may arise based on how well an airport delivers service to its customers and community at large. The strategic vision of the CEO and the senior

management team is important to the delivery of the airport's services. If the organization has a high leader turnover rate, there could be negative consequences to the airport that includes instability, increased costs, loss of valuable talent, and overall poor morale. (Duffield et al., 2011). The organization's ability to maintain a good reputation in the industry may suffer from these consequences; subsequently increasing the difficulty in recruiting highly skilled talent and a potential loss of credibility from clients' perspectives.

The CEO and the senior managers do not only have a sociological effect on the organization they belong to but also on each other. Fee et al. (2004) studied the influence of management turnover among the top five executives of 443 large firms through the period of 1993 to 1998 and found that turnover in the ranks of senior managers are typically greater when there is a preceding change in the CEO position. In addition, the departure of a CEO who has endured a long tenure with the organization increases the likelihood that a long tenured non-CEO manager will also leave the organization (Hayes et al., 2005). The authors stated that this activity occurs due to the complementarities that affect the value of employment relationships between a CEO and senior executives (Fee et al., 2004; Hayes et al., 2005).

### **Organizational Structure of U.S. Airports**

In most U.S. airports, the organizational structure follows the functional model. “[n]early all airports studied employ a functional organizational structure where jobs are separated by department, largely functioning as independent silos with main departments such as operations, maintenance, finance, administration, and development”

(Federal Aviation Administration, 2013, p. 14). At the top of the organization charts is the position labeled CEO, president, or executive director.

The position and role of the CEO in U.S. airports and general business domains is highly important to the organizational function of the respective companies. A close-knit relationship between a CEO and the organization exists. In addition, the CEO is responsible for setting the overall strategic direction of the organization as well as accountable to how well the organization will function (Pissaris et al., 2010).

The CEO plays an important role in developing the positive sociological outcome that the organization will take. He/she, along with the senior managers, is in charge of producing the directives that the organization will follow (Pissaris et al., 2010). The airport industry has been proven to have an effect on the community in which it is situated; thus, the directives of the CEO affect the community as well (Schaar et al., 2010). However, there is a gap in the studies that focus on how organizations adapt to the organizational changes brought about by changes in leadership. Given the proven importance of the CEO, a sudden change in that key role may have unprecedented effects that the organization could potentially fail to acknowledge and take account for. Understanding how organizations—or airports in particular—must handle these organizational changes could help close this gap.

### **Research Strategy**

The literature research was performed by reviewing many databases, online information, and various business and psychological books.

The databases that were utilized in this study were ABI/INFORM Complete, EBSCOhost, Psychbooks, Sage Journals Psych, Emerald Management Journals, Sage

Premier, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Psychology: A SAGE Full Text Collection, PsycEXTRA, Mental Measurements Yearbook, Proquest All Dissertations, Google Scholar, the library at Eastern Michigan University, internet sites such as the Federal Aviation Administration, the Airports Council International – NA, and the United States Department of Transportation’s Bureau of Transportation Statistics, among others.

Key search terms used were *U.S. airports; CEO search; CEO turnover; Person-Environment fit; stress management; organizational uncertainty; psychological contract; uncertainty theory of stress; resiliency; stress and change; senior management team; leadership transition and change; fear and change; leadership; CEO change; successor type; succession planning; public sector; airports and leadership; leadership dynamics; and change in leadership.*

Little current research exists concerning the topic of a change in the top leadership position with a particular focus on U.S. airports. I explored subjects germane to the topic that were not specific to U.S. airports but were generally and considerably relevant to the overall topic.

### **The Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

The concepts of occupational stress, resulting fear and uncertainty, and its effects on job satisfaction and performance also play a role in understanding the ability of employees to handle and deal with organizational changes. The organizational stress theory and the uncertainty theory of stress puts occupational stress and anxiety into context; analyzing the factors of the working condition in relation to the potential occupational stress levels of the workers.



## **Organizational Stress Theory**

Organizational stress has been defined as stress “arising from an employee's perception of an environmental demand which exceeds her/his resources, and is theoretically distinct from the employee's coping processes and responses to the stress interaction” (Shirom, 1982, p. 21). Shirom found that the individual's ability to cope with stress is more than likely mediated by organizational characteristics as well as the individual's personality. A key factor in the study was the concept of the person-environment fit, that is, the more congruent the characteristics of the person and the work environment are, the less stress the employee will experience in his/her occupation (Kulka, 1979). The concept of organizational stress is important to this research, as the concept of stress has been shown to generally be a key factor in existing research studies regarding the same topic.

In the context of organizational stress, stressor determinants are generally grouped into three major types: job-related, organization-related, and individual or personal sources (Cooper et al., 2001). Job related stressors emerge due to intrinsic job factors; roles in the organization; relationships with others at work including managers, peers, and subordinates; career development opportunities or lack thereof; organizational culture, politics, and structure; and work-life issues (Cooper et al., 2001).

Another facet of the organizational stress theory is the person-environment fit theory. The basic premise of this theory is that an incompatibility or unsuitability exists between the person and the environment he/she operates in (Edwards et al., 1998). The four constructs resulting from this theory are: an objective fit between an objective person and an objective environment; a subjective fit between a subjective person and a

subjective environment; reality, which is a relationship between the subjective and objective environment; and finally, the degree of accuracy of self-assessment or the relationship between the objective and subjective person (Edwards et al., 1998). The utilization of the P-E fit theory in this study is appropriate in order to understand how the person and environment combine to produce stress and influence strain (Edwards et al., 1998). Whenever change ensues in the workplace, the change event may alter the environment and consequently shift the employee's sense of security or stability in the workplace.

Organizational or job-related stress can take a serious toll on an individual's life; which, in turn, can cause family members or people close to the individual to suffer, either directly or indirectly (NIOSH, 1999). Stress can contribute to stress-related illnesses and may have a negative effect on the organization's productivity, both in terms of health care costs and employee absenteeism (Ismail et al., 2009). When a person is exposed to a stressor, such as a change in leadership, he/she produces a stress response that can influence his/her psychological, physiological, and behavioral well-being. Cooper et al. (2001) described stress as transactional because stress is something that occurs regularly between the employee and the employee's environment. A senior manager in an organization generally experiences high job demands but if the senior manager fails to maintain control over the situation, then the senior manager may experience significant stress as a result.

Strain causes stress. Cooper et al. (1994) described six types of strain. The six types of strain are: the job itself; the employee's role within the organization; the employee's relationships, particularly with their supervisor; whether or not the employee

has a clear career development plan; the culture and politics of the organization; and the employee's work-life balance. One significant type of strain that can result from a change in the top leadership position is job insecurity or disruption of the employees' career development plan. A new leader will most likely have different priorities from a previous leader; for instance, a certain level of job performance or attitude may have been acceptable to the former leader, but the new leader may have different expectations. It will be necessary for a senior manager to understand what those priorities and expectations are and respond to them appropriately in order to fit in with the new leader. The fear of not being able to do so and losing one's job is a significant factor that heightens the effect of workplace strains. Latack et al. (1995) stated that the event of job loss to an individual is almost always negative.

### **Uncertainty Theory of Stress**

The uncertainty theory of occupational stress is based on a formula comprised of the following factors: The amount of stress experienced will be equal to the employee's uncertainty multiplied by the importance of the circumstance to the employee, multiplied by the duration or length of the situation (Cooper, 1998). Uncertainty is a state of not knowing what an outcome will be and can result in feelings of vagueness or confusion. Generally, the state of uncertainty is viewed as, at the least, uncomfortable. "Uncertainty is an aversive state that motivates strategies aimed at reducing or managing it" (Bordia et al., 2004). Le Moal (2007) and Ursin (1998) discovered that the element of uncertainty is a precursor to stress. Ursin states that stress and a harmful work environment are linked to uncertainty and the inability to predict what may reasonably happen in the future. Uncertainty has both a "direct and indirect (via feelings of lack of control) relationship

with psychological strain” (Bordia et al., 2003, p. 345) and is a source of psychological strain.

This theory is rooted in stress research. Hans Selye (1956) conducted seminal research on the issue of stress and developed the General Adaptation Syndrome which develops from certain types of demands placed on a human being (Beehr et al., 1985). Selye also recognized that decision making and the associated consequences of a particular decision were significant factors to whether or not a person would experience stress (Beehr et al., 1985).

Anxiety has also been linked to uncertainty. Anxiety arises when an individual is uncertain about the outcome of a circumstance that may imply a potential danger to the individual (Miceli et al., 2005). The threat or danger posed to the individual may be definite or indefinite. The lack of control over the situation also plays a role in the determination of the amount of stress an individual will experience. A stressor that is unpredictable and uncontrollable will have a more negative effect than a stressor that is one or the other, but not both (Miceli et al., 2005). Beehr et al. (1985) stated that the degree of control an individual has over a situation is an important factor to work-related stress. Bordia et al. (2004) found that the ability to control job-related organizational change mitigated psychological strain. A person’s ability to control a situation reduces the amount of uncertainty the person will feel. In a multivariate study, Ashford (1998) discovered that perceived uncertainty about a major organizational transition were linked to employee stress. Although employees coped with the transition by varying degrees, the relationship between stress and uncertainty was only moderately affected. The better the

employee was able to control the situation and tolerate ambiguity, the less stress the employee felt.

It is in the organization's best interests to pay attention to and manage organizational stress when a new leader is introduced because studies have linked negative outcomes with organizational stress. Examples of potential negative behaviors are a decrease in the level of commitment to the job, turnover, expressing turnover intentions, lower attendance or absenteeism, job threat, and anxiety (Sullivan et al., 1992). Two consequences of organizational stress exist at the level of the individual employee and at an overall organizational level. At the overall organizational level, the organization may suffer from decreased productivity, in form of low morale, absenteeism, and increased health care costs (Cooper, 1998). Employees who are experiencing stress are typically not able to function in an optimal manner. The employees' best efforts may be deployed elsewhere, perhaps in seeking other employment opportunities in order to ensure a steady stream of income.

Mustari (1992) applied the uncertainty theory of stress to further refine the types of variables involved in the production of stress. Mustari (2002) found that stress does not result from one set or type of variable, but that the variables have varying degrees of effect on the level of stress produced. Mustari suggests that researchers should be aware of the influence of the type of emotion experienced and not to generalize degree of stress across all types of emotions. In the present study, I will expand on Mustari's idea that the kind of emotion has an effect on the amount of stress experienced by documenting the various types of emotions the participants had experienced during the CEO transition. Timing is a factor in a transition or organizational change. Paulson et al. (2005) found

that job uncertainty, levels of stress, and emotional exhaustion were at a peak before the change or transition occurred, but after the employee found out there would be a change and that the feeling of stress lowered once the transition was underway. The interview template used in the current study contains questions designed to capture the participant's feelings and experiences as they moved through the transition.

Tidd et al. (2002) applied factors of the uncertainty theory of stress in research on the topic of role stress. A key factor used in the research was uncertainty; the study examined job performance in the context of effort-to-performance and performance-to-outcome. Effort-to-performance relates to the uncertainty of whether or not the employee will be rewarded for their effort and performance-to-outcome is uncertainty linked to appropriate rewards given for performance. Tidd et al. found that although uncertainty has a moderating effect on role conflict to work stress, that the element of uncertainty may also have many facets to it that have not been explored. One of these facets is connected to a person's boss. van Dijke et al. (2011) found that individuals typically want to understand other people's motives in order to work effectively with them, especially when the other person is has great influence or power over them and the inability or uncertainty to understand a superior's motives can certainly cause stress.

The current study enhances this research by eliciting information about the type of uncertainty the participants experienced during the CEO transition and examining responses pertinent to the participant's coping skills. In an earlier study, O'Driscoll (1994) found that the element of uncertainty warranted further exploration as there were many as yet undiscovered dimensions to the aspect of uncertainty.

## **Job Satisfaction and Job Performance**

Most studies in the area of organizational behavior research operationalize job satisfaction as a person's evaluation (over a scale or score table) of the various facets of his/her occupation; with the person's evaluation observed directly as a representation of how a person feels about his/her job (Greguras et al., 2004). According to Depedri et al. (2010), a mental construction of a person's job satisfaction starts from the person's expectations or idea of a satisfactory working condition and ends with the perceived well-being of the person. It is affected by several factors including the nature of the occupation which refers to factors like task load, training opportunities, level of control, intrinsic interest, etc.; and the context which refers to the physical and social characteristics of the workplace like firm size, organizational structure, etc. (Depedri et al., 2010). Job satisfaction, therefore, could serve as an accurate conceptualization of a person's attitude towards his/her job (Greguras et al., 2004).

Job performance is comprised of outward behavior that people do in the workplace which are aligned to the goals of the organization they belong to (Cook, 2008). Siggins (1993) explored the relationship between the person's job satisfaction level and the person's subsequent performance; saying that for a long time, managers assumed that a more satisfied staff is a more productive staff. However, he points out that numerous studies have shown that there is no direct relationship between job satisfaction and job performance; having said that, while research shows that there is not *always* a direct relationship between the two—in some cases, there is. According to Cook (2008), observing the employees' job satisfaction levels is an important aspect of maintaining

business functionality because increased job satisfaction levels are correlated not only to increased productive behavior but also to decreased counterproductive behavior.

Ismail et al. (2009) say that stress often arise physically and emotionally when workers are not able to match the demands of his/her occupation. The two types of eustress that arise could eustress (good stress) or distress (bad stress). Employees who experience eustress usually meet their job demands regularly and motivate them to increase the quality of their work life; whereas employees who experience distress often decrease their work-life balance to meet the demands their occupation places on them.

In summary, the employee can experience occupational stresses due to organizational factors like workplace interaction including relationship with senior managers (Cooper et al., 2001). The worker may experience strains which affect his/her ability to perform his/her responsibilities to the fullest capacity. Thus, stressors must be understood and regulated to maintain proper organizational performance; however, the literature still presents a gap in the understanding of how these stressors are affected by changes in organizational leadership;

### **Airport Staff**

#### **Role of the CEO**

Within the airport organizational structure, administrative and operational functions and roles exist. Within the leadership and administrative function, the role of the CEO is one of paramount importance and influence in an organization. In the case of a U.S. airport, the role of the CEO is a key position in ensuring organizational success (Glick, 2011). The CEO acts as the visionary, motivator, taskmaster, and analyzer (Hart, et al., 1993). On top of those business and transactional functions, the CEO is also



responsible for creating and setting the organizational culture (Sashkin et al., 1988). The ability to transform and innovate is also an important aspect of the CEO role (Galambos, 1995).

A good CEO views his/her senior management team as an asset and maintains a high level of focus among the members of the team. According to Adams et al. (2005), some firms would rely on the CEO to make all the major decisions pertinent to the organization whereas other firms would make business decisions based on the consensus among top executives in the organization. The managerial decisions affect the direction the company takes and the quality of the company's performance. Dr. Cheong Choong Kong, who is the CEO of Singapore Airlines, stated that a strong team can achieve much more versus what he can achieve on his own (Clutterbuck, 1998). Herb Kelleher, the former CEO of Southwest Airlines, said that he would not look for a replacement who is just like him, but for someone who has his spirit to carry on the corporate culture he had formed.

It is important for other people in the organization to evaluate the potential change in the context of the CEO's perspective. One CEO in the biotech industry stated that managing a new company was like riding a wild horse (Hollanders, 2005). In order for senior managers to adequately cope with a change in leadership, it is important for them to be able to view issues from the CEO's perspective, in order to produce a smooth transition from the old management to the new.

### **Senior Management Teams**

A natural tension in the makeup of a senior management team is present. Each team member represents a different function in the organization but is also expected to

have the well-being of the entire organization as a priority (Berg, 2005). A new CEO must be clear about the priority of the senior management team member and monitor whether the organizational whole is being appropriately represented by the individual departments. Too much competition over limited resources of the company may lead to a strain on the relationships between the senior management team members. It is important to limit these strains. Empirical work tackling the relationship between the CEO and company performance affirmed that the function of organizations depend more on the performance of the top management team as one unit rather than on the performance of executives as individual leaders (Mackey, 2008).

In the transition to the new role, the CEO may bring former trusted colleagues to the group. If the CEO was promoted from within the senior management team, he/she may have already formed relationships and acquired personal preferences regarding the members of his/her senior management team. If not closely monitored, these dynamics can be troubling for the senior management team as a whole. Wade et al. (2006) also made a study regarding the effects of perceived unfair treatment among the senior management team members and the CEO on the potential turnover of senior management. They stated that the actions of the CEO were salient to the participants or stakeholders of the organization; the CEO should strive to maintain an atmosphere of equity among his/her subordinates.

### **General Staff**

A senior manager who is in the midst of a top leadership change will deal with challenges to face on several fronts. One is on a personal basis that involves how the change will affect the senior management and his/her attitude towards the job; the other is

how to help employees who report to the senior manager manage the transition—in other words, a leadership challenge for senior managers (Bunker, 2010). In addition to personal issues, senior managers must also be concerned about how their staff manages the transition to a new CEO. Employees will typically experience the same concerns as senior managers. Trignano (2010) wrote that change will affect each employee differently and that the senior manager should operate in an environment of trust and open communication—concerns should be shared and discussed.

An example of how a recent change in CEO can affect the general workforce was when Yahoo's new CEO, Marissa Mayer, made a big cultural change in the organization by stating that Yahoo staff members could not work from home any more (Goudreau, 2013). This type of change had an effect on staff members' financial and emotional well-being and received a lot of criticism both from Yahoo staff and supporters of workplace flexibility (Goudreau, 2013). This is an example of how a new CEO can change a long standing policy in a negatively received manner; however, there are other instances where a CEO can implement changes that positively affect his/her organization's members.

### **A Change in CEO**

A significant issue in U.S. airports is the turnover rate of the CEO position. Turnover among CEOs in both U.S. airports and the corporate world generally is occurring at a rapid rate (Favaro et al., 2011). The pace of turnover in the CEO ranks have increased, rather than decreased over the years. Research statistics indicate that the likelihood of a CEO being fired currently is three times higher than what it was during the 1980's (Higgins, 2005). The high turnover trend shows no signs of abating.

### **Why Does Turnover Occur?**

Turnover in the CEO role occurs for various reasons which may be planned or unplanned. These reasons include retirement, a move to another job, a political change, poor fit, job performance, death or serious illness (Gilmore, 2003). Paese (2008) stated that in 2006, one out of every three CEO departures occurred because the CEO was forced out of the position by the board due to poor performance. The frequency of CEO departures indicates a poor track record of boards for hiring an effective CEO. The increase in board members who do not understand the core business operations may contribute to increased CEO turnover decisions within organizations (Huson et al., 2001).

The structure, makeup, and characteristics of the board also have an effect on CEO turnover. A smaller, one-tiered board tends to be highly sensitive to the CEO's performance and will generally hold the CEO accountable for good performance (Nguyen, 2011) due to the closer one-on-one working relationship between a smaller sized board and the CEO. When a CEO works with a board that is comprised of many individuals, the CEO may not have the opportunity to work closely with or form effective working relations with all of the board members. In addition, board members may be a little more hands off in their oversight approach (Borokhovich et al., 2006).

### **Effect of CEO Turnover on the Organization**

Cao et al. (2006) wrote that the issue of a CEO departure and its effect on the organization has widely been ignored, even though this event is considered a critical one. The authors stated that research confirms that a CEO's departure could potentially be disruptive to the organization. It is difficult for employees to recover their balance and adjust accordingly when the top leader leaves the organization.

Sometimes a CEO's transition will be well managed and may cause little disruption in an organization, but in other instances, the transition can cause significant distraction brought about by the need to adjust. The distraction may pull the senior management team away from the effective management of the organization and cause disruption in the execution of the operations (Barrett, 2011). CEO turnover may be viewed in three different ways. The first view is that this change is disruptive and may cause operational inefficiencies including employee unrest. The second view is that a change in CEO is irrelevant and generally does not affect the organization's performance. Finally, the third viewpoint is that change is good, and a new CEO in the leadership position of an organization may energize employees in the company for better performance (Cao et al., 2006). The manner in which the transition is handled is critical to ensure a smooth transition so that the operations of the airport are not interrupted or otherwise negatively impacted.

Hillier et al. (2006) note that CEO turnover often occurs due to the poor performance of the CEO in maintaining or bettering the operating performance of the organization or by means of a voluntarily release of the role by the holder of the position; both considerably valid reasons for CEO turnover. CEO turnover often leads to an improvement of the performance of the organization given that the employees are able to properly adjust to the turnover (Hillier et al., 2006).

### **Types of CEO Departure and Respective Effects on the Workforce**

The CEO departure is a critical event in the life of an organization. Frequently, this event leads to organizational instability and it is also something that most organizations, at one time or another, experience (Buoziute-Rafanaviciene et al., 2009).

Hesselbein (1997) affirms that there are not many events in the life of an organization that are as serious, noticeable, or stressful as when the top leader of an organization leaves. Hesselbein pointed out that people within and outside of the organization scrutinize why the leader leaves, and they also gauge how well the transition is managed by the other stakeholders.

Various challenges remain in the wake of a leadership departure. The kind of departure has an effect on those who remain in the organization. Different types of and reasons for departure affect organizations in different ways. Farquhar (1996) described leadership departures as either routine or non-routine. Routine departures are those that are generally planned for, for example, when a succession plan is laid out beforehand and executed when called for. Non-routine departures are those that are disruptive in nature like a sudden death or illness, a forced resignation or termination for poor performance, or other political reasons as issues involving scandal or malfeasance. Non-routine departures can cause unwanted media attention that can make it difficult for senior management team members who are left in the organization to manage. In the wake of a leadership departure, the bounds of the organizations' succession planning capacity gauged against the complexity of the event ranges from low to high, depending on the circumstances. When the departure is routine, the effect on the succession planning capacity is high and the complexity of the event is low. As non-routine departures are measured, ranging from a traumatic event such as death or illness, a performance issue, conflict or controversy, to a public wrongdoing, the scales tip in the opposite direction—to high complexity and a low effect on the succession planning capacity.

In addition, each type of non-routine departure generates its own level of stress. In a traumatic event, such as sudden death or illness, or a merger or acquisition; feelings of distress and bereavement are predominant among the organization's workers. In the case of performance issues, the situation serves as an indication that there are potential problems in the organizations' performance; the departure may be less shocking to senior management team members than some of the other types of departures. The same is true in a situation involving conflict or controversy, except that if the senior management member takes a strong stand on the side of the affected leader, personal complications for that senior manager may result from the departure. Departures involving scandal or wrongdoing are very disturbing to senior management team members, as these types of events affect the reputation of the organization and its employees, especially senior management members (Farquhar, 1996).

In the case of a CEO departure because of an illness, Davidson et al., (2006) found that the execution of a succession plan may not have been done because organizations may not have been able to plan or prepare for this type of event. It is advisable for all organizations to have an emergency succession plan in place for just these types of emergency situations. In the development of an emergency succession plan for the CEO, two scenarios may arise. One is where there is a sudden loss of the CEO; the other is where the entire senior management team is lost, either through some type of tragedy or corporate malfeasance. The board should be prepared to deal with a one-level event, or an event containing multiple levels of managers (Behan, 2007).

### **Filling the Vacancy**

Hesselbein (1997) stated that there are generally four phases that occur when an organization is replacing a top leadership position. The first phase is to create a vision for the future of the organization; phase two is to build a search infrastructure for the leadership search process; phase three consists of the boards' delegation of duties to the search committee to perform the search; and phase four is to actually conduct the search.

An effective progressive airport executive (Gwyn, 2011) must possess many skills. The airport executive must be ready to manage various challenges that will arise on a daily basis. An example is managing an airport in the atmosphere of heightened security risks, a highly political environment, as well as meeting the demands of the airlines. An airport executive must understand the financial ramifications of having to fund the necessary initiatives ranging from the purchase of software tools to major construction projects. The executive must convey a well-defined vision so that the people in the organization move together towards the fulfillment of that vision. Strategic thinking, excellent communication skills, and the ability to deal with the media are all part of what it takes to be a successful airport executive. If the CEO departure is unplanned, rather than planned, additional factors are introduced, especially if there is malfeasance, such as a scandal or wrongdoing on the part of the CEO. It is important for the organizations' employees to manage these events properly to avoid a considerable disruption in the workplace in the wake of the CEO departure (Farquhar, 1996).

Candidates to fill the vacancy may either come from inside the organization or from an external source. Murphy et al. (2007) stated that there is a trend in the United States to hire an individual who is already in the role of a CEO from an external source.



In the close-knit airport industry, transitions may cause a domino effect and result in airport CEOs moving from one airport to another. Whether hiring from within the organization or externally, the factors to consider in filling the vacancy are whether or not the individual is a good fit both culturally and technically (McDonald, 2012). The manner in which the new CEO is selected is also an important factor in the literature. If the new CEO is not properly selected, the lack of diligence on the part of the selection committee can lead to distractions in the efficient operation of the airport and set the airport back in terms of executing strategy and moving the organization forward (Khurana, 2001).

Where the CEO comes from may have an effect on the entire transition, for example, some CEOs come from inside the organization, and others come from outside of the organization. Issues arise that should be addressed as the selection for the CEO role is made. Examples of the issues are that a CEO appointment from outside of the organization may result in a clash of culture that may cause senior managers to exit or to cause the new CEO to struggle because he or she is not plugged into the network of information (Clutterbuck, 1998). A CEO who is promoted internally may not make needed changes in the organization. The subject of succession planning is important in this context since an airport that has a solid succession planning system will be better able to support a successful transition to a new CEO (Clutterbuck, 1998).

The type of individuals who are involved in the selection process are critical components to a successful search. Carey et al. (2012) used the process the Ford Motor Company employed in order to select its recent CEO as an example of a successful hire. The selection committee was comprised of several Ford Motor Company board members, the chairperson of the company, and a search firm that was used in an advisory capacity.

The committee ended up looking outside of the traditional automotive sector and hired an individual who had a stellar track record at an aviation entity, Boeing Commercial Airplanes. The attributes that Mulally, who was hired as the CEO, brought to the organization were ones that fit with the corporate culture; and he was deemed someone who leads by example; values quality and teamwork; and works in a practical manner all the while maintaining the capacity to promote and drive a vision. The Ford Motor Company board was able to evaluate both industries and found the similarities between the two that indicates a fit for the CEO role.

The criteria used to define the role are also of key importance. The information utilized in the search must include a vision of the future state of the organization, the criteria used to define what the role should contain, and linking those attributes and skills to support the fulfillment of the strategy. In addition, using the same criteria in order to assess internal as well as external candidates may serve to reduce internal tension and competition (Nadler et al., 2009). If an organization fills the position internally, it is important that the organization has a good succession plan and process in place in order to ensure the best fit for the role (Font, 2001).

A primary factor in succession planning is to conduct a solid assessment of the individuals in the organization. The assessment should include feedback from managers, peers, as well as subordinates. Nadler et al. (2009) advised organizations involved in succession planning for the CEO position to avoid certain pitfalls. The first is not to be reluctant to launch a process that will result in employees competing with each other for the role. Another point of concern is a current CEO may have some difficulty with the idea of letting go of his or her responsibilities at a future date. The board should be aware

of this dynamic and ensure that the succession planning process is designed to mitigate the CEO's fears by helping the CEO envision his or her life beyond the role of CEO and by getting the CEO comfortable with handing over the role to someone who has been fully developed for the position. Finally, the employees of the organization may be leery about the amount of work it will take to engage in a solid succession planning effort (Nadler, 2009). The board, the current CEO, and the senior management team must be in full support of the succession planning process and clearly communicate support to the employees in the organization.

Jack Welch (2007) believes that succession planning is not effective in corporate America because of two factors; the first is that the board and current CEO may be too focused on financial profitability or viability and are not able to pay attention to succession planning; the second is that it is uncomfortable to discuss replacing the CEO when that CEO is still serving as the head of the company. Welch recommended tackling the issues directly in order to avert a potential crisis. CEO incumbents should also be aware of the personal benefits they will reap when they fully engage in the succession planning process. Some of the benefits include the ability to transition into new roles; if there is no successor for the CEO role, the CEO's ability to move to other opportunities may be blocked. A well-qualified replacement will also allow the CEO to be able to go on vacations or sabbaticals for personal fulfillment (Heffes, 2002).

### **Types of Successors**

Boards may be tempted to hire a CEO who possesses demographics similar to theirs. Factors such as age have been found to be an important element in choosing a successor. Davidson et al. (2006) stated that the similarity-attraction paradigm plays a

role in a CEO selection process. In particular, the authors found that there was a significant link between the average board member age, and the age of the CEO when hired. If the prior CEO had poor performance, this factor is tempered, in this case the board may experience a need for change and then hiring someone of similar age does not become a major issue in the succession process.

Another major factor in a CEO succession process is whether the new CEO will come from an internal or external source. It is estimated that “about 25 to 30% of successions today take place from outside the firm as compared to about 12% a decade ago” (Malik et al., 2011, p. 101). A hire from the outside will likely occur if the organization is in distress or in a turnaround situation (Clutterbuck, 1998). Typically, if the successor is from the outside, the successor will generally come from the same or a similar industry. The experience a CEO candidate has in a similar industry may be a key indicator of success, and should be taken into account when hiring a successor CEO.

### **Board of Directors Role**

There is a special relationship between a board of directors and its CEO. A solid bond of trust between the parties is necessary for an optimal relationship. The trust must not be excessive or poor, but must strike a middle ground. Excessive trust may lead to the board improperly executing its’ duties; however, if poor trust exists, it can lead to strangling the operational ability of the organization (Taylor, 2010). According to Zhang (2011), the effective performance of organizations is related to the interpersonal relationships that exist between the board and the CEO.

The role of the CEO is to create and execute strategy. The role of the board is to approve that strategy and to counsel the CEO from a broad viewpoint (Neff et al., 2005).

In addition, the board members usually have diverse areas of expertise—each board member holds their own perspective of what they believe should happen. Berry et al. (2010) stated that typically the board of directors will participate in leadership and decision making duties and also advise the CEO in a support role. The overall culture of the board may be different from the organizational culture; reconciling these differences is an additional challenge for CEOs. Terms of the board members are typically limited and board members frequently change creating a new learning curve for the CEO.

### **Dynamics of Organizational Change**

#### **Fear, Stress, and Change**

When there is a leadership transition, challenges for the new leader and the senior management team emerge. The challenges include the ability to continue running the business efficiently despite the changes in the rules because the old ways of doing things no longer work for the organization. A second challenge is to understand the politics of the change, the new expectations, and to effectively manage new ground. A third challenge is to manage the ambiguity and intricacy of a new situation, both for the new CEO and the current senior management team (Bond et al., 2011).

The entry of a new CEO creates an interesting phenomena—every incumbent senior manager in the organization is now a new employee and must prove their worth to the new CEO all over again (Kennedy, 1999). Osborne et al., n.d., stated that it is common for senior management employees to experience feelings such as loss, anxiety, and anger in the context of the introduction of a new CEO. The board should be aware of these feelings so that they assist the senior managers and other employees in effectively dealing with the transition.

Willets (2011) advised that it is typical for a new CEO to come into an organization and try to make his or her own mark on it. Senior managers should be open to change and be able to adapt to the new activities the CEO might integrate into the organization. Working with a new CEO is an important transition. Learning to interact productively with a new CEO who may have different ideas, styles, and inclinations is a difficult challenge (Riordan, 2008) but one that may and is met successfully by senior managers.

### **Uncertainty**

The concept of uncertainty plays a key role in the transition of a new CEO. Gallagher et al. (2009) suggested that there are five types of uncertainty that a newcomer may experience when joining an organization. They are newcomer appraisal, referent, relational, transformation, and initiative. These factors refer to how the new hire fits into the organization, how well they will perform, as well as how they will fit in socially. However, the authors state that there is also an effect on employees who have been working in the organization for a long period of time labeled as veterans. Those veterans experience transformational uncertainty which makes them ask whether the new hire will affect the current dynamics of their organization, how the new hire may influence the work environment, and more specifically, they also question the individual's job experience. The individual will likely try to reduce that uncertainty by gathering information from the new hire and about the new hire. An effective way to manage this transition is for both the new hire and the veteran employee to understand each other's perspectives.

The concept of uncertainty emerges in the concept of psychological contracts. Psychological contracts consist of unspoken expectations, expectations from the past, interdependence, and psychological distance; that is, how appropriately close a person can get to another due to trust factors. The last issue concerns the dynamics or changes that occur (Morrison, 1994). A psychological contract is a method that people use to organize their social life at work, and is generally the glue that holds things together (Morrison, 1994). Problems emerge when the organization changes its culture or methods of getting work done without clearly communicating those changes to the workforce. If the changes are not communicated clearly, the employee may perceive a violation of their psychological contract and may resist the change. Turnley et al. (2000) found that violations of the psychological contract by organizations usually result to negative employee attitudes and behaviors that manifest in neglect of job duties, a decrease in the employee's willingness to engage in helpful activities on behalf of the organization, and a desire to leave the organization at some point in the future.

### **Succession Plan**

To temper the negative effects of the organizational changes, companies must put a succession plan in place that can help ease the adjustment and familiarization process by means of preparation. Succession planning is very important activity for organizations to develop their leadership strategies over an extended period of time (Greenwood, n.d.). Having the right CEO in place is not enough; an organization must also have a proper CEO succession plan in place (Davis et al., 2009).

Greenwood (n.d.) says that the senior management team must regularly maintain this succession plan to ensure that it is aligned with the goals of the organization. Doing

so would subsequently ensure the adaptability of the succession in the future. The organization and its members would not be placed in a destabilized situation due to an abrupt integration of organizational change. Larcker (n.d.) also stated that the development of internal resources in preparation for future succession is a fundamental component of mitigating organizational risks. An operational succession plan keeps the crucial role the CEO plays in fulfilling company goals in mind while engaging the board of directors in the development of possible candidates that can fulfill the requirements of the company's set goals (Larcker, n.d.).

### **Surviving Organizational Change – A New CEO**

As discussed earlier, the uncertainty theory of stress (Beehr et al., 1985) is a measure of how stressful a change will be on an individual based on certain factors. Again, the measure is roughly the employee's perception of the level of certainty that they will be able to obtain the desired outcome(s) multiplied by the importance of the outcome multiplied by how long the uncertainties are in play. When these factors are multiplied, it results to the amount of stress experienced by the individual. The higher the uncertainties, the more stress the person will experience.

### **Uncertainty and Counteractions**

If the uncertainty theory of stress is applied in the context of a leadership change, the desired outcome of the senior manager is that they will be valued at the same or a greater level and that they will be able to retain their position within the organization. The importance of the outcome is significant because a job supplies their personal basic needs and wants. Finally, the period of time the uncertainty is experienced—the amount of time the senior manager would know whether or not the new CEO wants to retain



him/her in the position—must also be observed. In reality, this period of time could be for the entire duration of employment. This dynamic could cause quite a high level of stress for the senior manager which may or may not lessen over time (Beehr et al., 1985). The potential for a violation of the psychological contract is high and is necessary to understand for an effective transition (Morrison, 1994). A psychological contract is the perceptions of both the employer and employee concerning mutual obligations; typically the obligations are not spelled out but have evolved from past actions or statements (Patrick, 2008).

Despite the natural tension that is present in senior management teams, workplace social support is extremely beneficial in managing workplace stress (Ganster, 1995). Role clarification within the senior management team is also a key factor in stress reduction. Senior managers should be cognizant of the benefits of supporting each other through a leadership transition; the benefits from support from each other could work to greatly reduce stress.

Berg (2005) cautioned that if a CEO feels that a senior management team member has personality issues, the CEO may focus on exiting that senior management team member without a deeper understanding of the cause of the personality issues when representational issues are at play. If one of the senior management team members is exited from the group, it could cause unease and fear among the remaining members which may have a negative effect on productivity. The ability for senior managers to openly communicate about the change will enable the senior management team to help each other through the transition. It is important for senior management team members to create facts and not simply assert them. An exchange of views within the groups as well

as creating boundaries that allow permeation is suggested in order to break down barriers between groups.

The role of the CEO in the airport and effective interaction with the staff is an essential issue in order to achieve a successful transition. The relationship dynamics among the senior management team members can also assist or hinder in the transition (Berg, 2005). The support of the senior management team for their subordinates during this process is essential (Trignano, 2010). A new leader may come into an organization and upset cultural standards, or the expected behaviors and values of an organization. The new CEO should understand the cultural standards in order avoid upsetting the employees of the organization with too many rapid changes in the beginning (Goudreau, 2013).

### **Understanding and Adapting to the CEO**

It is essential for senior managers to understand the dynamics of a leadership transition, in order to effectively participate in that transition. Collecting information about the new leader is advisable, especially if the CEO comes from outside of the organization. Information can be gathered by talking to people who know the CEO. This information may be conducted by an internet search, or by exploring the CEO's affiliation with various industry groups (Signorovich, 2004). Gaining an understanding of the new CEO's personality type is helpful in facilitating effective communication with the new CEO. Surviving the organizational change and working well with the new CEO is an important concept. Relating to peers and working together to manage the change has been found to be useful (Ganster, 1995). In order to get through the change, senior managers need to be flexible, resilient, and willing to be open to new ideas (Gilles, 2011).

The senior management members of a university that had experienced multiple leadership changes over the years found ways to successfully survive the changes in top management position (Gilles, 2011). The author stated that the frequent changes in the leadership of the university had caused the team members to become more cohesive and supportive of each other. This team developed a stronger bond because of the environmental changes that occurred in their surroundings. In addition, Kantor, et al. (2008) recommends that senior managers acquire courage and curiosity as personality traits in order to remain adaptable to these and other types of changes. These traits allow senior managers to move ahead without being fearful of changes and may give the manager a more adaptive attitude towards changing circumstances. A senior manager who is curious about their surroundings is likely to develop or be open to new ways of doing things. The authors believe that these traits are learnable through coaching, mentoring, on-the-job experiences, and specific training programs. It is encouraging that a senior manager can receive coaching and training to effectively deal with the transition and is not doomed if they do not innately possess these traits. However, he or she must be open to and desirous of learning them.

### **Resiliency**

Stress may be reduced by moderator variables (Cooper, 2001). These moderators have many facets to them. One potential moderator is the individual's disposition and personal outlook or resiliency. In a study designed to measure personality traits that support resiliency, the traits of positive coping, affect, thinking, realism, the ability to control one's behavior, physical fitness, and altruism were some of the factors found to promote resiliency in an individual (Meredith et al., 2011). In addition to the mental

domain, physical, social, and spiritual aspects are also important in developing resiliency. A person's environment includes familial, collegial, and community, all of which are important in helping to support an individual's resiliency.

### **Case Studies about CEO Turnover**

A CEO who makes the major decisions of the company affects the performance of the company. The managerial decisions of the CEO affects the characteristics of the organization as well and is directly related to firm performance (Adams et al., 2005). Bennedsen et al. (2012) noted the importance of the CEO evidenced by the decline in company performance due to an unexpected hospitalization of the CEO. Companies growing at a rapid rate in their respective industries and are undergoing corporate expansion would rely heavily on the decisions of the CEO; unexpected changes in leadership may disrupt the regular operation of the organization.

Dimopoulos et al. (2010) explored the causes and effects of CEO turnover from a sample from COMPUSTAT Global that covers 95% of the total European market; and developed a final sample of 950 U.K. firms and 340 German firms from various industries. A collection of CEO turnover data by tracking the records of U.K. and German companies was performed. The data was analyzed utilizing statistics about the organizations, including information gathered about the board of directors and the nature of the turnovers. The results of the study indicated that managerial turnover has an asymmetric relationship to firm performance and if properly executed, turnover events may trigger improvements in the organizational performance of companies. Turnover events generally did not affect the performance of already high-performing organizations.

Researchers found that it was better for low-performing organizations to hire an outsider CEO instead of an internal resource if the senior management team lacked discipline.

Research conducted by Headlight International (2010) explored the effects of CEO turnover by comparing the performance of the company before and after a CEO turnover event. The study consisted of qualitative interviews conducted in 341 companies listed by the Swedish Stock Exchange from the period of 1994-2009. Results of the information gathered in the study indicate that CEO turnover in the Swedish Stock Exchange almost doubled from 8.4% in 1994 to 16.4% in 2008. The question of changing a negative performance by the company by changing the CEO is actually a viable solution was a topic of the study. The findings in this case study demonstrated that CEO turnover had negative effects on company performance but is not necessarily a negative event. Most negative effects arose from the difficulty of the CEO fitting in with the company environment. The negative effects may be mitigated by assisting the CEO in his/her integration into the company.

Khurana et al. (2000) conducted a similar study exploring the performance consequences of CEO turnover in historical cases. The sample consisted of the Fortune 200 companies in 1978. Turnover data was tracked and gathered from Standard and Poor's Register of Corporations, Directors, and Executives; and additional information regarding the officers of the companies were gathered from business publications like New York Times, Forbes magazine, and the Wall Street Journal Index. Annual operating returns were utilized as the variable to describe the operating performance of the organization and served as the dependent variable of the study. The independent variables included the type of departure and the origin of the successor. Four different types of

CEO turnover were discovered: (a) natural turnover succeeded by an insider, (b) forced turnover succeeded by an insider, (c) natural turnover succeeded by an outsider, and (d) forced turnover succeeded by an outsider. Their results showed that the first type of turnover had little effect on the performance of the firm. The forced types of turnover would typically have disruptive effect; however, when it's combined with an outsider successor, performance improvements could potentially occur. This study shows that turnover could potentially be beneficial to an organization if done properly.

Information from multiple studies demonstrated the importance of the CEO in the performance of the organization as a whole (Adams et al., 2005; Bennesen et al, 2012). The forced or natural turnover of a CEO also has an effect on the performance of his/her organization. The reasons for CEO turnover and its effect on companies from various industries are observed in literature (Jenter et al., 2010; Huson et al., 2001); however, there is much more information to be uncovered concerning the effects of CEO changes on senior manager teams in U.S. airports.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Research Design and Approach**

The research was accomplished by using a qualitative phenomenological approach to study the shared, lived experiences of senior management members of U.S. airports when there was a change in the CEO position. The information gathered from this study may further be used as a basis for further research into the topic of reducing anxiety and stress for employees affected by this type of change.

I used a qualitative method in the present study to achieve the following goals: To study a particular aspect of the participant's life; obtain the viewpoints of the participants; to understand the environmental context of the participant's experience; to glean insight into participant's social behavior; and to obtain data from several sources of information (Yin, 2011). These five factors are the hallmark of a qualitative study. This is descriptive research—that is, research concerning the participants and the situation that the researcher has knowledge of and desires to describe the observations and finding of the research (Sandelowski, 2000).

I used a phenomenological study to answer the research question about what it was like to experience a certain lived event. The phenomenological inquiry method allowed me to determine whether an essence is part of a shared experience to interpret the event in a way that will be useful to those reading the study (Law et al., 1998). In a phenomenological study, the researcher has set aside her own experience of a leadership change to objectively understand the experiences of the participants (Nieswiadomy, 1993). A phenomenological study focuses on the essence or structure of an experience, and the assumption is that essence is shared among the participants (Merriam, 2002). The

relation of a phenomenological study to this research is that the senior management team of a given U.S. airport will have experienced a change in leadership and that this experience was a shared one among that group of people. The phenomenological study allowed the participants to share their experiences from their unique perspective; this data was gathered to explore this particular phenomena. I employed transcendental or psychological phenomenology in this study (Moustakas, 1994). This type of inquiry focuses on the experiences of the participants, rather than on the interpretation of the participant's experiences by the researcher. It was important for me to 'bracket' my experiences with the occurrence of having experienced a change in a top leadership position to focus fully and objectively on the experiences of the participants. I work at a U.S. airport in a senior management position and have experienced a change in the top leadership position at the airport and cannot allow my personal experience to bias the study.

Information gathered for this study falls under four basic categories: contextual, perceptual, demographic, and theoretical (Bloomberg et al., 2012). Contextual information refers to the environment and culture in which the participants work; perceptual information is the information that is received from the participant's viewpoint, the information may or may not be factual. Demographic information describes facts and data about the participant, such as gender, length of service, job title, etc. Theoretical information provides a background about the topic of inquiry, what is already known about this topic (Bloomberg et al., 2012). The contextual information gathered in this study is addressed by asking the question of what the participant's experience was like during the months following the CEO transition. The demographic



information was obtained by me from each participant and includes the job title, gender, age, years of experience in the field, and number of years served at the airport. The theoretical information consists of a discussion of the uncertainty theory of stress, and organizational stress theory, generally.

### **Population Description**

A non-random, convenience sample was utilized, as the present study must by definition use a naturally formed group (Creswell, 2009). The population in the present study consisted of those in the role of a senior manager who worked in a U.S. airport and had undergone a change in the CEO or top leadership position. Three different airports with a total of three to four participants in each airport were interviewed for the purpose of gathering information for this study.

### **Sample Size**

Qualitative samples must be large enough to ensure that all important perceptions are discovered, but not so large that the information becomes redundant, or that the researcher has reached a saturation point (Mason, 2010). Creswell (1998) suggested that five to 25 participants was an optimal amount for a qualitative, phenomenological study; Morse (1994) stated that there should be at least six participants for a good qualitative, phenomenological study. The sample size used in the present study contained 11 participants.

### **Purposive Sampling**

A purposive sampling method was used. Purposive sampling or judgment sampling is nonrandom and nonprobable; this method was chosen in the present study to deliberately choose informants or participants for the qualities they possess or the

experiences they had undergone (Tongco, 2007). Criteria used to select the appropriate participants included a definition of the research problem and a determination of the type of information needed (Tongco, 2007). The use of purposive sampling supported the selection of participants in order to glean information critical to the research (Denscombe, 2007). The selection of those individuals who are or were senior managers, who work or worked in a U.S. airport in that capacity, and had undergone a change in leadership at the CEO level as participants were crucial to obtain information for the purpose of this research.

### **Participants and Setting**

The participants were members of a senior management team who currently work or have worked for a U.S. airport. The titles of those individuals were senior vice president, vice president, director, and manager. The participant gender demographics consisted of nine males and two females. The participant's ages ranged from 35 to 62. The years of experience in their functional field ranged from 15 to 30 years. The number of years the participants served at their perspective airports was from five to 35 years of service.

### **Protection of the Participants**

The present study was conducted under the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, Standard Four: Privacy and Confidentiality (2010).

The demographic information of the participants consisted of the job title, gender, age, years of experience in the field, and number of years served at the airport. No information was gathered pursuant to the individual's name, in order to protect the

participant's identity. A pseudonym was utilized; each participant was assigned a letter beginning with A-1 through D-4. The interview was conducted on a voluntary basis, and the participants were provided with the foreseeable use of the information gathered as well as being provided with a copy of the resulting study in its entirety.

The results of the interview were recorded electronically. I administered an interview questionnaire in a person-to-person format. I asked the questions and electronically recorded the responses as they were given as well as took notes. A disclosure statement was provided for each participant.

### **Procedures Used**

An interview template was created containing questions designed to elicit the experience of each participant. Probe questions were created in the event that the participant did not respond to the original question or the participant needed clarification to the original question. Dr. Beehr and Dr. Bhagat's (1985) input was sought in creating the interview template to assist in the proper application of the uncertainty theory of stress to the participant's experience.

Triangulation of the data is a method employed in order to increase the accuracy of the findings in a study (Cutcliffe et al., 1999) and was used in this study. "If a label appears repeatedly, then the researcher can be satisfied with its existence" (Cutcliffe et al., 1999, p. 379). Triangulation occurs by observing the uniformity of various data sources within the same method (Patton, 1999). The authenticity of the participant, phenomena, or circumstances was used as a criterion for validity (Whittemore et al., 2001). Attention to the authenticity of both the participants and circumstances increases descriptive and interpretive validity. Attention to authenticity also serves to mitigate

threats of bias and distortion and to contribute to a higher level of quality in the research (Maxwell, 1996).

### **Development of the Instrument**

The interview questions were designed to assist the participant to reconstruct their experiences in the transition of a new CEO. The purpose of this in-depth interview was not to elicit answers to questions, but to listen to the experiences of the participants (Seidman, 1999). The questions were non-directive and open-ended in order to encourage a robust description of their experience (Waters, n.d.). The interview protocol used in the research is included in Appendix G. The use of probe questions in order to mine more detail from the participant when the response was ambiguous or interesting was important (Smith et al., 2009) and used in the interviews. Structured probe questions were included in the interview protocol.

Probe questions were used during the interview and were generated from the participant's responses. The interview questionnaire is a structured and a semi-structured instrument (Roulston, 2010). Follow up questions such as 'tell me more about...' or 'you mentioned...could you expand on that' were asked during the interview in order to elicit more information from the participant. Avoidance of any tendency to use my own terms to sum up what the participants have said must be achieved in order not to introduce words or concepts that the participants would not have utilized (Roulston, 2010). The responses must consist purely of the participant's responses.

The probe questions were designed to elicit information in the extent possible to gain more information about the primary topic of the interview. The probe questions were designed around emerging themes and concepts found in the review of literature (Kelly,

2010) and were planned to avoid placing restrictions on the type of information gathered from the participants.

**Introductory Question:**

1. What is/was your role or job title at the time the transition took place?

*Related follow-up questions*

- How long were you or have you been in that role?
- How long have you generally been in the role of a senior manager?
- Was the incoming CEO an internal or external candidate?

2. Did you remain employed with the airport after the new CEO began employment?

*Related follow up questions if participant remained employed with the airport.*

- What do you believe about why you remained employed under the new CEO?
- What actions did you take, if any, to remain employed?

*Related probe questions if participant did not remain employed with the airport.*

- Under what type of circumstances were you separated from employment at the airport? Describe.
- What were your feelings and emotions at this time?
- Was there a period of time when you felt you would be separated from employment? Describe your feelings about potential separation. What did you do when the separation of employment took place?
- How long did the period of time last where you felt uncertainty about whether or not you would remain employed by the airport.

**Broad questions**

1. When you first heard that there would be a change in the CEO position, describe your reactions in terms of what you were thinking and feeling.

*Related probe questions*

- How would you describe your working relationship with the outgoing CEO?
- Have you experienced similar types of transitions? How was this transition compared to the previous transition(s)? In what way was it same? In what way was it different?

2. What was your role in the transition?

*Related probe questions*

- If you took an active role in the selection of the CEO, describe your activities in the selection process. How did you experience the role?

3. Describe your experience of being a senior manager under the new CEO when the CEO was first hired.

4. Describe for me what it was like to be in the airport 4 to 6 months after the new CEO was installed.

*Related probe questions*

- How did your relationship with your CEO change over the course of the 6 months after hire?
- Was your relationship worse or better or the same? Describe.
- Can you describe how you felt valued by the CEO?

5. Describe your experiences of stress, strain, or anxiety as a result of the transition.

*Related probe questions*

- How uncertain were you about obtaining the outcome you desired?
- How important was your success in this situation to you?
- How long of a time period did the stress, strain, or anxiety last?
- How long of a time period did the transition last?

### **Validity of the Instrument**

In order to establish internal validity of the interview questionnaire, a panel of five experts evaluated the survey instrument's clarity and viability (Martinez, 2008). Two of the panel experts were qualitative methods scholars who were teaching at Walden University at the time of this writing. In addition, three content experts were chosen. One was chosen from the academic literature used to write this research in the area of the dynamics of leadership transition. The other two content experts developed the uncertainty theory of stress (Beehr et al., 1985) used in this study as a gauge of the amount of stress participants experience in the leadership transition.

All of the experts were invited to participate as a panel expert via an e-mail invitation. A copy of the invitation letter is included in Appendixes B and C. The panel experts received a draft of the interview questionnaire and gave me their feedback either via return e-mail or marked up the interview questionnaire using the review tool in Microsoft Word, or did both. I incorporated the feedback into the interview questionnaire, answered any questions that the panel experts may have posed and then sent back a final draft for review to the panel experts. At that point, the interview questionnaire was finalized and included in Chapter 3 and in Appendix D.

### **Data Collection & Instrumentation**

An in-person interview utilizing the interview protocol was conducted in order to ask the participants about their experiences during the leadership transition. The protocol is presented in Appendix D. Prospective participants were invited to participate via an e-mail letter, when the participant agreed to the interview, an in-person meeting was scheduled between the researcher and the participant. A total of 15 participants were invited to take part in the interview, 11 agreed to participate. The interviews were conducted at each airport. At two of the airports, the interviews were completed in one day and in one airport, the interviews were completed over three days. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The interview questionnaire template was two pages long, and consisted of 22 questions, excluding demographic questions. The interview questionnaire was designed to ascertain the stress or anxiety experienced, the duration of the stress, and the importance of the situation to the participant. Questions about the participant's experience were also asked. The length of the interview was 45 minutes to an hour (See Appendix D).

### **Demographic and Other Questions**

Demographic information provides facts about who the participants are. Specific factors are age, gender, race, domicile, gender, occupation, etc. This information assists the researcher in explaining findings that materialize in a study (Bloomberg et al., 2012). Demographic information gathered in the present study included age, gender, years of service, title, and whether or not the participant was still employed by the airport at the time of the interview. Demographic questions are categorized as factual, and like attitude



and behavior questions, may be subject to flaws, such as lapse in memory, information withholding, or untruthfulness (Schneider et al., 2012).

Other types of questions asked in the interview questionnaire template were both attitude questions and behavior questions. Attitude questions are designed to capture a participant's feelings or beliefs; behavior questions "tap into specific aspects of current or past behavior, such as its frequency, intensity and timing" (Schneider et al., 2012, p. 41). The authors advise that these types of questions are subject to the clarity of the participant's memory and recollection abilities and so are best asked of more recent events.

### **Uncertainty Theory of Stress**

The interview questionnaire template was used to collect information from the participants. The questionnaire was designed to gather information concerning the participant's perceived uncertainty of obtaining the desired outcome, or retaining their position at the airport; the participant's perceived importance of the outcome; and the duration of the participant's perceived uncertainties (Cooper, 1998). These factors are the basis of the uncertainty theory of stress (Beehr et al., 1985) and are the foundation for the questions contained in the interview questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis**

A review of the data collected was performed. The first step in analyzing the collected data was to review all of the collected information several times, to write down observations about the interview as the review was conducted and developed the textural description of the event. The second step in analyzing the data was to review the observations performed in step one for recurrent or emerging themes. Identification and

coding data with recurrent themes from each participant was conducted, as well as identification of where the data varied. Then, the identified themes were brought together into consequential relationships or conceptual similarities with each other. The account of the core elements of the shared experiences was described (Fossey et al., 2002), developing a textural description, i.e., what the participants experienced as well as a structural description in the context of the situation or how the participant experienced the event (Creswell, 2013).

The final step in the data analysis was to develop a table of themes. The table contains the structure of the themes as well as sub-themes. The information collected was cross-referenced for purposes of review (Ballad et al., 2012). This information may be used for future studies of this subject matter.

### **Summary**

In order to understand the shared, lived experiences of a group of people who have experienced a similar event, the design and methodology used to collect the information in a manner that will yield the best results is critical. In the present study, the participants who were selected had undergone the experience of having been part of a senior management team at a U.S. airport, and had the experience of being part of an event where there had been a change in the top leadership position at that airport.

Demographic information was collected from the participants such as length of service with the airport, age, gender, title, and whether or not they were still employed by the airport. The participant's confidentiality was protected using the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, Standard Four: Privacy and Confidentiality (2010). Participants were not specifically

identified in the study, but were assigned an anonymous letter as an identifier for purposes of data collection. The factors of the uncertainty theory of stress (Beehr et al., 1985) were employed as a basis for the questions contained in the interview questionnaire template.

Finally, the collected data was analyzed using a triangulation method of analysis (Cutcliffe et al., 1999). Data triangulation utilizes various sources of data in order to increase the validity of the study. As the data was analyzed, feedback from the participants was evaluated to determine areas of conformity as well as areas of deviation (Guion et al., 2011). The information was labeled and categorized as major themes emerge to determine areas of significance in the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

This purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of senior managers at three airports who have experienced transitions in leadership positions using the uncertainty theory of organizational stress (Beehr et al., 1985). Data was coded using Nvivo 11 software. Using interpretive phenomenological reduction methods, three conceptual tasks were used to conduct analysis: epoche, eidetic reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). The epoche phase involves the temporary suspension of the researcher's biases and preconceived notions about the examined phenomenon. In this processes, researcher bias checking was conducted to allow for variation and flexibility during analysis. During the eidetic reduction phase, the "core" of the phenomenon was explored by repeatedly analyzing data to reveal additional layers of information and reflections of experience that are not as easily distinguished from surface appearances. The imaginative variation phase centered on scope expansion of the phenomenon, by contextually analyzing different types of relationships, functions, and outlying information. This chapter will include sections discussing the research setting, participant demographics, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and a chapter summary. The research questions used in this study asked:

- "What are the shared, lived experiences of senior managers who have experienced a change in their top leadership position?"
- "What are the shared, lived experiences of senior managers who successfully transitioned to working under a new CEO?"

### **Research Setting**

Senior staff from three airports were participants in this study, including Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run Airport (DTW), Indianapolis Airport (IND), and Memphis-Shelby Airport (MEM). Different transitional experiences occurred throughout each of the airports. The structured internal succession plan at MEM allowed for familiarity with the new CEO candidate and the future directions and management styles. Still, employees were not highly involved during the hiring process. The participants at MEM found that the development of trust relationships and social exchanges in the workplace affected their experiences. Involvement with new leaders in a transitional organizational phase is risk-based, and this requires individuals to develop an open mind in order to allow for trust building. Participants expressed concerns with working for a new leader, but the senior managers eventually developed a sense of trust and excitement about developing new strategies.

MEM ended up bringing in a CEO candidate to work alongside the incumbent CEO, allowing for the staff to adjust to new leadership, further develop future business and management plans, and observe the CEO candidate's behavior and specialization. During this process, the CEO candidate did not serve in regular CEO duties, but was involved in organizational operations as a peer. Though the timeline was planned, the incumbent CEO ended up leaving several months ahead of schedule, causing stress and anxiety among staff members during the transition. Participants described uncertainty about why the transition had occurred abruptly and expressed concerns about future directions of the organization.

At IND, the senior management participated in the selection process of the new CEO. The participants found the board members' confidence in senior managements to participate in the hiring process to be an effective method for developing support and buy-in for the incoming CEO. This experience, overall, fostered an empowering and successful transition process. Participants indicated that this experience was unique, and not something that they had experienced in other transitions. Participants felt confident in providing their feedback and opinions about the CEO candidates.

The participants emphasized that this process was empowering and effective. Eventually, the favorite candidate among senior staff was chosen. The participants indicated that they felt valued during this experience, and the ability to become familiarized with a candidate during decision-making processes created an empowering and autonomous work environment. In addition, the new leader promoted a positive and creative work environment, exhibited genuine concern over the well-being of the airport and employees, and sought to streamline developmental improvements and positive changes.

However, participants at DTW described stressful experiences during two transitional periods. The first transition involved bringing in a political CEO from the outside without any staff involvement during the selection process. This action fostered negative work climates and amplified stress, as the CEO was perceived to be unqualified for the position. The second CEO was an internal candidate, and this leader was found to be more suitable to the position. The first CEO served in the role for a period of two months, and then the CEO's employment was severed by the board.

The participants at DTW felt that their lack of involvement during the selection process and concerns over ethical behaviors of the board negatively affected work experiences and job satisfaction. The senior managers expressed concerns about having no input in the decision-making process and the effect of political scandals on their work performance due to the CEO's actions. The participants frequently experienced stress and anxiety about job security, the future of the organization, and whether they would be valued by new leaders. A general feeling of unease and trepidation plagued participants during these transitional phases.

Though the participants were not involved in the selection of the second candidate, the new CEO addressed concerns of the senior managers and attempted to bring stability to the organization. The new CEO was an internal candidate and a runner up from the previous session. The participants found the new candidate to be a relief from the previous CEO. Still, participants described continued feelings of anxiety due to uncertainty about how long the stability would last and a lack of trust in the organization's actions.

### **Demographics**

Senior managers from three airports were interviewed during the study. The participation criterion for the study was that they were either currently or had previously held a role as a senior manager in a U.S. airport. The participants were randomly selected from a larger pool of senior managers who had previously worked at U.S. airport or who were currently in the role of a senior manager at a U.S. airport. The total survey population for this study was thirty-one people. Eleven of these individuals were selected, three from the Wayne County Airport Authority (Detroit Metropolitan & Willow Run

Airports); four from the Memphis-Shelby Airport Authority; and four from the Indianapolis Airport Authority. Responses were grouped into the Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run Airport (DTW) staff, Indianapolis Airport (IND) staff, and Memphis-Shelby Airport (MEM) staff. Participant ages ranged from 35 to 62 years of age, and experience ranged from 15 to 30 years.

All participants were interviewed in a face-to-face meeting with me. I traveled to both the Memphis-Shelby Airport Authority and the Indianapolis Airport Authority to personally meet with the participants. I currently work at the Wayne County Airport Authority, and the interviews were conducted in each participant's office, not my office. All participants signed informed consent forms and each airport executed a letter of cooperation so that the study could be conducted at each respective airport. The interviews were electronically recorded to capture all the data, and were transcribed by a professional transcription service. In addition, the researcher also took notes during the interview sessions. Table 1 displays the demographic data for the participants.

Table 1

*Summary of Participant Demographics*

Participant	Airport
A1	Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run (DTW)
B1	
C1	
D1	Indianapolis (IND)
D2	
D3	
D4	
A2	Memphis-Shelby (MEM)
A3	
A4	
A5	



### **Data Collection**

Purposive sampling, a strategy used to select participants based off of their ability to provide information critical to the study, was used to generate a sample of senior staff from the three different airports. Prospective participants were invited to participate in an email letter and teleconferences or in-person meetings were scheduled. Interviews were approximately 45 minutes long and were conducted over a period of six weeks.

Individuals were recruited and selected if they fit study criteria. Selection criteria included candidates that were senior managers at a U.S. airport who have undergone leadership changes at the CEO level. All participants were informed of the study's purposes and consented to participate in the data collection process. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions using a semi-structured interview protocol that was created with input from Dr. Beehr and Dr. Bhagat's (1985) interview template. Interview questions were designed to address research questions pertaining to the shared, lived experiences of transitional leadership changes. Structured probe questions were also used to elicit more descriptive responses from participants.

### **Data Analysis**

During data analysis, it was expected that three key themes of uncertainty theory of organizational stress would be present, including: (1) effect uncertainty, (2) response uncertainty, and (3) state uncertainty. These themes center on participant perceptions of uncertainty and the thought processes experienced during transitional times. Effect uncertainty involves perceptions about the state of the environment or a particular component of the environment. This refers to a lack of clear understanding of how components of an organizational environment will be changing. Response uncertainty

involves the exploration of appropriate response options that are available during a transitional period. Response uncertainty usually involves a lack of knowledge where individuals believe they must respond due to a perceived need to react to an organizational shift. Effect uncertainty focuses on the perceived environmental impact of organizational transitions. Individuals may experience effect uncertainty when they feel uncertain about the nature and severity of a change event on an organization's functioning. This allowed for data interpretation by assessing the themes and patterns that emerged with the literature findings.

Data analysis followed a modified van Kaam design. Data was read in its entirety to gain a holistic understanding of the information. After becoming familiar with the data, several steps ensued. In the first step, lists and categories of data were created to serve as a preliminary foundation. In the second step, categories and themes were reduced by eliminating redundancies. In the third step, the data was clustered again. In the fourth step, the themes were created from the available data. Effect uncertainty, state uncertainty, and response uncertainty were themes that were documented; however, these themes were modified to effect experiences, state experiences, and response experiences incorporate a wider range of experiences. In the fifth, sixth, and seventh steps, the construction of an individual textual description, a structural textual description, and a textual-structural description of the essence of experiences was used to understand and interpret the observed themes. In the final step, data was organized by the research questions, and themes and subthemes encompassing the essence of shared experiences were reported. Textual descriptions from participant interviews were incorporated to reflect broad understandings of shared, lived experiences of the participants.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Several steps were taken to address issues of trustworthiness within the qualitative research paradigm. Adjustments were made to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the present study.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility was maintained by adopting well-established research methods and by incorporating researcher reflexivity within data collection and analysis procedures. Familiarity with the participating organization was obtained through the consultation of appropriate research and engagement with the participants. Triangulation of interview data with stress measurements and the use of peer review, thick description of the phenomenon, and reflexivity throughout the research process were also utilized to improve internal validity of the results.

#### **Transferability**

Transferability was maintained by providing information about the number of organizations participating in the study, number of participants and demographic information relevant to the study, and disclosure of the data collection methods used.

#### **Dependability**

Dependability was established by providing a detailed account of the research design and implementation of data collection and analysis procedures and by addressing the detailed nuances of data collection throughout the study.

### **Confirmability**

Lastly, confirmability was ascertained by reporting research limitations and potential researcher bias. This involved the use of detailed methodological procedures and explanations for methodology choices that were made in the study.

### **Study Results**

Themes that were examined during analysis include: (1) effect experience, (2) response experience, (3) state experience, (4) empowerment, and (5) autonomous work environment. Subthemes that were observed include: (1) job security, (2) taking initiative, (3) ethics, (4) learning curve, (5) demonstrating skill and value, (6) creating a sense of security, (7) work climate, (8) collaboration and involvement, (9) future directions, and (10) prioritization. All groups reported themes of effect experiences, response experiences, and state experiences, and the subtheme of demonstrating skill and value was equally prevalent among staff at all of the airports. However, several key differences were observed. Senior managers at DTW more frequently expressed subthemes of job security, demonstrating skill and value, and work climate. Prioritization, demonstrating skill and value, and future directions were more significant for IND senior managers. Finally, learning curve, prioritization, demonstrating skill and value, and work climate were the most significant subthemes in interviews with senior managers at MEM.

### **Research Question 1**

“What are the shared lived experiences of senior managers who have experienced a change in their top leadership position?” In this research question, participant lived experiences during leadership transitions were analyzed. Data was examined in its

entirety and was guided by organizational stress theory components. The concepts of state uncertainty, effect uncertainty, and response uncertainty were organizational stress theory tenets that were observed during analysis. However, these factors emerged as both positive and negative experiences and did not emerge solely as negative affect experiences with uncertainty. Observed themes include: (1) effect experiences, (2) response experiences, and (3) state experiences.

### **Effect Experiences**

The theme of effect experiences centered on participant perceptions and thought processes about the organizational effects of leadership change. Effect experiences involve predictions about the organizational state and subsequent cause-effect reactions perceived to occur during organizational transitions. This theme coincided with the effect uncertainty theme of organizational stress theory; however, effect experiences also encompass participant security and confidence in understanding the effects of leadership change. Table 2 displays the number of occurrences and percent of occurrences for Theme 1. This theme was the most significant in participant B1 and D1 in DTW and IND staff, but occurred equally among MEM staff. Observed subthemes include: (1) prioritization, (2) learning curve, and (3) job security.

Table 2

#### *Summary of Findings for Theme 1: Effect Experiences*

	Number of occurrences ( <i>n</i> = 77)	Percentage of occurrences ( <i>n</i> = 77)
Effect experiences	77	100
<i>Subtheme</i> : Prioritization	32	42
<i>Subtheme</i> : Learning curve	23	30
<i>Subtheme</i> : Job security	22	29

**Prioritization.** In this subtheme, hierarchical processes, task management, and goal attainment were examined. Prioritization perceptions ranged from views on how leaders managed airport operations to views on the value of staff members in the organization. Participants indicated that perceptions on leadership priorities affected workflow in both positive and negative ways. Negative perceptions generated feelings of uncertainty about organizational mission and goal accomplishment. Positive perceptions of appropriate prioritizations improved work productivity and generated feelings of accomplishment in senior managers. Participant A1 described positive perceptions of prioritization, emphasizing that having a clear understanding of a leader's priorities allowed for staff to perform efficiently:

Tried to find out what was important to each one of the CEOs, what their primary focus was going to be; and in the case of TM, she was interested in Public Safety and felt it was important to her role. With TN, it became extremely clear that it is the absolute primary focus (public safety), and he has continually made that clear at numerous meetings and in front of the public and the board. The first words out of his mouth were that safety and security was the most important issue.

Participant D4 discussed a negative view of prioritization, noting the incongruence between the organizational and authoritative missions:

The most significant transition was when we were privatized and when BAA came in around 1995, had only been here a year when they came in. The biggest question in terms of transition because we had a different employer, this is a unique circumstance. This was a for-profit, publically traded company in the U.K. I was most apprehensive was what would happen with my job because my

employer changed so that the whole mission of that organization was very different from the mission of the Authority. That was probably my most anxiety in a transition. Had only been there for a year, I was very young. The bulk of the top senior leaders at the airport did not make it through that transition.

Participant A2, on the other hand, felt that prioritization was a dynamic process that developed during a leader's transition into a new role. Participant A2 described prioritization experiences, stating that:

Yes, there has been a difference, more differences six months out because in his previous role he was the CFO, and so he still likes to get his hands into the CFO business. We used to tease him about letting it go, and now six months out, he is now finally letting go of it and letting me have more control of it and autonomy and he is focusing on other things.

*Learning curve.* This subtheme focused on how participants described undergoing transitions in knowledge, function, and management practices. Participants described feelings of insecurity when discussing learning curves they faced during leadership change. Participants also mentioned that leaders often experienced a learning curve when transitioning into new roles and adapting to a new environment. Discussions of learning curve focused on uncertainty about adapting to new practices and management styles. Participant C1, when discussing TM's leadership transition, described thoughts of uncertainty and stress associated with the unpredictability of the leadership transition:

I thought there could be an opportunity if we had somebody come in from the outside to come in and change our corporate culture for the good. Originally it

was billed as a nationwide search, but as time went on, it became clear that it was just going to be a local search – in fact, there were feelings that there was someone already selected and that an outside person was looking to put his candidate in order to take over the airport. At first, I felt a little excitement, thinking that we need to change our culture; someone from the outside might bring in something positive. The negative side was, oh no, someone from the outside is going to come in and change everything! Is it going to be good or bad? The senior managers had no input at all; it was going to be just whoever the board picked. So now, I had to start thinking about how he would work with this person. There was some anxiety about the learning curve – so there was a mix of excitement and some anxiety. As the process went forward, the anxiety increased.

Participant D4 also described feelings of uncertainty and stress with learning how to work with a new leader with different experiences and leadership styles than the previous leader:

Trying to understand his perspective, his leadership style, hot button areas, which were different from the previous leader. I had to fairly quickly address some staffing issues within the team because there was a higher level of focus on areas such as public affairs and marketing than the previous leadership. I recognized that I did not have the skill sets in my staff that I needed to be successful given the focus, so I had to take action with my staff. It was difficult because you realize you have people on your staff who do not fit but you have developed relationships with them and care for them. Some were long-term employees, it was hard. On a



business level, it makes sense. There is normal apprehension when you have got to transition and staff are not meeting expectations.

When discussing learning curve experiences, Participant A2 compared recent leadership changes with previous ones:

The current transition was completely different from the other that was experienced. First of all, because we were part of the succession plan and understood what was going to happen and we already had a really good working relationship with the person who was going to be the successor. It wasn't even like there was much of a change. We knew his management style was a little bit different, and the way he approached things was a little bit different, but we had worked with him, or I had worked with him for so many years that we understood how each other operated and it didn't change.

Finally, Participant A5 emphasized the difficulties leaders faced with learning new skills and adapting to change:

It continues to a large degree. It just depends on the day. Well over a year. The CEO is still transitioning, I would say, but it wasn't very long before the door was closed on the previous CEO and the new CEO showed up.

***Job security.*** In this subtheme, perceptions on employee value and functionality in the organization were examined. Job security was more prevalent in discussions with DTW staff than IND or MEM staff. The participants discussed feelings of stress and anxiety about changes in leadership leading to job loss or restructuring. Discussions of job security were not related to how participants perceived their value, but, rather, centered on uncertainty about future directions and management practices. Participant B1

experienced substantial stress and anxiety during TM's leadership, and described feelings of sadness evoked by the thought of a potential impending job loss. The researcher described B1's reactions, stating:

When B1 first found out in the fall of 2009 that the board was seeking to replace LR, B1 was extremely anxious about that. B1 was not at a point in life where B1 could not have a job. B1 voiced serious concerns about the ability to get another job at that time, B1 tried to get LR to fight for his job. B1 felt that LR did not do this, or what B1 would have done if B1 were in his place. B1 did seek another job, applied at another organization, went through the interview process (very stressful), ended up coming in second – if B1 would have been given the job B1 would have left because of not knowing what was going to happen at DTW. [...] B1 would be home with family and just sobbing, it was so stressful. Just talking about it brings back those feelings, everything is all right now, but back then, it was horrible.

Participant C1 discussed feelings of anxiety and a loss of value:

TM was only CEO for six or seven weeks, but felt uncertain all of that time. There was some anxiety about who was going to remain and who wasn't, including myself. Since TN has become CEO, there have been changes in the organization, reorganizations affecting my staff. As I watch each realignment, I believe I see my value decreasing, so I get more concerned about my longevity.

While Participant A5 felt secure and valued, Participant D1 described concerns of job security, noting that new leaders occasionally bring in their own staff. Participant D1 elaborated on feelings of anxiety in staff members during the transitions:

A lot of anxiety during these transitions, and you also have to deal with your staff because they are anxious. From supervisors to managers, they worry about losing their jobs, what's going to happen. I told them to just continue to do your job, that's number one. What happens after that we have no control over – I told staff that when there is news I will share it with them immediately. The key is keep doing your job, don't participate in the rumors – it's amazing, the front line starts rumors, someone will say the new CEO is going to come in and cut jobs and the next thing you know, it snowballs to the point that managers are asking how many jobs are we cutting? I get HR involved to help stop the rumor mill – but it is really non-stop.

### **Response Experiences**

Response experiences involved participant perceptions of appropriate reactions to courses of action to take during organizational transitions. This theme centered on the ability to appropriately understand and participate in behaviors and dialogic interactions during periods of change. This theme coincided with the response uncertainty theme of organizational stress theory. However, response experiences ranged from initiative-taking reactions to feelings of unethical behavior and the need to intervene to redirect leadership priorities. Table 3 displays the number of occurrences and percent of occurrences for Theme 2. This theme was prevalent in discussions with staff from all three airports, but was the most significant in participants B1 in DTW, D4 in IND, and A3 in MEM. Observed subthemes include: (1) demonstrating skill and value, (2) creating a sense of security, and (3) taking initiative.

Table 3

*Summary of Findings for Theme 2: Response Experiences*

	Number of occurrences (n=92)	Percent of occurrences (n=92)
Response experiences	92	100
<i>Subtheme: Demonstrating skill and value</i>	52	57
<i>Subtheme: Creating a sense of security</i>	28	30
<i>Subtheme: Taking initiative</i>	12	13

***Demonstrating skill and value.*** This subtheme involved responses and actions participants took to illustrate their value and employability in the organization. Participants experienced uncertainty about whether new leaders would find them suited to the needs of the organization, so actions were taken to ensure that assistance and guidance to new leaders were provided. The subtheme of demonstrating skill and value was prevalent in discussions with staff from all three airports. Participant C1 discussed negative feelings associated with feeling undervalued by both TM and TN. With TM's leadership, Participant C1 described feeling that "he didn't have any value. Never had any real conversations with her, did not feel value there." With TN, the researcher described Participant C1's perspective on the relationship:

Started out on the positive side of neutral and went downhill from there. Believes that his value has steadily decreased and that honestly he is just waiting for C1 to retire or leave. Feels minimal value, TN has restructured the organization to put folks in positions of authority that have negated his influence and expertise.

Participant A1 also described concerns about feelings of value and employability:

Thought that there could be a clean sweep of the at-will employees here at the airport. On further reflection, I think that some of the key positions would be kept

on, and I was in, what I felt, is an important job—keep my department on an even keel throughout the transition; I knew all the pieces to the puzzle and how they fit together, so I thought that I could potentially be pretty valuable to the new CEO whoever that might be.

Conversely, Participant D3 described feeling valuable to the organization and new leadership:

I think MR understands competence, and D3 meets his expectations of that. Visions are strategically aligned, and agree on the most important components to move the organization forward. The development and sustainment of high performance provides the foundation for everything else. Worked closely with MR to develop the strategy. It is important to work with a CEO, from my perspective, who clearly understands the effect that people can have on an organization's performance and on the achievement and other goals moving ahead.

Participant D1 elaborated on how the board leaders assured staff of their value by having them participate in candidate interviews:

They were able to interview the candidates, one didn't show up. The senior directors interviewed the final three candidates. They were happy to have the opportunity to do this, they had never done this before. The board was concerned about losing staff at the airport, respected the staff and wanted them to be part of the conversation. This way they have buy-in. It was very smart on their part.

Participant D2 further described feeling valued by the leadership and discussed the effect it has during organizational transitions:

Feels valued. It is an interesting question. Feels very valued, the CEO is constantly stating it. Has also been invited to participate in initiatives more than anyone in his role has been involved in before. Part of that is because how MR values me, but also values technology as a role, is an evolving player in an airport. It is becoming much more important.

Finally, Participant A3 indicated that having the ability to gain new skills and become a valuable asset to the organization gave him the ability to advance in his career:

He gave me the opportunity to do some other stuff, and he showed me that I could do, get more done. So he showed me position. I was nothing like what Delta Airlines, I worked for like just about every operation Delta Airlines had; and then one day he came to me and said why don't you go and interview for this job in the properties department. I said I don't know these guys... he says you don't need to, I feel that your strong enough, you can have a lot of [inaudible] go through headquarters, and it's not really a big deal, you know you can come back here in a few years and probably have my job, but you know, you need to give it a few years. He was a good guy. I liked him a lot. I have a lot of respect for him and ... and took the interview and got the job, and truth be known, I was probably Delta's first African-American moved to management.

***Creating a sense of security.*** This subtheme centered on perceptions of comfort, stability, and employment security. For the participants, having a sense of security in their skills and knowledge base allowed them to work efficiently during stressful transition periods. Creating a sense of security functioned as a coping mechanism that provided stability to counteract feelings of uncertainty. Furthermore, when new leaders

provided a sense of stability by ensuring that staff continued to do their jobs as usual, the participants felt less anxious about their roles in their organizations. Participant C1 discussed the relief of stability, stating:

It was a wait and see attitude. Knew TN in his former role, waited with anticipation to see what he would be like as CEO. There was some trepidation there. There was also relief that there was some stability, because everything had been so unstable for two years.

However, Participant B1 experienced anxiety and stress due to the lack of security and stability during leadership changes:

When we found out LR was leaving, we tried to gain some legal protections with an employment agreement – this backfired and the board asked all senior managers to rescind their agreements. It was horrible. It was in early 2011, was on vacation for B1's birthday with friends and family when B1 heard the board wanted to do this. This action ruined the vacation. B1 was short on time for medical retirement vesting, felt like there was no protection. B1 had no idea what B1 would do for healthcare because B1's spouse was on DTW's plan, no protection, just horrible.

Participant D3 found that self-assurance and feelings of security garnered different perspectives on work stresses:

There was a time I might have told you 10, but now it is an eight – I had a near death experience, the world takes on a different meaning. My priorities changed. My desires for a successful career are still here, but the world won't stop turning

if I don't have a successful career. On the level of the value I place on succeeding, it is 10 out of 10, but personal stress won't allow that so it is an eight.

Participant A3 similarly described the effect of self-assurance and feelings of security.

Participant D4 further discussed creating a sense of security, noting:

The stressful transition, the earlier one, the BAA one, I think to some extent your age and years of experience can play into that though because I just think that, you know, I have been in my career, and I have been in a senior leadership role for a long time now, quite some time now. And with those years of experience, you gain confidence in your own personal skills, strengths, leadership style. You know when I think back to the BAA transition, I was brand new, I had never been an executive before, never been in an executive leadership role, and I was immediately put into one when BAA came in. They say me as an up and coming leader and put me into this role. So I think my youth and inexperience were part of the anxiety ... it was because of that. If that happened today, I think it would be a very different experience. So I think even if you were talking to someone about this experience, with MR even, that was younger, newer in their leadership experience, it would be different.

***Taking initiative.*** The taking initiative subtheme focuses on how participants actively attempted to create stability and clarify understandings of their roles in their organizations. The participants revealed that actively engaging with organizational changes allowed them to demonstrate their value and lessen anxiety with feelings of uncertainty about future directions. Participants illustrated how their involvement assisted new leaders in ensuring that stakeholder needs are addressed. The researcher described



how Participant B1 attempted to alleviate stress in the situation by actively engaging with the leaders, taking action to protect B1's job, and providing assistance during transitions:

When TM came in, B1 did a few things in anticipation. B1 spoke with a person at who had worked with TM for several years about strategies to work with TM. B1 also met with two individuals who worked at outside firms who had also worked with TM. When TM arrived, B1 met with her and told her that B1 was looking forward to working with TM, and hoped that B1 could demonstrate to TM that TM could be confident in B1's abilities. Then tried to provide TM with sound advice on subjects brought to B1's attention and sought TM out to demonstrate B1's abilities. With TN, B1 did not have to do anything in particular as there was a close working relationship established between them. B1 had worked with TN during the period of time TM was here, and was very happy when TN became CEO, no concern after that about the stability of the position.

Participant D3 described how engaging with leaders allowed for a clearer understanding of organizational vision and alignment with personal values:

I wanted to understand where directionally the new CEO was going and wanted to ensure that the vision was aligned with my own. I consider myself as employable, not just in this industry but in others. If I wasn't aligned with and growing directionally with where MR wanted to go, then I would have decisions to make. Spent time communicating with him to understand where he wanted to go, understand what he wanted from my function in driving the organization forward. I was able to exhibit by my ability, to fill the need that he identified he wanted from my function. We were able to align with each other fairly early.

Participant D4 also took actions to assist in leadership transitions:

I clarified expectations when he arrived. We, as a group, came to consensus around strategy and it was some tweaking of strategy, kept an open mind. You need to be flexible, keep an open mind, have the ability to help educate in terms of history and dynamics in terms of bringing in, onboarding, and acclimating a new leader. How to interact with the board of directors and the community. Being open to a new leader is really important. Just having an open mind and getting to know him and his leadership style and focus areas. Every time I've worked with a new leader it is a new opportunity to learn because he brings such a vast amount of experience, MR has worked in multiple airports around the world.

Participant A3 further elaborated on attempts to secure his role and assist the new leader with organizational changes:

I just need to figure out what it is the boss wants, what he would like to accomplish. What we need to clear up, what are the issues, and clearly that is one of the problems. I understand that the CEO sometimes he has to change midstream, what might be today, may not be the case tomorrow. I try to give him the best information that I have and go with it.

### **State Experiences**

State experiences centered on perceived environmental climate and organizational outcomes. This theme involved the ability to adapt to a new environment and predict the probability of certain types of change. State experiences coincided with the state uncertainty theme of organizational stress theory. The effect of state experiences affected how participants interacted with leaders and other staff members. Table 4 displays the

number of occurrences and percent of occurrences for Theme 3. This theme was the most prevalent in discussions with staff from DTW and IND, and was the most significant in discussions with participants B1 in DTW, D1 and D3 in IND, and A2 in MEM. Observed subthemes include: (1) work climate, (2) future directions, (3) collaboration and involvement, and (4) ethics.

Table 4

*Summary of Findings for Theme 3: State Experiences*

	Number of occurrences (n=194)	Percent of occurrences (n=194)
State experiences	194	100
<i>Subtheme: Work climate</i>	66	34
<i>Subtheme: Future directions</i>	58	30
<i>Subtheme: Collaboration and involvement</i>	47	24
<i>Subtheme: Ethics</i>	23	12

**Work climate.** Work climate involves perceptions about organizational relationships, motivation, and mutual respect. Participants indicated that positive work climates alleviated stress and anxiety during their experiences of leadership change. Furthermore, negative work climates elevated stress and anxiety levels. Though leadership changes created feelings of uncertainty, providing mutually beneficial work climates positively influenced participants' experiences with new leaders. Participant B1 found that stressful work climates caused undue hardship and emotional distress. The researcher described B1's experiences, stating:

Strange set of circumstances because B1 was away on vacation right before the board fired TM. During that time, there was very negative media coverage about TM's hire; there was a scandal B1 had to deal with while on vacation, answering questions, giving advice etc. Calls from board members that were extremely stressful, leading up to TM's termination. Was happy to know that TM was not

going to continue as CEO, but then immediate concern over what will happen now? Just been through three CEOs in the course of 18 months. When B1 found out TN would be the new CEO, there was a great sense of relief. There was a little bit of trepidation that a former CEO would be re-selected, that would have been negative too, but better than TM.

Participant C1 elaborated on the effect of work environments on productivity and functionality, stating:

[...] Changing CEOs is a stressful event on I think the senior management team, because I think the senior management team has typically been together for a while, has a sense of direction and teamwork and how to work together and the disruption and the uncertainty connected with changing the CEO kind of puts everything on hold and sets the senior management team in a position of wondering, are we going to change direction or are we going to get broken up and are we going to continue to be valued as a team. So I think this is a fairly stressful time when you change CEOs.

Participant D3 described feelings of uncertainty about the new work climate, stating:

It was similar to all of the other changes because one leader transitions out and their famous last words are almost always they are going to take all the wonderful things we've done and drive them forward. Anyone who has gone through a lot of changes knows that is not going to happen. The individual is going to come in with their own strategy. Not surprised as in other transitions that MR was going to take a different approach. The most significant change is that we went from a culture that has been long standing purely family oriented and capitalized on the

positive aspects and minimized the opportunities to one that really made a commitment to being high performing in all areas. There was a reorganization, clearer and more purposeful strategic message that was developed by the senior management team led by me and MR which resulted in an organization development assessment and subsequent reorganization.

Participant D1 found that the positive, respectful work climate under MR motivated staff and allowed them to transition easily:

After MR was hired, the senior management staff met. There was a transition with MR because he was moving from another state, a lot of activity on MR's part to get his family moved, a home purchased, so he spent a lot of time doing that. A little time meeting with the staff, MR's approach was not to make waves or problems during the transition. MR wanted a chance to come in and monitor, review and see what the strategic plan was for the airport, what it should be – also assess the staff, their potential and ability to do their jobs. D1 believes MR did this well. The staff felt comfortable with his approach. MR said for them to do their jobs, if you need anything come to him – MR will work with the legislative and political people, introduce himself to the community. He did this so there was not a lot of interaction; they just kept him informed, very important to him. Definitely not a micromanager, no doubt about that.

Participant D4 similarly discusses positive effects of work climates where staff feel that their work is valued:

They have weekly meetings, the executive team, and he recognizes in that executive group, individually, it goes around the table and recognizes you are

doing a great job at this. He specifically states what he likes and takes the time to recognize people in that team environment the good things that are happening from within each of their areas. He will tell you great job at a board meeting. D5 presents a lot at the board meetings because of the initiatives, the board is always interested in those things, they are high profile and so he will recognize that.

Participant A5 further described feelings of security due to the positive work climate:

A little bit apprehensive, some fear of the unknown, fear for the organization. I feared that there would be a loss of the familial atmosphere that the previous CEO had instilled in us, had brought to us. He always gave us a sense of security. He was an extraordinarily trustworthy person, every bit a gentleman, and extremely well respected by everyone.

Finally, Participant A3 indicated that stressful work climates and organizational priorities that do not align with staff can cause tension:

You know I did that for a few years. And got tired of the traveling. I just got tired of arguing with the airport too. You know the airport is about telling you what they want to do, and how they want you to do it, because they do stuff that's throwing a lot of money at it, you know because they had it, but it makes no sense without knowing what they actually needed. So I felt that I could add more value on this side ... and I just got tired of travelling so I had a good working relationship with LC here, and he brought me as a Director. So to make a long story short, I became a Vice President, and that's why I'm here.

***Future directions.*** This subtheme centered on participant perceptions of uncertainty about organizational directions and future business plans. The participants

described feeling stress due to uncertainty about new business directions and goal orientations. Participants also mentioned that they experienced anxiety due to organizational changes using unqualified leaders. For the participants, having leaders that had experience and familiarity with working in an airport provided the most beneficial relationships with employees. The researcher described Participant A1's perceptions of the changes taking place, noting:

The biggest concern was with TM because she was an unknown quantity. It was not clear in the beginning, where the board members were going; this was one of the only times where A1 was concerned. One – did they want A1 here; and two, did A1 want to stay on as a team member with that group. It was one of the only times when A1 had any concerns about where A1 would be working in the future.

Participant D3 described the importance of being able to adapt and prepare for new business directions during major organizational changes:

Have worked with companies that have been sold or acquired about four other times, each of the four times came out ok, and usually it is better positionally than before. It comes down to individual and functional confidence. Whenever there is change, if you rely on relationships and the people change, you can't be objective but if you are coming from a place of competence, your chances for a successful transition are higher than if you rely on the relationships. There is always apprehension until you know who is really going to be in place and what their agenda is.

Participant D4 expressed concern about having a leader with airport experience:

Hopeful that it would be an airport person. Because some cities or entities when they transition the CEO position at the airport, sometimes think that bringing in someone that has no airport experience. My anxiety was oh please let them bring in an airport person. And then I felt that generally if we get an airport person, they would be an advocate to establish a strategy that will be in the best interest of the airport and our community.

Participant D2 described how concerns about future directions impacted D2's work environment:

When B came in D2 wasn't at the Airport Authority, but when JC came in, there was a lot of unease at every level of the organization. Was not a senior manager, did not think D2's job would be eliminated, but left voluntarily because D2 didn't like what JC was doing to the organization. Was there around six months with JC.

Finally, Participant A4 found that even when employees sought to prepare for organizational change, unexpected events and uncertainty about future decisions created anxiety:

It is important to understand something too; the stress came when SB moved into that role. A lot of change occurred at that time. LC was supposed to leave in July, LC ended up leaving in December (prior to July). LC was still there, still on staff, but no longer came to work anymore. LC was a consultant to SB when needed. That change, the announcement period was very short. We understood LC was leaving and July 15 was to be the last day. SB was already getting ready to step in; SB stepped into the role this past year, so the stress went up when that occurred because it was much sooner than anticipated. There is some question as



to why that occurred and what all was going on behind the scenes, but simultaneously with this there was a transition in board responsibility too and that created additional stress with a complete turnover of the board essentially now with the exception of one individual who had been here three years ago. Everyone else in that office had been changed out and prior to them, most of those board members had been in place 10 plus years. So with that change, and this very short notice change, it created a lot of angst among our staff. So the stress level certainly went up at that point in time and continued because of some of the uncertainties of not being able to read the tea leaves, like I mentioned earlier.

***Collaboration and involvement.*** This subtheme focused on experiences working with others and remaining involved during decision-making processes. The participants found that having involvement during interview processes made transitioning to drastic organizational changes easier. Furthermore, not having the ability to collaborate or assist in decision-making processes increased levels of stress and anxiety. The researcher described Participant B1's difficulties:

One of the first things to mention is the feeling that the senior management team was fractured, because there was no team it was every man and women out for themselves. TM did not have a team approach to anything, TM did not really talk to us as a group, so it was survive or be gone. Total lack of a team approach. B1 tried to be helpful to TM, introduced TM to people at the airlines, but things quickly changed with the board firing TM. TM did not have a clue on how to manage. The appointment was so purely political TM had no idea what TM was doing. It was sad for B1 because of feeling an investment of many years to make

the organization a great place to work and to do the job extremely well and overnight we were a political hotspot, in the news in a negative way. It was sad. B1 felt sad.

Participant D4 found that collaboration during the interview process promoted positive transition experiences for the employees:

We were actually allowed to sit in on the interviews and so we thought that was pretty cool. In the transition process, MR came to us seeking our input, we felt like key issues and opportunities existed without our areas of expertise. It was a key part of the transition; MR also looked to us to provide a background about interacting with our board members, community leaders, key issues from the community, from a stakeholder perspective, that was certainly part of the transition.

*Ethics.* This subtheme involved perceptions of moral behavior and judgment of new leaders. It was found that unethical behavior created negative work experiences and impacted job performance. Moreover, leaders that demonstrated ethical behaviors had a positive effect on work flow and investment from employees. The researcher described B1's frustration with unethical business practices from the organization:

B1 knew that the board was conducting a search process. This process led to TM being hired, the way the process was handled was not best practice. Senior leaders were not part of giving input in the process; we could have provided valuable input. B1 had to deal with the ramifications of the decision as part of the job. That was also very stressful. Remembers finding out that TM was selected, not TN – difficult to resurrect that feeling, B1's heart just sank, what were we going to do

now. Had no role in the transition. The whole thing was different. The manner in which the board conducted the search was not how B1 had seen other searches conducted. The airport had to deal with the lawsuit claiming a violation of the Open Meetings Act and losing because it was conducted improperly. The board was working with the advice of outside counsel. It did not turn out well except that we ended up with a good result with TN as our CEO. TM's employment was terminated, and there was very stressful litigation for the next two years.

Participant D3 indicated that efforts taken to ensure ethical business conduct had an effect on work experiences during the transition:

Was in the liaison position between the board and the senior management team in providing feedback, and participating in the interview process. The senior team was actively involved in the interview process. I was the one who summarized the feedback from the senior managers to provide a written summary to the board concerning the assessments of the candidates. It was interesting that D3 structured it where the current leader was part of the assessment but did not participate with the senior management team. The assessment was separate because B's influence on the team members, there was fear that the team would be swayed by B's opinion. So B was asked by me to leave the room with the other candidates and B gave feedback separately.

Finally, Participant D1 stated that ethical behaviors and concern for employees differ between private sector and government municipality jobs:

There were similarities in the transitions, but more stressful in the private sector because they can just do what they want to do. Being connected with a

government municipality, there are some things they are more concerned about, political fallout of cutting jobs – you wouldn't find that in the public sector.

### **Research Question 2**

“What are the shared lived experiences of senior managers who successfully transitioned to working under a new CEO?” In this research question, effective organizational transitions were analyzed. The airports examined underwent different types of transitions. While MEM had a structured internal succession plan, IND had an effective selection process that empowered employees and included them in decision-making processes. However, stress during the DTW transition was high due to perceived unethical behaviors and a lack of involvement during the selection process. Observed themes included: (1) empowerment and (2) autonomous work climate.

#### **Empowerment**

The theme of Empowerment described participant perceptions of their value, importance, and level of involvement in organizational functions. In this theme, actions centered on improving work conditions and employee job satisfaction effected participant experiences during leadership transitions. Working with leaders who were interested in increasing autonomy among employees positively influenced participant experiences. Participants indicated that feeling valued for their contributions decreased stress and anxiety levels. Participant D3 described positive experiences with empowerment and employee value:

I feel accepted for my knowledge and contributions. Valued for his intelligence and appreciated for his time which isn't always common in D3's role. Sometimes it is the policing of the personnel and administration that is even criticized never

valued. I have been criticized when it didn't go well, but no one ever says a good job today. The problem is it can be a thankless role, so it is nice that someone sees you as a strategic player and that you are valued as a business person before just seen in D3's functional role – an important distinction with MR.

Participant D1 also emphasized the effect of empowerment practices on employee development:

From a strategic point, the plan was different from what we proposed. The approach to projects, how they were managed, and the perception of the public, how we should work with the public, our political friends and foes – changed a lot. MR desired to keep us out of the newspaper which was great because prior we were always in the newspaper in a negative way. MR wants to make sure that everything we do positively is in the media and in the community. MR worked hard on this and expected us to do that as well. It is amazing how everything has changed, now it is like we can't do anything wrong. If we do something wrong, then they say its ok, we will cover for you – the media works with us because we work with them. MR's direction is that we are partners with everyone, FAA, TSA, the community, government officials. MR states that we are all here for the same reason. MR pushes the customer service initiatives, really big on that. Our strategic plan has been streamlined because of MR's leadership; it used to take forever to get anything done. MR is big on streamlining and erasing bureaucracy, empowering our staff. If a mistake is made, not a big deal.

### **Autonomous Work Climate**

This theme focused on perceptions of organizational trust, employee and organization goal alignment, and self-direction. Participants indicated that having the ability to manage themselves, demonstrate their knowledge, and take initiative in organizational operations allowed them to produce more favorable working conditions. Participants found that work structures that heavily involved employee expertise rather than leader micromanagement were more effective in reducing stress levels. Participant A2 elaborated on the positive effects of increased autonomy and respectful working relationships:

The experience has been...it has been completely a positive experience because I already had seven years of working with SB. Six years working for SB directly, SB was my boss. I was one of the people that directly reported to SB, and so the dynamics between us didn't change. SB continued to let me do my job. SB was there if I needed, but wasn't a micromanager. SB let me have some autonomy and delegated authority.

The researcher found that Participant B1 experienced more favorable work environments under TN's management:

B1 felt that TN gave B1 the opportunity to get back to basics, had worked with TN closely when in TN's former position. B1 believes that TN immediately bloomed in the CEO position; TN may have been discontented prior to that – TN was there as an interim for a while but didn't approach it as interim, approached it as if TN would be there long term. TN and B1 do not agree on everything, but have a good working relationship. TN brings a calming, stabilizing influence.

Very different from prior CEO's and even different from LR, TN is much more pragmatic.

Participant A2 further described the benefits of autonomous work climates:

We had a very good rapport. He was very accessible. He was a very good mentor and yet provided you with the opportunity to explore things on your own and do things.

### **Application of the Uncertainty Theory of Stress**

The formula contained in the Uncertainty Theory of Stress (Beehr et al., 1985) was applied in the present study to ascertain the amount of stress experienced by each participant in the study, and also used to gauge the amount of stress as an average at each airport, and then generally across all airports. The results of the measure of stress used in the present study were ranked within the pool of the participants, not by using an external scale. The theory purports a measure for the amount of stress an individual experiences by multiplying the amount of uncertainty (Uc), importance (I), and duration (D):  $S = U_c \times I \times D$  (Atkins, 2007).

Each participant was asked three questions specific to the Uncertainty Theory of Stress (Beehr et al., 1985), as follows:

Question 1: How uncertain were you about obtaining the outcome you desired?

The participant was instructed to answer the question using a scale of one through five (Table 5).

Table 5

*Scale for Question 1*

Not at all Uncertain	Somewhat Uncertain	Uncertain	Very Uncertain	Extremely Uncertain
1	2	3	4	5

Question 2: How important was your success in this situation to you? The participant was instructed to answer the question using a scale of one through five (Table 6).

Table 6

*Scale for Question 2*

Not at all Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
1	2	3	4	5

Question 3: How long of a time period did the stress, strain, or anxiety last (number of months)? The participant was instructed to answer the question using units of months, up to twelve months.

Results are displayed in Table 7 for Airport A, Table 8 for Airport B, and Table 9 for Airport C.



Table 7

*Results for Airport A*

Question	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
How uncertain were you about obtaining the outcome you desired?	1	2	2	3
How important was your success in this situation to you?	5	5	5	5
How long of a time period did the stress, strain, or anxiety last (number of months)?	1	5	6	12
Total amount of stress experienced by each participant	5	50	60	180

Table 8

*Results for Airport B*

Question	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
How uncertain were you about obtaining the outcome you desired?	4	3	2
How important was your success in this situation to you?	4	4	4
How long of a time period did the stress, strain, or anxiety last (number of months)?	3	7	6
Total amount of stress experienced by each participant	48	84	48

Table 9

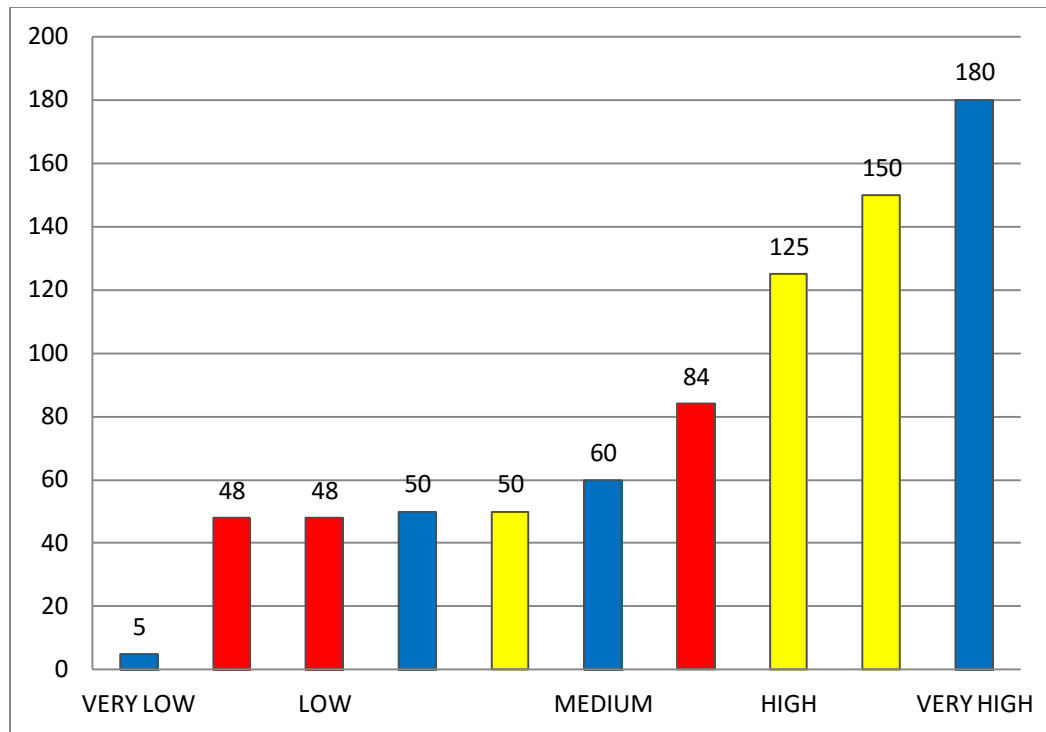
*Results for Airport C*

Question	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
How uncertain were you about obtaining the outcome you desired?	2	5	5
How important was your success in this situation to you?	5	5	5
How long of a time period did the stress, strain, or anxiety last (number of months)?	5	6	5
Total amount of stress experienced by each participant	50	150	125

A graphical representation of stress measured is displayed in Figure 1. The amount of stress, as measured by the Uncertainty Theory of Stress model, for Airport A, by participant, was as follows: 5, 50, 60, and 180 for an average between all participants at 74.

The amount of stress, as measured by the Uncertainty Theory of Stress model, for Airport B, by participant, was as follows: 48, 84, and 48 for an average of 60.

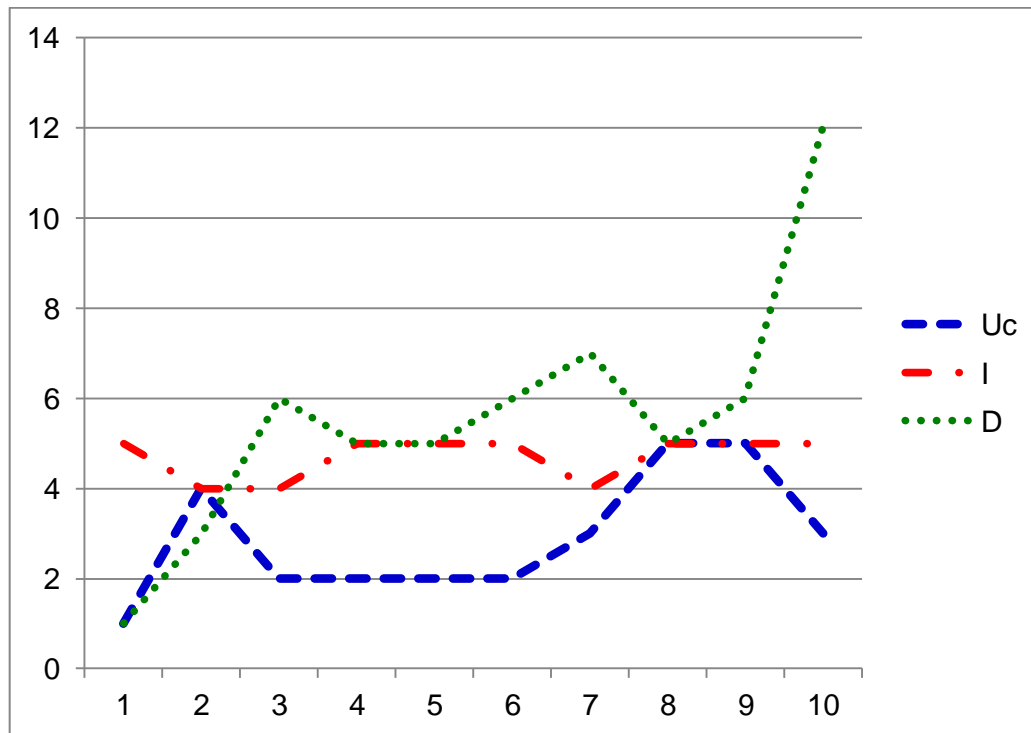
The amount of stress, as measured by the Uncertainty Theory of Stress model, for Airport C, by participant, was as follows: 50, 150, and 125 for an average of 108. The overall average of all participants was 80.



*Figure 1.* Uncertainty Theory of Stress measurement by participant; Blue: Airport A; Red: Airport B; and Yellow: Airport C.

The measure of stress reveals, on average and in relation to each other, that participants at Airport B experienced the lowest amount of stress; that participants at Airport A experienced a slightly higher level of stress; and that participants at Airport C experienced a significantly higher amount of stress. One participant at Airport A experienced the highest level of stress. This is due to the amount of time the stress, strain, or anxiety continued. The period of time reported for this participant was twelve months. Participants at Airport C reported across the board, high levels of uncertainty about obtaining their desired outcome. The levels of uncertainty reported by participants of Airport A were generally low; participants at Airport B levels of uncertainty were also generally low. All participants stated that the importance of their success was high to very high.

The general measure of stress between all participants at all airports was 80. The descriptor for the average amount of stress level for all participants falls between medium and high stress levels (Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* Scores of each participant by factors: uncertainty, importance, and duration. Uc = uncertainty (0–5); I = importance (0–5); D = duration (1–12).

### Evaluation of Findings

Themes of (1) effect experience, (2) response experience, (3) state experience, (4) empowerment, and (5) autonomous work environment emerged during analysis.

Observed subthemes include: (1) job security, (2) taking initiative, (3) ethics, (4) learning curve, (5) demonstrating skill and value, (6) creating a sense of security, (7) work climate, (8) collaboration and involvement, (9) future directions, and (10) prioritization.

Effect experiences, response experiences, and state experiences were significant among all groups; however, particular subthemes were more prevalent in discussions at certain

airports. Senior managers at DTW more frequently emphasized job security, demonstrating skill and value, and work climate during transitional leadership experiences. However, IND, senior managers more often discussed prioritization, demonstrating skill and value, and future directions. Finally, senior managers at MEM emphasized learning curve, prioritization, demonstrating skill and value, and work climate. While key differences were observed, demonstrating skill and value was a subtheme that occurred equally among staff at all of the airports.

Data was triangulated with results of stress measurements. Stress was measured using organizational stress theory scale measurements (Beehr et al., 1985). Participants at IND experienced the lowest levels of stress, while participants at DTW indicated significantly higher levels of stress. Participants at MEM experienced slightly higher levels of stress than IND; however, the amount of stress, strain, and anxiety experienced during the twelve-month period of transitional leadership at DTW revealed high levels of uncertainty about the future of the organization. Levels of uncertainty were low among participants at both IND and MEM. All of the participants studied reported high levels of perceived importance of their success. This suggests that concerns about job security, the inability to demonstrating skill and value, and negative work climates were associated with high levels of stress during leadership transitions at DTW. Furthermore, effective goal prioritization, feeling valued, experiencing support when learning new skills, having a positive work climate, and being informed of future organizational directions were inductive to perceptions of lower stress levels.

## Summary

This chapter discussed the setting, participant demographics, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, and results of the study. This study examined the shared, lived experiences of senior managers undergoing leadership transitions in U.S. airports. This qualitative study used a phenomenological design to illustrate the experiences of senior managers using organizational stress theory. Results of this study revealed several key findings. Themes of (1) effect experiences, (2) response experiences, and (3) state experiences emerged during analysis. Senior staff at DTW experienced the highest stress perceptions while senior staff at IND experienced the lowest stress perceptions. Close working relationships with CEO's were found to be necessary for efficient and effective operations. Because airports generate revenue for communities and regional businesses, the effects of leadership changes can substantially effect the well-being of the affected communities and regions. The effect a CEO has on an organization is significant, as the ability to successfully move the organization forward is not possible without the support and aligned vision of top-level employees. As this research demonstrated, inconsistency, unethical behavior, and self-interest frequently results in detrimental organizational effects. While acts of self-interest can negatively affect an organization, trust-based relationships, fairness, and credibility are factors shown to garner support and improve the overall well-being of the employees, community, and organization. Chapter Five will continue the analysis of results by discussing the interpretation of the findings.

## Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

In this phenomenological study, the shared, lived experiences of senior managers at three airports undergoing leadership transitions were examined. The research questions asked what these experiences were and how senior managers successfully transitioned under new leadership. Senior managers from the Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run Airport (DTW), Indianapolis Airport (IND), and Memphis-Shelby Airport (MEM) were interviewed and qualitatively analyzed. After examining the relevant literature, it was predicted that leadership influence would affect the overall performance of the organizations. The study attempted to examine perceptions and levels of stress and uncertainty in senior manager experiences during leadership transition. These findings reveal that CEO leadership styles and management substantially effects perceived stress and organizational performance.

The focus of this research inquires whether organizational stress occurs during periods of leadership transition and how these transitional experiences are perceived. The following sections reiterate the study's research questions:

- RQ1: What are the shared, lived experiences of senior managers who have experienced a change in their top leadership position?
- RQ2: What are the shared, lived experiences of senior managers who successfully transitioned to working under a new CEO?

To address Research Question 1, a phenomenological research design was used to determine the nature of the relationship between organizational stress factors and leadership styles. Interviews with participants were conducted and analyzed for recurrent

themes and patterns. Non-random convenience sampling was used to locate participants for the study. In addition, the study employed purposive sampling that involves the selection of participants based off of traits or experiences. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions aimed at analyzing their experiences and perceptions of organizational stress.

Continuing off of the theoretical and methodological framework of the previous research question, Research Question 2 was used to identify key factors associated with successful transitioning. Sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures were consistent with the previous research question. However, questions were oriented toward examining qualities and organizational characteristics of effective leaders.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of this study support organizational stress theory that contends organizational characteristics effect job satisfaction and the ability of employees to cope with organizational demands. These findings are in concordance with studies by Shirom (1982), Cooper et al. (2001), and Beehr et al. (1985) that determined organizational characteristics and uncertainty associated with change influence an individual's ability to cope with stress emerging from intrinsic factors, including role, relationships, career development opportunities, organizational culture, and work-life balance issues. This signifies that a CEO's leadership effectiveness and relationships with employees have a direct effect on how efficiently an organization functions. The following is a summary of the interpretation of the results that shed light on the relevance of previous literature findings.



## **Organizational Stress Characteristics**

Organizational stress occurs from an individual's perceptions of environmental demands and perceived ability to extend available resources to resolve the issues. The results of the current study are in accordance with findings from several studies that examined organizational stress. Shirom's (1982) study found that person-environment fit, due to an individual's personality and organizational characteristics, moderates levels of stress experienced in an occupation. Studies on organizational stressors (Cooper et al., 2001; Ismail et al., 2009) and organizational strain (Cooper et al., 1994) found that organizational stress can negatively effect the well-being of employees and concerns about job security or disruption of career development plans. Strain is a factor that causes stress due to major organizational changes or career plans. In the current study, participants experiencing higher levels of organizational strain at DTW more often described feelings of depression and anxiety than individuals with lower levels of organizational strain at IND and MEM airports.

## **Person-Environment Fit**

Studies on person-environment fit indicated that incompatibility of an individual in a work environment could affect how an individual experiences stress and strain. This study supports findings Edwards et al. (1988) and Kulka (1979) that found that changes in the workplace frequently alters the perceived stability of a work environment. Latack et al. (1985) found that the inability to respond to new priorities and fear of losing one's job significantly heightens the effects of organizational strain. The current study revealed that participants that were more insecure about the transferability of their skills and

capabilities more often experienced organizational strain and perceived themselves as less compatible to their work environment.

### **Uncertainty Theory of Stress**

The amount of stress experienced is calculated using the uncertainty theory of stress by examining the employee's uncertainty, the importance of the circumstances, and the duration of the situation (Cooper, 1998). Studies examining uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004; Le Moal, 2007; Ursin, 1998) found that unstable work environments and negative experiences are linked to perceptions of uncertainty and the inability to predict future directions of the organization. Uncertainty was found that have both direct and indirect relationships with strain in the current study. Participants that more frequently described feelings of uncertainty and concern about future directions under new leadership experienced higher levels of stress and strain. The current study also supported findings by Selve (1956) that decision-making abilities significantly affected factors contributing to organizational stress. Furthermore, studies by Miceli et al. (2005), Ashford (1998), Sullivan et al. (1992), Mustari (1992), Cooper (1998), and Tidd et al. (2002) supported the current study's findings that lack of control over a situation and perceptions of uncertainty negatively affect work stressors leading to decreased morale and productivity.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is frequently examined as an evaluative indicator representing how an employee perceives his or her job. Studies by Cook (2008) and Siggins (1993) found that employee job satisfaction is correlated with increased productive behavior. The current study supports findings that strains effect an employee's ability to effectively perform his or her responsibilities. However, the extent to which job satisfaction plays a

role in employee productivity is unclear due. Despite low morale and experiences of stress and strain, several participants did not experience lower workplace productivity. If anything, the organizational stress caused participants to work harder to ensure their job security and value. Participants emphasized the importance of continuing to do their jobs normally as a way to provide stability and lesson the effects of organizational strain. While job satisfaction has a role in experiences of stress and strain, the current study did not find job satisfaction to be a significant predictor of decreased work productivity.

### **CEO Effect on Organizational Performance**

Studies by Pissaris et al. (2010), Schaar et al. (2010), Adams et al. (2005), Bennedsen et al. (2012), Dimopoulous et al. (2010), Headlight International (2010), and Khurana et al. (2000) examined the role of a CEO in organizational efficiency and performance. These studies indicated that top leaders are paramount to the functioning and efficiency of an organization. Because CEOs create the setting and organizational culture of an organization, the productivity of the organization relies on their ability to maintain focus, make effective managerial decisions, and acquire employee trust. The current study supported the literature on the effect of a CEO on the success of an organization. This was particularly evident at IND, where employees found MR's leadership style greatly contributed to the success and optimized performance of the organization. While succession planning was found in the literature to positively influence CEO transitions in an organization, the current study did not find succession planning to be as significant as the new CEO's leadership itself. Despite having guidance during the transition, participants found that environmental effects, such as the transition that took place as the incumbent CEO left earlier than expected and the failure of a new

CEO to perform as employees expected and hoped, created anxiety and negative transitional experiences regardless of whether succession planning was involved.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The results of the current study found organizational stress theory (Beehr et al., 1985) to be an accurate framework for examining employee experiences during transitions in leadership. Tenets of the uncertainty theory of organization stress within organizational stress theory were particularly emphasized in this study. Organizational stress theory is frequently used to analyze the nature of relationships between organizations and environments. This theory has been instrumental in understanding how stress effects employee well-being and contributes to organizational issues associated with poor functioning, inefficiency, and low employee morale. Person-environment fit is a concept grounded in organizational theory that was also used to assess and compare employee abilities with organizational and environmental demands. To examine how stress, strain, and person-environment fit affects senior managers, the effects of effect experiences, response experiences, and state experiences were investigated. While literature on the uncertainty theory of organizational stress addresses the role of environmental experiences as an umbrella term, differentiable aspects of organizational environments were found to have an effect on perceptions and behaviors in an organization.

#### **Effect Experiences.**

Effect experiences centered on participant perceptions of the ability to predict the effect of organizational changes on the organization and effected stakeholders. This experience is often related to an organization's external environment; however, this does

not mean that individuals are unable to understand the nature of environmental effects. During the current study, it was important to understand that participants were agents of change themselves and maintained a clear understanding of how external changes occur. Participants recognized that leadership changes and unemployment occurs in a variety of circumstances and acknowledged justifiable structural changes. Effect experiences were more focused on participant levels of confidence in knowing the long-term goals and future directions of an organization.

In the current study, effect experiences were not limited to effect uncertainty, but effect certainty perceptions as well. Participants described effect concerns that were associated with job security, learning curve, and prioritization. The participants indicated that not only organizational effects were of importance, but stated their perceived abilities to acclimate to new jobs or organizational environments, if needed, were also a consideration. Participants that valued their skills and contributions found that even when concerns about job security were present, they did not worry about learning curve and acclimating to finding and working in a new job. Participants that were concerned about their ability to keep up with technological changes, however, expressed more concerns about job security and their needs to demonstrate their value to the organization.

### **Response Experiences**

Response experiences involved the ability to understand and assess the value of response options available for an employee during organizational change. Response experiences center on implications that there is a need to act due to a perceived threat or unique opportunity. The current study assessed responses that occurred due to organizational restructuring to understand how participants coped with major transitions.

Senior managers found that their responses had an effect on the work environment and transitions in management. Because the senior managers recognized the importance of autonomy, they encouraged employees to take initiative in responding to the occurrences.

Response experiences included taking initiative, demonstrating skill and value, and creating a sense of security. This theme was not exclusively tied to effect experiences, but were often associated with and influenced by perceptions of potential effect experiences. The effects of these experiences ranged from organizational to personal impact. The senior managers illustrated that adapting to a new environment was necessary in producing desired effect outcomes, such as maintaining job security and ensuring that the organization prioritizes tasks efficiently. However, the association between effect experiences and response experiences were not always closely related. Participants also demonstrated particular response experiences due to personal values and beliefs rather than effect outcomes.

### **State Experiences**

State experiences focused on perceptions of the nature of an organizational environment. Individuals undergoing organizational change may express concerns about actions that organizations or key constituencies might take in response to new visions and goals for the organization. Individuals may also experience uncertainty about general changes in technology development, trends, and community involvement with the organization. State uncertainty experiences may stem from the inability to predict future outcomes or having an incomplete understanding of the relationships between an organization and the environmental context. In the current study, it was important to

recognize that state experiences were a result of perceived environmental contexts and not necessarily defined by cultural understandings or objective views of the world.

In the current study, state experiences manifested in concerns about future directions, collaboration and involvement, ethics, and work climate. This theme differed from effect experiences and response experiences in that participants did not view themselves as having any direct effect on state experiences. While participants demonstrated some control over effect experiences and response experiences, state experiences were viewed as external factors. The participants noted that uncertainty over an organization's environment generated higher levels of stress due to the lack of control over the situation.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The major limitations of this study include sampling bias, the lack of longitudinal data, the inability to determine the accuracy of self-reported information, and limitations of using scales to assess stress measurement. Because nonrandom, purposive sampling was used to generate a sample of participants with particular experiences, a holistic view of employee experiences was not observed. Furthermore, this study focused on perspectives of senior managers and did not include perspectives of other employees. While qualitative data is useful in exploring participant experiences, several weaknesses must be considered. First, knowledge obtained may not be generalizable to other settings and situations. The current study focused on three airports in the United States. Particular effects of airport management may not be relevant to locations outside of the United States. Second, predictions cannot be easily made or tested. Because the nature of qualitative research is subjective and exploratory, the ability to create and test hypotheses

is difficult to examine and replicate. Third, results and data collection procedures may have been influenced by the researcher's personal biases and idiosyncrasies. Finally, participants in the study may have had difficulty in accurately expressing their opinions and belief, and current feelings about situations may change over time.

In addition to data limitations, the research design may have affected study results. Convenience sampling methods have the potential to weaken external validity. Procedural limitations, such as using a binary scale in the stress instrument, can limit data collection by excluding samples that may provide valuable information, but do not fit into one category. Given the aims of the research question and generalizability effect, a larger sample size would more likely provide more realistic results.

### **Recommendations**

The data from this study identified several organizational stress responses that have not consistently been examined in other studies. In addition, this study generated new potential research questions and considerations for future research. To test the reliability of the emergent themes in this study, future studies can be created to examine the accuracy of effect experiences, response experiences, and state experiences in producing generalizable results in other regions. Quantitative studies and mixed methods research can be used to triangulate with current findings and assess the possibility of other variables, such as anxiety, that were not as consistently examined in the current study.

To increase the power and generalizability of the current study's findings, future research can utilize several steps to further address the research problem. Statistical power is usually utilized in quantitative studies, but can be considered in qualitative



studies as well. Increasing the power of a study can be obtained by either increasing the sample (N) or decreasing the variance within the populations. A small sample size may not accurately reflect the population mean, and even if the population means are identical, there might be variation in the group outcomes. In order to test whether a variable other than random error accounts for a difference between group means, a larger sample is needed and will more likely reflect population means. In addition, having large variance in a sample can make it difficult to determine whether correlative factors other than random error are responsible for altering the group outcomes. To combat this, sample size needs to be increased to account for larger variance, samples must have a small variance, or the experimental design should incorporate data within-subjects.

**Future research methods.** A potential research method that can be utilized in future research involves the use of ethnographic evaluation designs. Ethnographic evaluation often involves the systematic determination of a subject's merit, worth, and significance using criteria governed by a set of standards. This approach addresses problems by attempting to capture the complexity of social systems by tracking and understanding change in local cultures, attitudes and practices, and assessing different factors as causal rather than attributive. Within the process of evaluation, researchers can contribute to developing and implementing methods and techniques for conducting evaluations in order to evolve, develop, and improve within a changing environment. The determination of quality and value is an important factor. Researchers can effectively determine quality and value through analysis of an environment, including the relationships between individuals, the project goals, and the environment. Determining

the value of something can be crucial to determining accountability to funders, managers, and shareholders.

### **Implications**

The results of this study provide new information on the effects of organizational stress on participant experiences. Job stability has been shown to have a significant effect on organizational operations and interactions with community members. Because airports are an important organizational structure that affects regions, local businesses, and a community's local economy, it is necessary to ensure that employee morale, productivity, and organizational commitment are adequately recognized. Effectively analyzing the experiences of airport staff is necessary to provide positive social change for employees, managers, and the surrounding community by highlighting the difficulties in leadership transition, concerns about job security, and methods to improve employee motivation and self-efficacy. This research has provided new interpretations of employee experiences that have not been consistently analyzed. In addition, this research has identified empirical evidence of employee engagement influenced by positive leadership that can serve as an example for future research of other airport organizations. This study found that examining airports with effective leadership management could shed light on necessary improvements and considerations needed to maintain an efficient and productive organizational environment.

The topic is important to society for a number of reasons. A change in the top leadership position of a U.S. airport has an effect on the people who work at the airport; the results of the effect can be positive, neutral, or negative depending on how the change is managed by the people involved – the airport's board of directors, the senior managers

and employees of the airport, and the incoming CEO. The specific group of people studied in this research center on the senior management team, as the working relationship with the CEO is a close one and so this group of people would experience the change more profoundly than perhaps others. If the change is managed poorly, the result can have a very negative effect on the efficient and effective operations of the airport which in turn, can affect the community and region's well-being. Airports generate revenue for communities by supporting local businesses, creating jobs, promoting businesses, and providing vital aviation services to the region (Esler, 2006).

In addition, the effect of a change in CEO on an individual who works at the airport is of social significance, as the change may affect whether or not the individual will remain employed by the airport. When employees perceive an uncertain employment outlook the outcome may be one of overall diminished well-being for that individual (Boswell et al., 2014). Boswell et al. (2014) points out that perceptions of job insecurity may lead to work issues saturating the person's personal and family life by the person working more hours and spending less time with family and friends. An additional negative effect is job stress resulting in negatively affecting the person's family by bringing the worker's stress and emotional exhaustion home.

And finally, the effect a CEO has on an organization is significant. In a recent study, trust in the CEO by employees was a key factor in employee satisfaction. The factors listed in executive trust were: ability, fairness, employee oriented, honesty, and forthrightness (Perry et al., 2007). The CEO must constantly earn the right to lead others or risk challenges to his or her credibility, inconsistent actions or self-interest can erode that credibility. Just because a CEO is in the position of top leader does not automatically

confer ultimate authority on them, there are too many issues to balance (Porter et al., 2004). The reaction, either positive or negative, by employees will be largely based on the CEO's actions. Positive reactions are important for the CEO to gain support to move the organization forward, without that support success is not possible. The result of a CEO who does not gain that support from his or her senior managers will more than likely be detrimental to the organization overall.

### **Conclusion**

In this research, factors of organizational stress, strain, and uncertainty in airport senior managers were analyzed using a phenomenological inquiry. The data signifies that CEO leadership and management styles have a substantial effect on organizational performance. The data also supports theoretical findings on organizational stress theory and the uncertainty theory of organizational stress. Future research may better address the research problem by expanding the sample size and generalizability while also providing new explanations from mixed methods and evaluative approaches. These methods will allow for researchers, policymakers, and the overall public to better understand the social contexts surrounding airport management. In conclusion, the results of this study revealed that the positive and negative effects of transitional leadership, though difficult for senior staff managers to cope with, are mediated by the active roles leaders take in ensuring employee needs are met and maintained throughout the process.

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## Appendix A: Expert Content Panel Invitation

Dear Dr. XXX:

I am a candidate for a Ph.D. in Psychology with a concentration in Organizational Behavior at Walden University. I am studying the topic of the effects of leadership change, the title of the dissertation is: The Effects of a Chief Executive Officer Change on the Senior Management Leadership Team of a United States Airport. I am interested in the topic as CEO turnover is a fairly common event in the airport community and this turnover does have an impact on the senior management teams of that airport. My study will be accomplished by using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in order to study the shared, lived experiences of senior management members of U.S. airports when there was a change in the CEO position. I am utilizing the uncertainty theory of occupational stress that you and Dr. XXX developed in 1985. My methods committee person, Dr. Augustine Baron, my methodology committee member, agrees with me that the use of the uncertainty theory of stress as a theoretical basis is appropriate.

I am working on creating a list of questions that will serve as the primary data collection instrument for this study. Because of your expertise and knowledge on the topic of occupational stress and the uncertainty theory of stress, I would be honored and would very much appreciate your feedback regarding my proposed interview questions. I anticipate your review should take no more than 30 minutes. I realize the time that will be taken from your busy schedule and would like to give you a gift card as a token of my appreciation for your participation. Please let me know if you feel that you would not be able to participate. I know that you may be on vacation now, and will wait to hear back from you when you can respond.

My background is as follows: I currently serve as Vice President Human Resources at the Wayne County Airport Authority (better known as the Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run airports). I have earned a Juris Doctor degree from Michigan State University School of Law, an M.S.A. with a concentration in Human Resources from Central Michigan University, and a B.A. in Human Resources from Concordia University.

I look forward to the possibility of working with you as a potential panel member.

Sincerely,

Gale LaRoche

## Appendix B: Expert Methodology Panel Invitation

Dear XXXX:

I am a candidate for a Ph.D. in Psychology with a concentration in Organizational Behavior at Walden University. I am studying the topic of the effects of leadership change, the title of the dissertation is: The Effects of a Chief Executive Officer Change on the Senior Management Leadership Team of a United States Airport. I am interested in the topic as CEO turnover is a fairly common event in the airport community and this turnover does have an impact on the senior management teams of that airport. My study will be accomplished by using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in order to study the shared, lived experiences of senior management members of U.S. airports when there was a change in the CEO position. My methods committee person, Dr. Augustine Baron, my methodology committee member has asked me to procure two qualitative methods experts to review my interview questionnaire template to ensure that the instrument is valid. My chairperson is Dr. Amy Hakim.

I am inviting you because of your expertise in qualitative research studies. I would very much appreciate your feedback regarding my proposed interview questions in the following areas and any areas that you feel appropriate:

- Fit of central and subquestions
- Appropriate language and wording of Central Questions and subquestions;
- Appropriate language and tone of interview questions, including probes;
- Suggestions for changes in wording, tone, language on Central/subquestions; and
- Suggestions for changes in interview questions.

I realize the time that will be taken from your busy schedule and would like to give you a gift card as a token of my appreciation for your participation. Please let me know if you feel that you would not be able to participate.

My background is as follows: I currently serve as Vice President Human Resources at the Wayne County Airport Authority (better known as the Detroit Metropolitan and Willow Run airports). I have earned a Juris Doctor degree from Michigan State University School of Law, an M.S.A. with a concentration in Human Resources from Central Michigan University, and a B.A. in Human Resources from Concordia University.

I look forward to the possibility of working with you as a potential panel member.

Sincerely,

Gale LaRoch

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

### **Introductory statement**

This study involves the perceptions of senior managers at a U.S. airport who have undergone a transition in the CEO or top leadership position. The senior manager's perceptions include their experiences, feelings, and thoughts about the transition. I am interested in your sharing any thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to the transition and I may occasionally ask more about those experiences as we move through this interview.

### **Introductory question**

1. What is/was your role or job title at the time the transition took place?

#### *Related follow-up questions*

- How long were you or have you been in that role?
- How long have you generally been in the role of a senior manager?
- Was the incoming CEO an internal or external candidate?

2. Did you remain employed with the airport after the new CEO began employment?

#### *Related follow up questions if participant remained employed with the airport.*

- What do you believe about why you remained employed under the new CEO?
- What actions did you take, if any, to remain employed?

#### *Related probe questions if participant did not remain employed with the airport.*

- Under what type of circumstances were you separated from employment at the airport? Describe.
- What were your feelings and emotions at this time?



- Was there a period of time when you felt you would be separated from employment? Describe your feelings about potential separation. What did you do when the separation of employment took place?
- How long did the period of time last where you felt uncertainty about whether or not you would remain employed by the airport.

### **Interview questions**

3. When you first heard that there would be a change in the CEO position, describe your reactions in terms of what you were thinking and feeling.

#### *Related probe questions*

- How would you describe your working relationship with the outgoing CEO?
- Have you experienced similar types of transitions? How was this transition compared to the previous transition(s)? In what way was it same? In what way was it different?

4. What was your role in the transition?

#### *Related probe questions*

- If you took an active role in the selection of the CEO, describe your activities in the selection process. How did you experience the role?

5. Describe your experience of being a senior manager under the new CEO when the CEO was first hired.

6. Describe for me what it was like to be in the airport 4 to 6 months after the new CEO was installed.

*Related probe questions*

- How did your relationship with your CEO change over the course of the 6 months after hire?
- Was your relationship worse or better or the same? Describe.
- Can you describe how you felt valued by the CEO?

7. Describe your experiences of stress, strain, or anxiety as a result of the transition.

*Related probe questions*

- How uncertain were you about obtaining the outcome you desired?
- How important was your success in this situation to you?
- How long of a time period did the stress, strain, or anxiety last?
- How long of a time period did the transition last?