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Public Sector Fire Chiefs' Strategies for Employee Succession Planning

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Webster University, 2010

BS, Park University, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

More than 21% of public sector fire chiefs lack effective succession plans for employees, and 45% of fire chiefs do not provide adequate succession plans. Grounded by Burns's transformational leadership theory, the purpose of this multiple case study was to explore successful strategies that 2 fire chiefs from 2 firehouses in the southern United States used to improve succession planning for employees. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and review of organizational standard operating procedures. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step approach, which included: compiling data, disassembling data, reassembling data, interpreting data, and concluding data. The 3 themes that emerged from data analysis were: identify monetary influences that improve employee performance, create a mentoring plan, and promote recognition incentives. Findings from this study may contribute to positive social change by providing fire chiefs with successful strategies to improve employee succession planning. Fire chiefs can use these strategies for succession planning and for improving employee performance. The results contribute to positive social change through identifying the demands that fire chiefs consider when filling critical leadership positions, which may improve organizational efficiency and safety education in the community.

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Dedication

I dedicate this Doctoral of Business Administration (DBA) research study to my wife Erin of 27 years and our son, Devin, and daughter, Niah. My family has supported me throughout every step of this arduous journey. I am appreciative of my mother Linda, who gave me the motivation to achieve any goal I set out to accomplish, and my brother Myles, who supports me with whatever I decide to do. Additionally, to my friends and extended family that gave me that extra push and support to continue my educational goals, I thank you.

Acknowledgments

The doctoral process for me began at full throttle, and throughout the process, several stops delayed my progression towards graduation. The extensive time invested to achieve my personal goal, a Doctor of Business Administration degree, has been bounteous and immeasurable and could not have been done without the help and support of family, friends, and scholars. I give many thanks to my committee for getting me to the point of conclusion. My chair, Dr. Fan has been an enormous support and inspiration throughout our time together. My second committee member, Dr. Neal, provided persistence and rigor for grammar and an openness that helped me to become a better scholar. Dr. Kangas, University Research Reviewer (URR), has been with me from the beginning and I offer thanks for always being honest and never letting up. Finally, I thank all the cohort members on this journey with me who helped support me during some of my downturns. A huge thank you to everyone involved in my success through this journey to becoming Dr. Easley.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Leaders require succession planning to appoint employees to fill critical positions. Succession planning practices in the public sector are often inadequate (Pita, Mafini, & Dhurup, 2016). Fire chiefs use succession planning to identify and appoint employees with specific skill sets and aspirations to fill vital leadership positions. Succession planning by fire chiefs supports employees' decisions to utilize training that helps them achieve short and long-range performance goals. Therefore, fire chiefs who successfully apply succession planning strategies might gain an increase in workplace productivity from employees with motivation to attain a position in the organization's leadership hierarchy (Perrenoud & Sullivan, 2016; Van Wart, 2013). In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored strategies that fire chiefs in the southern United States used to improve succession planning.

Background of the Problem

Factors that prevent leaders from identifying and implementing employee succession planning include limited funding, adverse employee performance, and curricula oversight (Lukea Bhiwajee & Garavan, 2016; Seidle, Fernandez, & Perry, 2016). According to Seidle et al. (2016), the corporate costs of employee training for public sector organizations has exceeded $50 billion annually since 1996. However, just 25% of those funds have supported improving industry-specific succession planning strategies (Seidle et al., 2016). Therefore, some public sector leaders, including fire chiefs and police chiefs, experience setbacks when working to improve strategies for employees' succession planning (O'Neill, 2016; Orazi, Turrini, & Valotti, 2013).

Additionally, techniques that many fire chiefs use for succession planning for employees are often ineffective (Arnaboldi, Lapsley, & Steccolini, 2015; Lukea Bhiwajee, & Garavan, 2016; Sun, Peng, & Pandey, 2014).

New opportunities for employee advancement emerge when fire chiefs use succession planning (Perrenoud & Sullivan, 2016; Van Wart, 2013), and when their succession planning strategies are fundamentally supportive of organizational improvement (Porter, Franklin, Swider, & Yu, 2016; Van Wart, 2013). Often, fire chiefs are oblivious to the consequences of unfavorable succession planning or relate outcomes to the organizations' missions and visions. More importantly, if fire chiefs fail to devise efficient and measurable procedures that strengthen succession planning, they risk losing opportunities to inspire future fire department leaders.

Problem Statement

Fire chiefs face challenges with implementing effective techniques in succession planning for employees, which lead to low work performance (Office of Personnel Management [OPM], 2016; Russell, 2016; Valero, Jung, & Andrew, 2015). Valero et al. (2015) noted that over 21% of public sector fire chiefs lack effective succession plans for employees, and OPM (2016) reported that 45% of fire chiefs do not provide adequate succession plans. In my study, the general business problem was that some leaders do not implement succession planning, which limits optimal work performance. The specific business problem was that some fire chiefs lack strategies to improve succession planning for employees.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that fire chiefs used to improve succession planning. The target population consisted of fire chiefs from two separate firehouses in the southern United States who implemented strategies to improve succession planning. The findings of this study advance positive social change by presenting information that may lead fire chiefs to promote employees and to prepare them to fill key leadership positions. The implications for positive social change included improvements to strategies for succession planning by fire chiefs who use these findings. Fire chiefs could enhance employees' job performance and productivity, which could result in an increase in the number of successful leaders in firehouses who can positively affect their communities.

Nature of the Study

Research Method

Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are three standard methods used for research (Gehman et al., 2017). Researchers use the qualitative method to engage participants with open-ended interview questions and to explore their interpretations of a phenomenon in natural settings (Edwards & Brannelly, 2017). Alternatively, quantitative researchers collect data when the goals are to test a hypothesis (Kniffin, Wansink, Devine, & Sobal, 2015). Mixed method researchers combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches to draw on the strengths of each method (Church, Schumacher, & Thompson, 2015). The quantitative method is ineffective for studying interpersonal relationships, behaviors, or effects on succession planning outcomes of employees (Bass, Avolio, & Jung, 2003; Lighton, 2017), all of which were goals for this study. In addition, I did not test a hypothesis, so a quantitative method or a mixed method was not appropriate. I selected the qualitative method to explore a business problem in two firehouses overseen by two fire chiefs in the southern United States, using open-ended questions.

Research Design

I considered four research designs for this study including phenomenological, ethnographic, narrative, and case study. Using the phenomenological design involves describing an individual's lived experiences of an event or experience (Bevan, 2014; Cole, 2013; Giorgi, 2017). I did not select a phenomenological design because my study was not about describing participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon. Researchers use ethnographic research to focus on observations, cultures, and specific skills that align systematically with research concerns (Rapp, 2017). I did not select an ethnographic design because I did not seek to observe people or culture. The narrative design affords researchers a more holistic view of developments or perspectives of event information obtained from participants' stories (Vohra, 2014; Yang & Hsu, 2017; Yin, 2014). I did not select a narrative design because I did not wish to obtain stories from participants.

Yin (2014) indicated that in a multiple case study design, researchers explore differences within cases to duplicate findings. I used this design to explore the differences between two cases. Andersen, Bjornholt, Bro, and Holm-Petersen (2016) contended that researchers often select a multiple case study design when seeking to duplicate findings of previous cases and associate those findings with current cases. Yin indicated that a multiple case study allows researchers to predict similar results or contrasting results in a predictable manner. For these reasons, I used a multiple case study design to explore a phenomenon across multiple sites to compare unique features of each case. I interviewed fire chiefs and reviewed standard operating procedures (SOPs) supportive of the organizational phenomenon to collect data that identified successful strategies used in succession planning. Furthermore, I used a qualitative case study design to explore a phenomenon related to improving employee succession planning.

Research Question

The overarching research question was: What strategies do fire chiefs use to improve succession planning for their employees?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to support succession planning practices for your employees?
2. What strategies do you use to improve succession plans for your employees?
3. What strategies do you find beneficial for improving and overcoming challenges with employee succession planning?
4. How do you measure the benefits of succession planning for your employees?
5. How is your strategy for succession planning relevant for employee training?
6. How do you prepare for retirement or unexpected vacancies?
7. How do your employees respond to your approaches toward succession planning?

8. What additional information that I may have missed, can you provide about strategies used in succession planning with your employees?

Conceptual Framework

I used transformational leadership theory as the basis for my conceptual framework. Transformational leadership theory allows researchers to explore leader-subordinate exchanges and understand what leaders are doing to (a) influence the behavior of subordinates by means of example, and (b) support successful strategies as guidance for advancing subordinate behaviors (Smith, Eldridge, & DeJoy, 2016). The transformational leadership theory was established by Burns (1978) and then formalized by Bass (1999). I found that this theory could be used to discover and identify a leaders' influence on subordinates and the succession planning strategies used to stimulate performance. Transformational leadership theory has foundations in leadership strategies, behaviors, motivations, and the perspectives of employees' (Smith et al., 2016). Using this approach supports employees who engage each other in the workplace, thereby advancing strategies that signifies leadership as transformational. I found that these strategies were used by fire chiefs in my study to motivate high-quality employees to establish goals for obtaining future leadership positions. I selected this theory for the conceptual framework because it aligned with this study and allowed me to accept theory constructs and viewpoints as ideal for exploring successful strategies that fire chiefs can use for improving succession planning for their employees.

Key concepts relevant to the transformational leadership theory are (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational motivation, and

(d) idealized influence. I used the transformational leadership theory because this theory offers key concepts and strategies fire chiefs could use to identify and prepare employees to transition into leadership positions. Further, using the transformational leadership theory supported this study because strategies suggested by some fire chiefs to improve employees' succession planning might reduce competency shortcomings and influence future leaders' performance.

Operational Definitions

Fire chief: A fire chief is the highest-ranking administrator in a public sector firehouse who strategically manages its members (West & Murphy, 2016).

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

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Khorsandi and Aven (2017) described assumptions as things not explicitly related to research paradigms. Researchers consider study assumptions valid, but not verifiable (Grant, 2014). In addition, personal preferences, pragmatic observations, interpretations, and individual choices vary researcher perceptions (Abe et al., 2015). I assumed that participants perceived their environments through the lens of managers. I also assumed participants would honestly answer questions relevant to their organizations. Next, I assumed that participants would not endure future adverse actions from superiors, not end up in unethical positions, and not break any laws. Last, I assumed that a multiple case study was the best design for this research, that interview data and SOPs I collected and reviewed would provide useful information regarding improvements to succession planning strategies, and that the data would provide information to share regarding improvement strategies supportive of succession planning.

Limitations

Limitations are possible weaknesses in a study where researchers have restricted authority (Yin, 2014). The limitations in this study included the use of a qualitative method and case study design, which may have restricted additional research opportunities and possibly interject a study weakness. Lincoln, Guba, and Pilotta (1985) indicated that researcher ethics and approaches could introduce bias into qualitative case study outcomes. In this study, I found that the SOPs fire chiefs used to execute succession planning were not specific to the practice of succession planning, and the tactics were approached differently by each participant. Another limitation was my use of only two data collection methods.

Delimitations

Delimitations are attributes enabling researchers to determine the boundaries of a research study (Mouton et al., 2016). This study was delimited to two fire chiefs in two firehouses whose professional objectives aligned with strategies for succession planning in the southern United States. Delimitations in this study included fire chiefs working as decision makers who align organizational objectives with improving succession planning for employees in the southern United States. Another delimitation was the small number of participants assigned to administrative positions in each firehouse. I did not involve fire chiefs outside the scope of active employment in a public sector firehouse and I did not interview employees of participants.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The results from this study could support fire chiefs with successful strategies to improve succession planning for employees. Findings in this study could also provide fire chiefs with additional change initiative data from the field, thereby contributing to their knowledge and improving strategies for succession planning. Further, this study could serve to strengthen critical knowledge needed to assist other fire chiefs within the public sector when considering succession planning for employees. This study might also encourage fire chiefs to pursue new business practices. For example, a fire chief's style of mentoring might directly influence a follower's behavior, performance, or self-confidence (Skurzewski-Servant, 2016). As a result, study findings regarding improving strategies for employees could offer new concepts for fire chiefs to use for succession planning.

This study could further contribute to professional and best business practices by identifying new strategies for succession planning. The exploration of strategies could also contribute to the public sector by identifying some difficulties fire chiefs encounter when developing employees, resulting in potential public sector growth investments. In addition, administrative integration of best practices applicable to different leadership styles and the transformational leadership theory could support succession planning. Additionally, the establishment of techniques to explore succession planning benefits and opportunities could affect best practices with employees. In summary, the information I discovered during research included successful strategies and business practices that fire chiefs use to improve succession planning with employees in their organization.

Implications for Social Change

Jin et al. (2016) reported that leaders who practice succession planning produce fully marketable protégés. The purpose of succession planning is to develop employees to fill vacancies (Schepker, Kim, et al., 2017). The findings in this study indicated that employees can benefit from improved succession planning with advancement opportunities to fill critical firehouse vacancies. The findings also showed that fire chiefs with clear strategies for succession planning improved relationships with internal and external stakeholders (employees and community members, respectively). Furthermore, the findings from the study could provide employees with improved succession planning adopted from practiced strategies that could lead to performance improvements. This study could challenge fire chiefs to review SOPs that detail succession planning for their employees, conduct internal and external audits to locate areas of improvement, and then advocate or introduce improved strategies for succession planning. Findings from this study contribute to positive social change because fire chiefs who prepare their employees using succession planning practices recognize demands to fill critical leadership positions in support of organizational efficiency and community safety education.

Another contribution to social change is that fire chiefs could be more inclined to remedy fallacies that arise in communities from their employees' actions not aligned with the organizations' missions and visions. Community service and training programs offered by leaders, including fire chiefs, will assist in the promotion for future fire service membership of community members. Therefore, fire chiefs who recognize and train employees to work in alignment with succession planning strategies might increase those employees' output and transitions into potential vacancies.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

In my review of academic literature, I explored strategies fire chiefs used to improve succession planning for employees working in public sector firehouses. Specifically, I reviewed the literature on strategies that supported the improvement of public sector employees' succession planning. I found that fire chiefs used varying methods for succession planning improvements, especially when identifying performance benchmarks for employees' development. I selected sources from an exhaustive review of literature using the transformational leadership theory, employee succession planning, and existing and key literature that included journal articles and seminal books related to the study topic and central research question. Van Wart (2013) posited that previous researchers assign emphasis on leadership ethics, cultures, and employees' perceptions of management, but few have focused primarily on PSLs or improving employees' succession planning. Therefore, I reviewed literature on these strategies for improving employees' succession planning in public sector firehouses.

Literature Review

A literature review is an extensive investigation of collected data from published peer-reviewed research (Volk, Stengel, & Schultmann, 2014). In this qualitative case study, I addressed fire chiefs' consistent setting of beneficial standards for firehouse succession planning while encouraging high-quality employees to prepare for future leadership positions. The information for this review came from multiple peer-reviewed articles with insights on successful succession planning and its adoption by fire chiefs. The literature review includes materials associated with the conceptual framework that served as the lens for this study. In this study, I explored successful strategies that two fire chiefs used to improve succession planning for employees. The constructs of the transformational leadership theory that influenced my literature search strategy included (a) intellectual stimulation, (b) self-actualization, (c) personal engagement, and (d) idealized influence. This literature review is organized into four main sections on (a) transformational leadership theory, (b) succession planning, (c) supporting and contrasting theories, and (d) theory in relation to the study.

I acquired most sources using Walden University's library to access databases such as ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Scholar Works, Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM, and Google Scholar. The search terms included *leadership, leader's development, leadership strategies, leadership succession planning, employee succession planning, public sector leadership, transformational leadership theory*, *transactional theory, LMX, public sector administration, human capital, leadership organization,* and *employee development*. This study includes 215 references; 86% have a publication date from 2014-2018, and 85% are from peer-reviewed journals. I also used additional sources including seminal books, scholarly articles, professional journals, governmental sites, and doctoral dissertations. Among the sources were those that supported the study theory and methodology.

Transformational Leadership Theory

I used the transformational leadership theory to explore which leader-subordinate relationships could benefit from strategies that improve succession planning. According to Burns (1978), who established the foundations of the transformational leadership theory, employees who engage each other by advancing strategies in the workplace use transformational leadership techniques. Batistič (2017) affirmed the transformational leadership theory is supportive when applied to developing employee succession programs. The constructs of the transformational leadership theory are (a) idealized influence, (b) self-actualization, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) personal engagement (Burns, 1978). In the succession planning process, these constructs combine the attributes necessary for an employee's professional growth. Transformational leadership theory was suitable for this study because its constructs facilitated my exploration of strategies that fire chiefs use for improving succession planning for employees. Burns defined transformational leadership as a joint action involving a leader's relationship with subordinates and then the application of the management strategy. Some methods that support the transformational leadership theory include mentoring, fostering, and motivating subordinates to support a leader's expectations (Pandey, Davis, Pandey, & Peng, 2015). The transformational leadership theory can be used by fire chiefs in support of promoting succession planning for employees, which can indicate leaders' confidence in them as they work to achieve a higher position.

Bass's (1999) transactional leadership theory and transformational leadership theory are similar because the final goal is employees' performance exceeds a leaders' expectations. The transformational leadership theory emphasizes mentoring and facilitation of change from leaders. Alternatively, the transactional theory aims toward the creation of leaders with opportunity-based exchanges (Bass, 1999; Buch, Thompson, & Kuvaas, 2016). Contingent reward and passive management reflect value-based constructs of transactional theory as predictors of dependable actions (De Wolde, Groenendaal, & Helsloot, 2014; Felix, Halim, Ahmad, & Arshad, 2016). For that reason, leaders have role opportunities to mentor employees to determine their value and professional worth. I explored strategies fire chiefs used with employees, the effects of those strategies on mentor-subordinate relationships, and the improvements those strategies facilitated in succession planning. I also reviewed how fire chiefs view succession planning and how program successes and failures affects organizational stability.

Transformational leadership theory has origins in leadership strategies that take seriously employee's behaviors, motivations, and perspectives (Smith et al., 2016). These actions include transformational leadership influences of individual's behaviors. Similarly, the practice of using contingent rewards involves bonuses for loyalty to encourage subordinates' motivation for earning leadership honors with the transactional theory (De Wolde et al., 2014; Ugaddan & Park, 2017). Consequently, some employees considered loyal start to desire additional monetary compensation as confirmation of successes (De Wolde et al., 2014). The traits I explored for public sector review were based on the performance transformation of employees and not performance changes based on benefits or rewards for adherence to given instructions.

Supporters of contingent reward practices provide transactional leaders the opportunity to influence team members' expectations with monetary awards (Dulebohn, Wu, & Liao, 2017). Dulebohn et al. (2017) also determined leadership behavior affects followers who perceive contingent reward as a control antecedent of Graen and Schiemann's (1978) leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Under certain circumstances, passive managers use conditional punishment and other corrective actions in response to poorly performing followers (Nguyen, Mia, Winata, & Chong, 2017). Alternately, some leaders promote social constraints, while others utilize persuasive mentoring as a means of gaining employees' compliance (Anderson, Baur, Griffith, & Buckley, 2017). In the end, the behavior of some followers is a direct reflection of LMX leadership style and transformational leadership practices.

Nguyen et al. (2017) suggested that leaders often use encouraging strategies to promote inspirational behavior. Public sector fire chiefs might utilize this approach to incorporate succession planning for high-quality employees. In this literature review, I found that transformational leadership theory was used by researchers to discover leaders' influences on subordinates and strategies supportive of stimulating performance. These conditions justified my selection of transformational leadership theory as a theoretical lens for viewing this study. Researchers observing a business phenomenon through a managerial lens could incorporate some theoretical constructs to explore available strategies to improve succession planning.

Succession Planning

As a public sector agency grows, a leader's ability to influence subordinates to replicate desired attributes such as ethics, motivation, trust, and respect is increasingly significant (Jyoti, & Bhau, 2015). Tummers and Knies (2015) argued that experienced administrators should focus their attention on improving strategies for internal stakeholders (employees). Fire chiefs in the public sector use a variety of succession planning methods based on department dynamics. Succession planning is a process of employee development that some managers use to inspire high-quality employees who exhibit a desire for advancement.

The succession planning process is instrumental for high-quality development of future leaders (Schepker, Kim, et al., 2017; Titzer, Shirey, & Hauck, 2014). Progressive leaders should consider viewing succession planning through the lens of program managers (Park & Yoo, 2016). These managers should consider the needs of stakeholders and how to put forth consistent services to each represented community. The LMX and motivation-hygiene theories could be used to support relationship building. However, using the LMX and motivation-hygiene theories are not helpful in establishing personal motivation or recognition of a direct transition process. A lack of instituted education programs for employees can lead to performance uncertainty.

In 2014, a survey on characteristics of career succession indicated that employees prepared for succession outperformed those who were not prepared (Berns & Klarner, 2017). Administrators using a hands-off approach or simply not embracing the growth of prospective leaders might experience lower percentages of eligible promotional candidates because, as Smith (2015) noted, succession planning is ideal for employees' workplace advancement. Van der Voet (2016) contended that implementing emergent and planned approaches helps establish a managers' leadership style, as does using multiple methods for changing behaviors. Emergent approaches are critical for a true leadership-based event (Van der Voet, 2016). The action of gaining trust from leaders motivates employees to spend more time on required tasks and to perform beyond set standards (Asencio, 2016). One approach to succession planning is to use traditional reinforcement practices with subordinates. Fire chiefs in the public sector frequently adjust to emerging strategies and change management practices to meet organizational trends.

Approaches to transformational leadership in the public sector must address a deep hierarchy-based culture where employee assume leaders are both influential and visionary (Pandey et al., 2015). Compared to their equivalents in the private sector, public managers are more constrained with the use of extrinsic rewards, and so the act of being inspirational is important for PSLs because they experience more difficulties while motivating employees (Hinojosa, Davis McCauley, Randolph-Seng, & Gardner, 2014). Transformational leaders influence subordinates' behavior. For example, the behaviors of fire chiefs in this study who practiced transformational leadership built higher levels of interpersonal trust with employees and were efficient at becoming more transformational than transactional.

Theory Application

Choi and Rainey (2014) and Van Wart (2013) noted that leaders who practice transformational leadership theory frequently manage organization change, ethos, objectivity, and structure by empowering employees. In contrast, leaders who do not devote the necessary time to subordinates must draw on other resources to establish respectable relationships with employees, like those found within LMX in-groups (Kelley & Bisel, 2014). Although not predictable, employees' succession planning applied purposefully by fire chiefs in this study reduced organizational inconsistencies in employees' performance. Also, the availability of higher education programs and industry-specific lecturers to instruct employees onsite provide fire chiefs with new opportunities to improve strategies for employees planning.

Bass et al. (2003) found that transformational leaders work to gain respect and develop opportunities that improve employees' progression in status. Murphy, Rhodes, Meek, and Denyer (2016) detailed how the balance of leadership within the public sector requires a unique ability to be dynamic and adaptive to hurdles in the workplace. In contrast, Andersen et al. (2016) noted that managers implement strategies differently and support decisions they disagree with regarding these requirements. A uniform application of successful strategies, program review, and follow-up for improving succession planning analysis might reduce possible threats of instability in the leadership pipeline. Likewise, leaders who use the transformational style of leadership can foster employees to manage the prospects of obtaining knowledge passed down within supervisor-mentorship programs for individual employees. More specifically, members associated with LMX in-groups are usually those whose attitudes and behaviors are synchronized with the leaders' interactions, while out-groups are more neutral with mutual benefits and communications (Allen, 2005). Some leaders rely on in-group members, although unified relationships encourage motivation and active exchange under LMX theory.

Corporate agency leaders have increasingly promoted programs that integrate growth strategies for employees in their organizations (Seidle et al., 2016). Yet, some agency leaders discovered that their efforts were negatively affecting the transparency of progression goals (Seidle et al., 2016). Some of these administrators assumed that business knowledge transferred between those in leadership positions during job turnover could create problems with succession planning strategies (Mckee & Froelich, 2016; Orazi et al., 2013). Waldron, Schary, and Cardinal (2015) claimed leaders face challenges using traditional courses for systematic professional development for employees. Moreover, competing public sector organizations offer employees the possibility of advancing their careers when they feel growth opportunities are not an option from their direct supervisors. Therefore, fire chiefs should use succession planning because growth strategies support professional development that might positively impact employees' promotional aspirations.

The successful practice of succession planning is not always effective. For example, mutual engagement affected employees' transitioning, but is not always present in succession plans (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015; Schepker, Kim, et al., 2017). In addition, some fire chiefs lack the soft skills needed for encouraging competent performers (Khoury & Al-Kotob, 2014; Rao, 2017). These interpersonal skills fire chiefs apply frame dominant factors for the success of employees' succession planning.

Jyoti and Bhau (2015) explored how LMX and relational identification impact job performance and transformational leadership. The population they studied consisted of public educators and supervisors working throughout ten school districts, with only full-time employees to a minimum of one-year tenure selected to convey professional experience, relationship establishment, and leadership understanding (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). There were 266 participants, 60 of whom were supervisors, and the remaining 206 were subordinates. The authors applied Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for the evaluation of trustworthiness and found that transformational leaders' idealized influence inspires employees and creates lasting relationships between leaders and subordinates. While Jyoti and Bhaus' study incorporated a large participant pool to gather data related to the multiple conceptual frameworks studied, I focused on a small pool of participants in two separate firehouses to collect data related to one conceptual framework that supports strategies to improve succession planning. Jyoti and Bhau used questionnaires for data collection to acquire information related to transformational leadership, leader-member-exchange, and objective influence data. In this study, I conducted semistructured interviews and reviewed organization SOPs for data collection and analysis for the research phenomena. Jyoti and Bhau concluded fair treatment of subordinates enables transformational leaders to foster high-quality relationships. Findings from this study indicated the use of improvement strategies for succession planning could be beneficial for fire chiefs to foster high-quality relationships and advance employees to fill senior leadership positions.

Jyoti and Bhau (2015) found that other leadership roles in their study impacted followers who ultimately followed along the path of mentors, indicating how role relationships between leaders and followers eventually manifests and leaves a stable path to healthy work relationships. Jyoti and Bhau noted leaders who move on to exhibit emotional behaviors inspire followers to accomplish organizational goals. They also found that devoted teachers under transformational leaders deliver at higher performance levels than those who are not. The results in Jyoti and Bhaus' study confirmed transformational leadership affects leader-member-exchange influence on data points (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). Furthermore, the results specified LMX and relational identification (RI) served independently in roles as mediator (LMX) and moderator (RI).

Yoon and Bono (2016) argued that top leadership must maintain stable working relationships with employees to foster self-sufficiency. Many public sector agencies have far-reaching histories immersed in a para-military and autocratic culture, and these unpredictable leadership beliefs might negatively influence work relationships (Sun et al., 2014; Van Wart, 2013). Strategies leaders use for employee succession planning should be fundamentally supportive of organizational change (Porter et al., 2016). Refining employee progression can advance the professional cultures and beliefs in the workplace. Fire chiefs, specifically, should consider the effects of ill-defined succession planning for employees, including irregular succession planning that could occur. When leaders fail to focus on devising strategies for improving concepts to use with succession planning, they risk missing opportunities to build organizational strength.

Larat (2016) found a need for comprehensive training throughout organizations to ensure leaders understand downward shifts and support opportunities to advance future leaders. According to Ramalho (2014), creating a future employee workforce in-house is an adequate staff improvement practice. Furthermore, employee growth is essential for sustaining organizational success (Panchal & Moschandreas, 2015). Elsey and Riddle (2015) suggested formative training begins with nonsupervisory integration into organizational business practices. An effective employee workplace introduction is a crucial step to mold and mentor staff and provide a strong first impression. I explored the transformational leadership theory and public sector management in this study. Only a few studies I reviewed included information from leaders in similar organizations who capitalized on strategies for improving succession planning for their employees. Although some managers apply strategies differently, most outcomes showcase the individual needs of PSLs. Fire chiefs should foster their employees utilizing succession planning, which simplifies learning and supports progressive advancement.

Leaders managing with transformational leadership theory develop their employees by designing an encouraging environment that supports dynamic growth and sustains a comprehensive plan of action for advancement (Khoury & Al-Kotob, 2014). Such leaders could also exchange with “in-group” subordinates for high-quality essentials that require subordinates attain actualization or status under LMX (Khoury & Al-Kotob, 2014). In contrast, the transformational leadership theory is not favorable with group rank or status. Succession planning for employees thrive in an LMX environment with select groups of aspiring workers; however, this study is unique to individual mentoring, and LMX alone is not enough to support strategies to improve employee succession planning.

Managing Employee Performance

Employee retention has a direct association to job performance, strategies for leadership success, and succession planning failures. Ferris and Murphy (2016) asserted that leadership style and job satisfaction were primary reasons for sustainability challenges. Using adequately trained fire chiefs is beneficial for the retention of talented employees and reduces the lack of succession planning turnover. Falk and Blaylock (2012) found hostility, honor, humility, and honesty as negatively affecting job satisfaction and retention, and explored reasons why some leaders chose damaging leadership styles that affect manager-employee confidence outcomes. However, the quality of a leaders' style and effectiveness solely depend on steps previously taken by seniors to successfully implement succession planning.

According to Rante and Warokka (2016), opportunities occur when organizations appoints an influential leader for others to follow. In fact, a leaders' techniques might influence employees' motivation and performance if they encourage self-identification and recommend explicit performance goals (Wijewardena, Samaratunge, & Härtel, 2014). Haynes and Stein (2015) indicated that fire chiefs are responsible for maintaining a progressive work environment. In short, public sector organizations whose employees stayed longer than 2 years frequently included leaders who observed and nurtured employees' talent.

Scholars have described qualities of varied work settings where experience and approval of workplace environments lead to improving performance (White & Shullman, 2012). Abdulrahim and Rachman (2014) explored leadership performance and found it plays a crucial role in workplace performance. Therefore, the selection of quality leaders could determine a company's need for additional sustainability interventions (Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt, 2014; Perrenoud & Sullivan, 2016). In fact, for 30 years, White and Shullman (2012) explored leadership styles and approaches to problem-solving plus its effects on members' performance with no absolute resolution. Similarly, a less traditional leadership practice in the public sector employs intimidation and perceived authority-based management as a means to problem solve and conjure compliance (White, & Shullman, 2012). Hence, leadership performance is crucial for promoting workplace values and principles to employees, although, it was not always successful.

Ospina (2016) opinioned that an analysis of methods might contribute additional awareness that administrative leaders could use to build or cross-reference to advance theory in practice. Change-resistant administrators in the fire service often manage employees using autocratic leadership, thereby indicating a need to keep working towards improving leader-subordinate style relationships (Smith et al., 2016). Jyoti and Bhau (2015) revealed that fair treatment of subordinates enables transformational leaders to foster higher-quality relationships. In addition, managers embrace organizational culture as a guide for the development of leaders during the subordinate mentorship phase (Batistič, 2017). Organizational leaders' expectations must uphold company values and build upon the foundation that set the company onboarding process (Elsey & Riddle, 2015). This process frequently begins during the employee's onboarding process or entry into the organization. The comparison and analysis of theories within organizations could provide perspective to public leadership as it relates to contemporary strategy. Leaders should also be open to improvements in organizational needs and values that relate to organizational success. The findings indicated that fire chiefs sought assistance from external public sector organizations to compare strategies for improving employees' professional development.

Organizational managers passionate about their business intuitively use incentives to convince workers to maintain professional standards (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). Public sector organizational leaders often incorporate common relationship-based styles of leadership that encourage maximum sustainability (Koohang & Hatch, 2017; Wang & Odongo, 2017). Reducing the ambiguity of goal setting is an effective strategy that improves organizational performance, but many leaders struggle with this task (Nguyen, et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2014). Sun et al. (2014) explored relationships between different perceptions of organizational goals, and Batistič (2017) researched leadership and quality management at corporations, and both found the administration of business strategies by corporate boards to be substantially unattached to employees' perceptions of the organization's goals. Alternately, Sun et al. found public sector employees surveys throughout multiple agencies found that employees often relate to the organization's mission.

Beyond the significance of upholding values, few scholars believe all value creation comes from the organization (Giauque, Biget, & Varone, 2015). Efforts to sustain organizational cohesion are important to management executives. Therefore, this analysis explores methods to implement improved management strategies that reduce internal organization erosion related to ineffective succession planning. Leadership status, norms, and standard practices relate to company practices and organizational sustainability and leadership values. Spence-Laschinger, Wong, and Grau (2012) found a negative correlation between bullying leadership tactics and employee resignation. Here, bullying and turnover are higher with people who know each other versus those who do not (Lansiquot, Beverley, Tullai-McGuinness, & Madigan, 2012). To combat this issue, Lansiquot et al. (2012) suggested that managers create detailed procedures for hiring and onboarding employees. With the creation of organizational procedures, leaders write out expectations detailing work practices.

Onboarding challenges. Onboarding is a major building period for employees, and often establishes what strategies leaders will use for employees' growth. Onboarding employees remain an essential duty of managers in charge of performing organizational integrations (Macnaughton & Medinsky, 2015). Correctly done, using this process will produce effective organizational leaders in the public sector. However, company executives expect leaders to adapt to social competence norms, employees' perceptions, and challenges that preclude skill-based learning (Batistič, 2017; Klein, Polin, & Leigh Sutton, 2015). The common onboarding errors found that impede the improvement of an employee's progression often become the standard (Elsey & Riddle, 2015). Some onboarding problems include stress, information deprivation, priorities, information overload, transition, simple accommodation, process delays, communication failures, comradery, and pass on (Davis & Frolova, 2016). I used these standard errors as reference points in this study as evidence for the inclusion of process commonalities.

New hires. The onboarding process in the public sector operated differently from other civil-service departments, and there was little differentiation in supervisor training (Macdonald, 2016). Klein et al. (2015) suggested integrating new hires into the work environment should be a slow and methodical process. Fire chief's onboard employee's multiple times each year, yet onboarding managers frequently violate standard human resource management (HRM) training essentials, thereby damaging relationships with employees (Figlietti, 2017). According to Alnıaçık, Alnıaçık, Erat, and Akçin (2014), leaders can grow insensitive to the transitional stress associated with an introduction to a new way of doing business for employees. New hires who join public sector teams regularly need desensitization and soft integration into what could be a para-military organization. These organizations retain authority with rules, hierarchies, and standard operating procedures.

Human resources. Human-resource professionals (HRP) can convey standard business practice to managers to use with new employees, yet many do not understand the importance of accurately communicating this vital information (Bass, 2016). For example, while speaking openly and purposefully usually leads to better understanding and task execution by subordinates, technical jargon, and electronic reliance to procedural knowledge can result in constant bilateral confusion. In fact, the complete reliance on electronic methods usually promotes confusion (Charlier, Stewart, Greco, & Reeves, 2016). A misunderstanding that occurs during the employee onboarding process results in a major breakdown in trust and morale (Ellis et al., 2014). A manager's attention to detail and dedication to build relationships through good practices, most often elicit the best results (Ellis, Nifadkar, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2017). Relationship building, and succession planning are integral in the development of future fire service leaders.

Employee priorities. Reducing miscommunication among leaders and their employees is crucial (Abdulrahim & Rachman, 2014) as was the process of establishing priorities in an organization that determine how to satisfy progressive goals. Some leaders ignore these practices and fail to understand the importance of introducing employees into a work organization during the onboarding process (Eisner, 2014). Workers who lack commitments are apathetic, dislike management, are unaware of essential duties, and receive discipline most frequency (Abdulrahim & Rachman, 2014). As this process evolves, leaders must assume which commitments had valor.

Employees who do not obtain needed information to perform their roles ethically start at a disadvantage (Bonner, Greenbaum, & Quade, 2017). Abdulrahim and Rachman (2014) proposed that each employee receive their expected duties in writing after onboarding with explanations of performance expectation. Emphasis on mutual understanding of responsibilities and assumptions relates to psychological bonding (Massenberg, Schulte, & Kauffeld, 2016). Massenberg et al. (2016) added that both employee and manager need to equally understand ethical considerations and their complex relationships with performance. Moreover, either during the process of onboarding or initial performance of duties, employees who feel bewildered toward needed tasks are not able to perform at optimal levels. A connection between new hires and their leadership as related to assignment functions and obligations is crucial during onboarding.

Kim, Eisenberger, and Baik (2016) suggested that smooth and methodical organizational flow encourages employees. The authors explained the organizational flow could prove difficult if the structures were void. Thus, the normalized movement of communication between manager and subordinate can be an implicit function of capability (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). For instance, information during the onboarding process was constructive, concise, and practiced by other employees. Next, a human resource manager's role is essential for successful utilization of organizational roles, missions, and visions. A natural and sequential balance between organizational change and stability combines long-term success and limited disorganized information to pass on as a priority during initial onboarding. Cassar and Buttigieg (2015) theorized that less than one-third of industry-specific managers have a precise qualification in this area. Alternatively, organizations, such as the fire service, consider the functions of human resources as a service that should have internal and external dexterity (Andrews, Ashworth, & Meier, 2014). Ultimately, researchers found that incentives and an employees' resilience positively relate to their commitment to understanding the organizational process (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). Also, the practice of adequately onboarding public sector employees can improve internal workplace human-resource functions.

Planning. Some managers use Gantt Chart planning as a simple systems approach to operations planning, and the recognition of the necessary elements for successful onboarding, can substantially reduce the time spent for new employees to transition into their jobs (Lurie, 2016; Ong, Wang, & Zainon, 2016). Human resource professionals and organization leaders frequently fail to plan actual onboarding costs for brand new employees with budgets that are preplanned (Boysen, 2017). The lack of transition planning negatively affects new employee's introduction into the organization. In some locations, offices might not be cleaned or painted; computers, desks, chairs not ordered or set up in advance; and key support personnel might not be appropriately trained. Organizations that are prepared to adopt regular change and processes for simple accommodations might outperform companies that do not. Participants interviewed for this study suggested that new employees be mentored by senior staff and that a process be put in place to support professional development.

Delays. Providing adequate information to employees regarding benefits and pay occurs early in the onboarding process (Macnaughton & Medinsky, 2015). Employees should not have to make decisions of a serious nature without the opportunity to give it some serious thought, and this period is essential to organizational success (Ong et al., 2016). Numerous poorly trained managers are not providing employees with the necessary paperwork to allow enough time to plan a significant life event or even prepare for transition into a new role.

Employee communication. Cassar and Buttigieg (2015) determined that employees informed of specific job tasks felt as if they were part of an organization and had a lower rate of terminating employment. Additionally, when managers fail to provide realistic views about the job performed within the organization, employees remain confused about job performance duties and responsibilities and lack a mental connection made between themselves and their managers (Chen, Wei, Wang, & Peng, 2016; Piatak, 2017). The comradery established after this connection often initiates the foundation of work relationships.

Relationship building and providing an accepting work environment where employees feel they can create relationships remains relevant to the onboarding process (Clark et al., 2017). Leaders who do not anticipate this need violates basic accountability principles of human resource management (Massenberg et al., 2016). Organizations that properly integrate HR systems and training for employees have active leaders who are effective mentors (Economides, Philippopoulos, & Varthalitis, 2016). Although untrained leaders lack the experience to understand the adverse effects of putting menial tasks above building trust and relationship with subordinates, leaders anticipate providing employees information.

Two-Factor Theory (Motivation-Hygiene Theory)

Herzberg’s (1974) two-factor theory includes situational factors that relate to employees’ physical and emotional actions as reactionary or nonreactionary in the work environments. These measures include cognitive association by employees to self-associate their work ethics with that of direct supervisors (Bos-Nehles, Bondarouk, & Nijenhuis, 2017). Conservative leaders are more proficient at building relationship securities, although nonreactionary leaders who plan for social interactions throughout the public sector reduce leadership simplicity (Herzberg, 1974). Although Bass (1999) expanded transformational leadership theory with additional constructs, the groundwork for this study integrates Bass's (1999) and Herzberg's (1974) leadership methods as valuable internal assets.

Alderfer (1969) proposed the existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory as a retort to Maslow's (1943) theory of motivation. However, Maslow's (1943) and Alderfer's (1969) theories advanced motivational themes centered on needs, goals, and job satisfaction, but did not emphasize manager-protégé relationships or strategies that could be used with public sector employees. Thus, researchers consider the methods of the accomplished theorists Maslow and Alderfer to be content based and not specifically related to leadership practice (Bostan, Condrea, Burciu, & Morariu, 2009). Leaders who opt to spend time mentoring protégés usually gain employees with leadership drive (Alderfer, 2014; Sanjeev & Surya, 2016). Although the motivation-hygiene theory received strong consideration, it does not contribute to the core base of this research regarding the improvement of strategies for succession planning that incorporate favorable outcomes.

Bass. Bass's (1999) transformational leadership theory and Graen and Schiemann's (1978) LMX theory identified job satisfaction as a motivational factor that dismisses a leader's need to influence subordinate work while still building a relationship (Kelley & Bisel, 2014). Meanwhile, Bass, Avolio and Jung constructed the transformational leadership framework to motivate followers with inspirational morals, ethics, and the exploration of the phenomenon (Bass et al., 2003; Lehmann-Willenbrock, Meinecke, Rowold, & Kauffeld, 2015). The LMX approach changes PSLs style from an authoritarian focus to a relationship focus and social-based style of leadership, whereas transformational leadership theory is focused on motivating employees.

The LMX theory outlook by some theorists transcends and conceptualizes the values set within the transformational and transactional theories of Bass et al. (2003). Value-based leadership cohesiveness among personnel constitutes satisfaction as an overarching goal for successful instruction and transition (Wart, 2003). Some researchers view Bass' theories as one-sided with individual biases used for manipulation and personal gains. Even though the possibility of bias exists, the transformational leadership theory considerations remain an alternative for organizational leaders to appreciate growth and solidarity.

Graen and Schiemann. Graen and Schiemann (1978) extended Burns's (1978) transformational leadership theory to include leaders advocating high-quality "in-group" and low quality "out-group" employees to perform beyond set expectations and emulate a company's visions and organizational goals. Bass, Waldman, Avolio, and Bebb's (1987) theories incorporate independent values, visionary thinkers, and motivational leaders as reflected by several multi-factor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) survey responses (Bass, 1999; Felix et al., 2016). Graen and Schiemann wanted to understand relationships between leaders and followers and internal oppositions.

Notably, the LMX and transactional theory feature leadership and manager-subordinate relationships characterized by leadership styles that encourage diverse subordinate mentoring (Bass et al., 2003; Naseer, Raja, Syed, Donia, & Darr, 2016). Because of this, each conceptualized theory has workers who remain motivated by praise and ability to gain additional recognition and affluence (O'Neill, 2016). However, the LMX theory constructs for supervisor-subordinate relationship outcomes are evenly reflective but lack similarity in the shifting of organizational characteristics (Yoon & Bono, 2016). Combining relationship building theory attributes alongside successful strategies to improve succession planning includes combinations of paradigms that align with the research question. As applied to this study, LMX and transformational leadership theory supports my research to explore subordinate exchanges linked to leadership alongside strategies that could be used to improve employees' succession planning.

Logical Theories Related to Transformational Leadership Theory

Transactional theory. Burns (1978) minted the term *transactional theory*. Bass et al. (1987) followed up declaring leaders build working relationships and individual character that support transformational leadership theory. For some leaders, increasing interactions with employees regarding transformational styles of leadership as procedural guidance is reasonable (Orazi et al., 2013). Often, workplace bias and employee favoritism contribute to a leader's continual rise or expectant failure (Felix et al., 2016). Together, transformational and transactional leadership practices are common and considered effective at building relationships that improves strategies for employees' growth (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). As each subordinate-leader's relationship matures, the need for additional responsibility is supportive of a transactional-based connection, whereby a leader reward subordinate. Some leaders work to earn subordinate admiration, making appeals to prove worth and recognition for work performed. Furthermore, subordinate employees in the public sector who want higher-quality group status with leaders could earn new favors, thereby, creating a relationship shift.

Social exchange theory. Role theories such as LMX provide the theoretical groundwork for relationship development and are similar to social exchange theory (Lighton, 2017). The LMX foundation begins around relationship practices defined by high and low-quality factors. Bierstedt and Blau (1965) determined that both low-quality and high-quality employees advocate reciprocations as valid for relationship exchanges yet have differing foundational values. For example, motivated employees advance past relationships as self-realization and work better after strong leadership praise their performance.

An empirical review of the literature on leadership in the public sector could confirm an impact on leadership performance, culture, and job commitment (Seidle et al., 2016). The foundation of transformational leadership theory design incorporates leadership visions that inspire subordinate workers to accept challenges. Meanwhile, organizational group cohesion remains affected by age growth and strategic difficulties, and minor implications emerge when adapting leadership styles (Batistič, 2017). Lastly, social exchange theory tenants included developmental features that fit into various leadership styles like those of LMX.

Leader-member exchange theory. LMX theory originally resembled transformational leadership design as practiced in early 1970 (Clarke & Mahadi, 2016). Little, Gooty, and Williams (2016) concluded that LMX theory and transformational leadership theory are adaptive and relevant in organizational business. The selection of high LMX relationship achievement factors is affirmative for leadership's support of protégés when attainment is a necessity (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Leaders who practice under LMX adopters favor compliant employees from within the group (compliant top-down communication) rather than employees outside the group (none productive top-down communication). Although leaders may endorse employees, group selection does not automatically encourage isolation. Such relationships between employee and manager determine if the employee is in or out of the *in group* (Elanain, 2014). These external environmental fluctuations support adopting visionary employees within the organization to match changes and harness the potential sourced talent (Gabriel, 2014). The literature details transformational leadership style used extensively among public sector professionals.

LMX theory, unlike existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory, has purposeful leadership relationship strategies for subordinate employees (Little et al., 2016). Leadership temperaments affect how role processes and group assignment support development. Furthermore, high-quality employees are striving to maintain in-group status as opposed to out-group status, leading to a dyadic relationship composure that could include implications and a means for positive or negative correlation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Under LMX theory, many dominant leaders choose individuals whom they fee will conform and remain subservient to their requests (Jin et al., 2016). LMX theory detailed that associations between managers and subordinates are reciprocal, and high-quality leader-member exchanges result in high trust, mutual respect, lower turnover, better performance, and improved productivity (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Most often, the reciprocity in bilateral relations often leads to role negotiations (Hesselgreaves & Scholarios, 2014). Effective leaders nurture both groups who mutually benefit the other with optimism, allowing out-group members to gain mutual respect of in-group members.

New followers actively participate in the decision-making process that advances their organizational status as in-group members (Graen & Schiemann, 1978). Such a contract-based situation moves the follower to an out-group status (Buch et al., 2016). Overall, LMX leadership was varied and sought after, but other approaches to leadership styles transcend group style variations (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2015). Successful LMX leadership may also prevent favoritism between groups. However, low-quality LMX relationships brought a wider social distance between leader and follower, reducing the quality of the relationships and making social exchanges between leaders and followers more contract-based.

LMX leadership adopters either maintain their positions by securing subordinates inside each functional group where trust and support are absolute, or they fail to maintain their position (Breevaart, Bakker, Demerouti, & Van den Heuvel, 2015). Followers of the LMX theory advocate that inner group members remain valued and trusted workers whose assistance to leaders aids in maintaining leadership authority (Matta, Scott, Koopman, & Conlon, 2015). Some relationships evolve above a manager’s expectations, thus simulating the importance among leaders to vet relationships judiciously, although various dyads of high-quality expectations will cultivate (Rao, 2017). The LMX theory ratifies the relationship between leader and subordinate as it relates to effectiveness.

Leadership. Personal attributes such as integrity, trust, and willingness to delegate power increase high-quality and loyal followers' confidence (Dulebohn et al., 2017). Furthermore, employee advancement remains hampered by a lack of future insight, which thwarts opportunities for succession planning (Getha-Taylor, Fowles, Silvia, & Merritt, 2015; Piatak, 2017). These perceptions of leadership behaviors differ within workspaces that delimit variations of the LMX theorem (Dulebohn et al., 2017). Once a leader-led relationship exists, it becomes the first essential stage of LMX development. Sometimes leaders find challenges with LMX culture because the values they perceive derived from previous leaders (Clarke & Mahadi, 2016; Wang & Odongo, 2017). Therefore, leadership in the public sector regularly encounter the challenges of layoff, budget cuts, and hiring freezes that sometimes negatively affect organizational trends. However, not all employees can understand or appreciate idioms correlated with culture, social status, economy, and charisma, leaving only the leader-led relationship that sustain them.

Leaders are supportive of healthy relationships and clear expectations with their followers under an LMX theory by building trust and loyalty and avoiding depravity and greed, especially during times of system challenges (Chen, Wen, Peng, & Liu, 2016). That said, the LMX theory lacks consideration of leadership personalities; for example, how leadership authority influences LMX, it remains evident in studies that covers a follower's prestige (Cook & Glass, 2016). As a result, followers might perceive authority as selfish. However, in this circumstance, the member still benefits socially (Dulebohn et al., 2017). These personal gains influence joint ventures between leaders and subordinates where arrangements deliver expected outcomes.

Dulebohn et al. (2017) found that many work relationships include transformational and transactional inferences with empirical connections of LMX. When given the opportunity to exceed expectations within a relationship status and not social status, LMX and transformational leaders positively and responsibly reciprocate (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). The quality of relationships under LMX and transformational leadership and a leaders' influence over followers is contingent upon reward behavior guided by expectations set by leaders for followers (Dulebohn et al., 2017; Jin et al., 2016). Transformational leaders develop successful relationships by setting clear expectations of goals. These goals provide a connection and social norms that combine suggestive and selective leadership styles in workspaces.

Confidence among followers could be a determining factor of Graen and Schiemann's (1978) LMX performance in theory whereas Bass et al. (2003) suggested leadership framed through transformational and transactional theory displays relationships as optimal. By encouraging members, transformational leaders are receptive to trying new tactics (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). Following the transformational leadership style is an important antecedent to making a positive connection between leaders and protégé relationships (Jyoti & Bhau, 2015). Employees with quality relationships can move beyond self-interest and work toward suggesting work goals that benefit both leaders and followers. In short, tolerant leaders applying transformational leadership theory choices might reach their full potential if practiced.

Commitment from leaders prepared to follow through with effective growth strategies support successful employee growth. Despite the numerous programs designed to improve succession procedures, some fire chiefs are using methods that are ineffective (Orazi et al., 2013). Within a group, tasks range from anarchy to a single individual directing everything (Robert, Dunne, & Iun, 2016). Additionally, when a person rises from a group, they are usually intent on power development. Hence, a willingness to socialize for a sense of belonging or companionship needs are some prime motivators in the public sector (Smoke, 2015). Because of the group indecisiveness, the transformation style of leadership is well-matched because it typically does not involve groups competing for power positions. Individuals rising from the crowd have charisma, intelligence, or some quality that others recognize and saw as desirable or essential for accomplishing the task (Robert et al., 2016). In this manner, LMX theory and transformational leadership theory could support some fire chiefs' succession planning approaches, although the means for obtaining standout individuals is controversial for these organizational leaders.

Arguably, situations where no functions are available but that include persons intrigued by high-performance measures ultimately promote followers' interests (Robert et al., 2016). Furthermore, interested fire chiefs can choose employees succession planning under several of the theories discussed herein; although multiple results are plausible, LMX remains a nonselective approach because of suggestive group interactions with supervisors. Role development has many origins, depending upon why the group formed. For instance, team members could be imitated by groups who gauge position and group status (Robert et al., 2016). Additionally, many of the tasks assigned to managers usually define the types of role authority. Newer roles invented by leaders as rewards for favors performed to benefit employees are typical. The balance between a leader's direct involvement in decision making and delegating work to others is necessary for success (Robert et al., 2016). Thereby, granting a need for a division of labor function, which creates a need for positions because some leaders cannot do every aspect of all tasks.

Mixed admittance in either direction can result in the micro-management or dispersal of authority to the extent that a leader can lose their role (Robert et al., 2016). Lost perceptions of power could cause authority resistance by lower ranked employees. If authority delegated excessively or without merit, challenges for influence arise, leadership might become diluted, and power could vaporize quickly (Steele & Plenty, 2014). Essentially, the importance of working together unintentionally promote self-interest and individualism in the workplace.

Vertical dyad linkage. Graen and Schiemann (1978) coined vertical dyad linkage (VDL), also known as leader-member exchange theory, as a *group stimulus*. Role making processes are the substance of the dyad, with a provision that supports the bartered relationships evolution between leaders and protégés (Matta et al., 2015). This terminology is unique for the two separations of leader and subordinates and their connected relationships (Ross, Huang, & Jones, 2014). Similarly, under VDL, once referred to as a conclusion to the discovery of the LMX theory, leaders and subordinates must acclimate to different motivations and restraints to avoid risk levels targeted as advantageous to others (Graen & Schiemann, 2013). VDL leaders also continue to challenge medium-quality subordinates' relationships with additional responsibilities, while allowing lower quality in-group subordinates to gain higher-quality status (Yoon & Bono, 2016). Because of this, leadership professionals began to integrate LMX theory more often for situational adeptness (Dulebohn et al., 2017). Within a dyadic linkage, the relationship between followers and leaders is one of acceptance of met expectations.

Leaders who practice systems theory dictate success and failure in organizations with or without chaos, unlike those operating under LMX constructs that remain neutral and bias-free. Members build trust the longer they work at gaining leadership confidence in LMX (Cho & Poister, 2014). Jyoti and Bhau (2015) noted LMX resembles social exchange theory, noting leaders practiced LMX and transformational leadership theory by way of influence and tangible constructs (Elanain, 2014). Relationships negotiated under the LMX premise obligate followers to acquire a leader's perspective and logic (Lin, Lin, & Chang, 2016). These relationships develop into three role categories: (a) stranger, (b) acquaintance, and (c) partner to identify starter attributes. The perception of these stages is different among groups, and in many situations, creates personal challenges (Dulebohn et al., 2017). Building relationships that center on perceived power creates a society of disorganization (Dulebohn et al., 2017). As a relationship enters the stage of introduction and compatibility, the stranger's phase begins the building process.

Phase 1: Stranger. As the stranger phase progressed forward, interactions between leader and follower begin with building trusting relationships with subordinates, while cementing secondary roles within the organization (Robert et al., 2016). Dyadic relationship members enjoy interactions that result in blind trust, and subordinates do not question leaders' rules. Individual or low-quality performances of subordinates are not applicable in this phase (Steele & Plenty, 2014). Similar members seek out additional leadership attention and continuously support subordinates in this group. Frequently, roles are one directional and proactive, allowing self-interest and sometimes humor to thrive (Robert et al., 2016). Lastly, these members exchange lower quality experiences while maintaining an understanding of the other's role.

Phase 2: Acquaintance. Progressing the dyad toward the sequential shifts formalizes interaction and accomplishments as listed by standardized protocols (Steele & Plenty, 2014). The additional emphasis at the offering of compensation to leaders to increase perceived chances of promotion brings new competition. Trust improves exchange quality and focus less on individual interest outside the group (Robert et al., 2016), solidifying medium quality and interest positions with equal member involvement (Steele & Plenty, 2014). Acquaintance is a significant point where leaders realize the relationship's reciprocal advantages and opportunities available for subordinates to implement brand-new roles.

Phase 3: Partner. In this step, leaders and subordinates synchronize each other's ideas regarding leadership consistency (Steele & Plenty, 2014). Some relations with leaders remain dyadic with negotiated roles for self-interest over group interest. Moreover, exchanges between leader and subordinate are mutual between individuals although quality expands to a higher status (Steele & Plenty, 2014). Each group member adopts dependability and loyalty attributes. In other words, a high trust level extends throughout the team, relieving low-quality tension (Robert et al., 2016). Reactions among group and leaders become synchronized, and work patterns create quality returns. As a result, leaders using LMX theory advance upon previous levels of trust, interaction, support, and rewards that determine the quality of a relationship.

Contrasting Theories Related to Transformational Leadership Theory

Leader-member social exchange (LMSX). Bernerth (2005) developed the leader-member social exchange theory, which is a behavioral and not a relationship-based theory, enabling a transfer of tangible objects with expectations attached. Newer concepts of LMX feature a social two-way interaction and exchange process between leaders and protégés (Bernerth, 2005). Leadership is less one person doing something to another, but rather a process of leaders and subordinates accomplishing each other's goals with mutually influenced interactions (Bernerth, 2005). Higher-quality relationships are linked with LMX leadership, whereas perceptions of perceived authority generate individual empowerment (Dulebohn et al., 2017). LMSX aspects include commonality, exchange, and a unique set of leaderships constructs guided by focused managers. Additionally, LMX follower support leads to positive interactions and fewer adverse meetings between leaders and protégés. The LMSX theory did not align with this study since I did not study a leaders' relationship traits for individual empowerment.

LMX. LMX constructs characterize relationships, although dyadic relationships between leaders and protégés are conditioning leaders not to develop an honest relationship with followers (Dulebohn et al., 2017). Dulebohn et al. (2017) focused on antecedents and outcomes together to access the complex functions using only LMX. Not until the 20th century, when the focus of scholars remained on governing leadership and not follower attributes, did it become conventional to consider a simple relationship as successful (Kabalo, 2015). Efforts to maintain operational leadership remained a developing factor of LMX; although, the ability to modify changing relationship outputs increased (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). The introduction of LMX includes evidence that could change criteria related to relationship theories, leading to a nonstandard form of consideration. For example, para-military organizations continue evolving outside democratic platforms. Under LMX, effective leadership means the leader-follower relationship manifests growth. More importantly, at the discretion of the administration under LMX, the establishment of relationships is not an elective for protégés. Lastly, a wide range of antecedents associated with the creation of LMX based relationships offer options for developing relationships.

Although LMX is considered a relationship theory, Kim (2015) described LMX as a behavioral method. Kim (2015) also suggested that the LMX description was vague, with unusual conceptual definitions. The absence of a central construct in LMX is an indication that no essential relationship exchange exists (Kabalo, 2015). LMX includes social and relationship-based methods to build a base. For example, leaders who use dynamic theory with a dyad to build relationships create viable workspace connections. The LMX theory did not align with this study since I did not study relationship experiences in the workplace or the limited value it adds for succession planning.

Human capital theory. Schultz (1961) developed the human capital theory to promote the further extension of human value integrated with similar economics theories.

Some of the constructs within the human capital theory are (a) health, (b) organizational policy, (c) education, (d) people cost investment, (e) education, (f) job opportunities, (g) skills and abilities, and (h) initiative. The human capital framework is not applicable in this study because it did not align with strategies for improving employee succession planning. The theory constructs align more closely with research opportunities of human capital, and expenditure and productive stock value are irrelevant to this study. The theory of strategic human capital emerged as restricted, especially Schultz's belief of placing monetary values on human worth and exploring divergent perspectives associated with each theory (Junita, 2016; Wright, Coff, & Moliterno, 2013). Using the human capital theory involves describing strategies that could improve subordinate succession planning and not applying a monetary value on people.

Theory of planned behavior. Theory of planned behavior (TPB) consolidates subcategories of personal attitudes and personal customs (Afshari & Gibson, 2016). Business failures can involve leadership practices without productive reinforcement as a shared practice of unethical behavior. Still, partially impractical in all organizations, the practice of variance could incorporate job benefits. Practical implications of TPB include how organizations that awaiting sustainability programs might use the conceptual model as a tool to achieve and assess program achievement. Incidentally, corporations do not achieve success implicitly, legally, or socially. The theory of planned behavior did not align with this study since I did not study personal attitudes or customs of individuals or the organization's sustainability programs.

Strategic human capital. Wright et al. (2013) concluded that strategic human capital analysis commences when leaders decide which nonmonetary rewards supplement monetary gains, thereby incrementing their investment value. Accordingly, Wright et al. (2013) proposed several foundational concepts and assumptions solidifying strategic human capital research and noted that people determine their (a) education, (b) training, (c) medical care, and (d) cost-benefit analysis. Within the appropriate scope of control, certain individual choices remain controlled. Separately, strategic human resource management comprises organizational investment and interest and human capital (Astutiek, 2017; Wright et al., 2013). The strategic human capital theory did not align with this study since I did not study individual value to the organization. Individual performance associate human capital theory and remains analytical regarding investment via performance and education, thereby leading to efficiency creation (Schultz, 1961). Schultz's (1961) human capital theory and the theory of strategic human capital by Wright et al. (2013) did not completely align with this study of exploring strategies for improving succession planning.

Transition

In Section 1, I reviewed how I used a qualitative multiple case study to explore strategies fire chiefs used to improve succession planning for their employees. I explained the background for the business problem, composed a problem statement, described the purpose of the study, and designed a research question. Next, I described the transformational leadership theory, which was the conceptual framework used in the research. Following this, I emphasized the significance of the study and explained study assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Last, I extensively reviewed the literature on strategies that support the improvement of public sector employees' succession planning in the literature review. In Section 2, I address the role of the researcher, research design, research method, eligibility criteria for participants, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I present the findings, application for professional practice, and implications for social change. Next, I present recommendations for action and further research. Last, I include a reflection on my experiences within the DBA Doctoral Study process and provide a conclusion to my study.

Section 2: The Project

In Section 2, I present strategies fire chiefs used to improve succession planning for employees. I also present information that supports the research method and research design of this study, and I discuss the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, and participant recruitment and demographics. Further, I discuss my strategies for data collection and data analysis. I then outline the steps I used to validate reliability and validity before reviewing the content in Section 2 and previewing Section 3.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that fire chiefs used to improve succession planning. The target population consisted of fire chiefs from two separate firehouses in the southern United States who implemented strategies to improve succession planning. The findings of this study advance positive social change by presenting information that may lead fire chiefs to promote employees and to prepare them to fill key leadership positions. The implications for positive social change included improvements to strategies for succession planning by fire chiefs who use these findings. Fire chiefs could enhance employees' job performance and productivity, which could result in an increase in the number of successful leaders in firehouses who can positively affect their communities.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher's role in a qualitative study involves exploring a phenomenon by first collecting data, and then reviewing and validating the emerging information (Anderson, 2014; Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). While performing the role of researcher, I ensured that I adhered to all guidelines in the data collection process. Although I am employed in the public sector, I had no direct or personal relationships with the participants selected for this study. As a public servant, I have considerable experience in employee succession planning because I serve in an administrative position and participate in annual fire leadership conventions. I conducted this study in the southern United States where I have some indirect relationships with local fire chiefs. Although I do not work for the fire chiefs, who I selected to interview for this study, I am familiar with fundamental concepts pertaining to strategies used for succession planning.

During this research, I followed the ethical standards mandated by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for doctoral studies. As a qualified researcher, I followed the principles outlined in *The Belmont Report*. Namely, I complied with the guidelines set forth by the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) and remained unbiased throughout the data collection process. Christie, Bemister, and Dobson (2015) described the researcher's role as collecting, analyzing, and validating data without bias. Edwards and Brannelly (2017) indicated that mitigating personal interests and predispositions is a challenge for qualitative researchers. With some researchers, biases could inhibit the research process if ignored (Robinson, 2014). Ethical research practice leads to validity, quality, and bias reduction (Loui, 2016). The data I collected was raw, unbiased, and not supportive of preexisting assumptions concerning the phenomenon as viewed through a personal lens. I remained impartial despite my personal beliefs and recused my private opinions or potential judgments.

I gathered data for analysis by conducting semistructured interviews with fire chiefs, as well as reviewing organization SOPs related to succession planning. In my interactions with participants, I secured interview notes collected in my reflective journals to maintain participant confidence. Throughout this process, I adhered to the interview protocol (Appendix) to ensure consistency in my data collection role. To reduce the possibility of bias and enhance the clarity of information, I recorded each Skype interview with participant approval to ensure that information was accurate, to mitigate bias, and to increase the validity and reliability of the study.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of two fire chiefs who worked in two firehouses located in the southern United States. Yin (2014) indicated that case studies are validated easily if defined according to specific criteria for participant selection. Such criteria include recruiting enough participants in a target population to justify findings of the study (Gentles, Charles, Nicholas, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2016). For this multiple case study, I recruited two participants whose eligibility matched selection criteria. To be eligible to take part in the study, participants had to be fire chiefs who worked in a firehouse in the southern United States and who used successful strategies to improve succession planning for their employees. Additional eligibility requirements were that all participants must have been at least 18 years old at the time of the interview and must have worked in a supervisory position. According to Yin, researchers may be selective in their choice of study participants. When selecting participants, I ensured that their characteristics aligned with the central research question, and that they understood the purpose of the study and the research goals. The participants in this study shared characteristics that included the successful application of leadership responsibilities, reflected substantial knowledge, and contextual diversity about successful strategies used in succession planning for employees in public sector firehouses.

I located city managers in the southern United States by means of a Google search. I reviewed public websites to find contact information. Next, I requested contact information for prospective participants who met the above-described eligibility criteria for the study from the city managers. I obtained permission from the city managers to gain access to prospective participants using a letter of cooperation. City managers served as the primary approving authority because of their role as executive officers who supervised fire chiefs.

Dennis (2014) asserted that acceptable participants are key to conducting qualitative research and to achieving a working relationship. Interviewing participants in their business setting usually provides a level of comfort that supports a working relationship (Lancaster, 2016; Yoon & Bono, 2016). I established an initial working relationship with prospective participants using e-mail as a method for communication. Dennis noted that connecting with study participants and maintaining a working relationship are strategies supportive of open communication and rapport. Selected participants met eligibility criteria as aligned with the overarching research question. In this study, working relationships were supported with open discussions and by exploring participant knowledge of the business phenomenon during interviews.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

In scientific studies, the three available research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Maxwell, 2015). Researchers may use the qualitative method to engage participants in semistructured interviews and explore participant phenomena (Edwards & Brannelly, 2017; Katz, Huffman, & Cojucar, 2016; Lancaster, 2016). The use of the qualitative method enables researchers to explore an issue or concern in a location over a defined timeframe (Kniffin et al., 2015). A qualitative researcher's purpose is not to control study variables, but rather to understand a phenomenon in its natural state (Clark & Thompson, 2016). Qualitative methods involve the use of open-ended questions and the review of collected data to engage participants with previously prepared questions, as opposed to focused questions that support the validation and accuracy of controlling behaviors (Bevan, 2014; Khorsandi & Aven, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Watkins, 2017). Using the qualitative method, I used open-ended questioning to facilitate the unrestricted flow of voluntary information from participants regarding succession planning as they viewed it, thereby justifying this method. I used the qualitative method to collect data to explore succession planning, which included the successful strategies that fire chiefs used for improving succession of their employees.

Quantitative methodology involves computations based on collected data and the testing of hypotheses (Snelson, 2016). Kniffin et al. (2015) argued that, in contrast to a qualitative approach, quantitative research is aimed toward predicting phenomena through an investigation of the relationships among variables and does not focus on exploring and understanding the meaning of a business problem. The use of a quantitative method is ineffective for the discovery of phenomena, or for understanding interpersonal relationships, behaviors, or effects on leadership outcomes (Bass et al., 2003; Edwards & Brannelly, 2017). I did not test for a hypothesis; therefore, I did not use a quantitative method. The mixed methods strategy requires a researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, thus necessitating considerable time expenditure (Almalki, 2016; Church et al., 2015; Maxwell, 2015). The mixed methods approach, which includes quantitative and qualitative methods, was not warranted for this study because quantitative data collection and analyses were outside of the scope of the research question. Additionally, in quantitative and mixed methods, researchers use closed-ended questions to verify and quantify data with statistical outcomes (Maxwell, 2015). Because a mixed method approach includes utilizing quantitative methods and asking closed-ended questions, it was unsuitable for this study.

Research Design

The research designs that I considered for this study included (a) phenomenological, (b) ethnographic, (c) narrative, and (d) case study. Phenomenological designs involve examining an individual's lived experiences with a phenomenon (Bevan, 2014; Chan, 2015; Dowden, 2014). I did not select a phenomenological design because this study did not focus on personal experiences or perceptions of individuals' lived experiences as affected by a phenomenon. Because researchers use an ethnographic design to describe or interpret culture (Fusch & Ness, 2015; McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014; Rapp, 2017), I did not select this design because my research did not entail describing or interpreting lived experiences associated with culture. Narrative designs aim to provide a holistic view of an individual's real-world experiences as expressed in personal stories (Vohra, 2014; Yang & Hsu, 2017; Yin, 2014). I did not select a narrative design because this study did not investigate real experiences through the narration of the personal stories of individuals.

A case study design is suitable to investigating topics with the aim of understanding what, how, and why something is occurring (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013; Gentles et al., 2016; Vohra, 2014). Yin (2014) indicated that the goal of a case study is to replicate findings, and then present a cross-platform case comparison and predict results. Yin further detailed the case study design as useful for understanding source problems with no defined solution. A researcher might select a case study design when seeking to explore in-depth cases and replicate findings (Anderson et al., 2017; O'Cathain et al., 2015). For this research study, I explored several cases in different locations, and identified a multiple case study design as the optimal choice.

Lunnay (2015) indicated that researchers should collect data until data saturation was reached, which entails collecting data from multiple sources until no new information or themes emerge from the data. To ensure data saturation in this study, I conducted semistructured interviews as one data collection method and followed up with member checking. I also reviewed SOPs on succession planning used by fire chiefs as a second data collection method. I used both collection methods until no new data emerged and data saturation was reached.

Population and Sampling

Purposeful sampling is a qualitative option in which researchers use personal judgment to choose samples that can answer the research question (Emerson, 2015; Gentles et al., 2016). Securing purposive samples increases research credibility, as individuals are identified for their knowledge in relation to a phenomenon (Duan, Bhaumik, Palinkas, & Hoagwood, 2014; Moritz et al., 2015). I used purposeful sampling for this study because this type of sampling was beneficial for gathering rich information from fire chiefs, and for understanding their associated role in executing successful strategies to improve succession planning for employees. I selected two fire chiefs to participate in this study based on their positions in the organizational hierarchy, which qualified them to answer the questions that I asked during interviews. I selected purposeful sampling to acquire a representative sample of two fire chiefs who could successfully answer the central research question.

Yin (2014) indicated that suitable sample size is necessary for a qualitative case study to address the research question efficiently. Anderson (2014) determined that adequate sample size is dependent on the population selected and how it aligns to the research question. Researchers conducting a case study interpret phenomena as described by interview participants in their natural setting (Mouton et al., 2016; Vohra, 2014; Yin, 2014). In qualitative research, data saturation is contingent on the nature of the research and the number of participants necessary to answer the research question (Elo et al., 2014; Nelson, 2016). Lunnay (2015) stated that researchers should collect data from participants until data gathering contributes no new information or themes. Cleary et al.

(2014) indicated that sample size for a qualitative study could include 20 participants or fewer; however, Gentles et al. (2016) argued that sample size could be smaller and achieve saturation when a researcher asks the same question to multiple participants and no new information emerges. For this qualitative case study, the population consisted of fire chiefs with a sample size of two fire chiefs who worked out of two firehouses located in the southern United States who implemented successful strategies to improve succession planning for their employees.

Fusch and Ness (2015) indicated the importance of a researcher choosing a sample size that has the best chance to enhance data saturation. Achieving data saturation in my study was facilitated by the selection of two data collection methods that strengthened research validity. I began data collection with semistructured interviews and then continued with a review of organizational SOPs until additional data collection contributed no new themes or information. For this study, I selected two public sector fire chiefs because they provided the best opportunity to collect enough data to answer the central research question.

The popularity of Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) applications has led to a new generation of platforms for convenient interviews (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). Semistructured interviews may be conducted either inside or outside the work environment in an open or private area to lessen the possibility of bias (Duan et al., 2014). Each participant used their private office and an Internet accessible device for the Skype interview. The interviews I conducted with participants were via Skype from my private office. The criteria for selecting participants included: (a) they must work in the capacity of a fire chief in a southern United States firehouse and have used successful strategies to improve succession planning for their employees, (b) they must be at least 18 years old at the time of the Skype interview, and (c) they must work in a supervisory position. Participants outside the scope of the eligibility criteria were not invited to participate in this study.

Ethical Research

Throughout the research, I followed ethical protections to safeguard participants in the study. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) found that obtaining individual consent in the interview process should be executed before conducting an interview. The process of acquiring consent from participants required the use of an informed consent form that details the purpose of the study, ethical protections, and controls over disclosed information, as well as how to be excluded from the study (Mealer & Jones, 2014). The informed consent form was attached to the interview invitation and acknowledged by participants prior to participating in this study. The informed consent form indicated that no rewards or incentives were provided for participation in the study. This informed consent document clarified that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the interview at any point without penalty. Although, I advised participants that they had the right to withdraw consent by expressing to me their intention verbally or in writing via e-mail; no participants withdrew their content to participate in the study. Participants reviewed and positively acknowledged the informed consent form and returned it to me before the interview. The e-mailed acknowledgment served as the participants' consent to take part in the study.

Bromley, Mikesell, Jones, and Khodyakov (2015) found that researchers can meet the highest ethical standards with (a) engaging in actions that support sound ethical choice, (b) demonstrating awareness, (c) practicing respectful participant encounters, and (d) allowing open dialogue during interviews. Protecting the confidentiality of all information collected is vital for the ethical protection of participants and to promote comfort when volunteering for a study (Loui, 2016). I described the procedures in use to ensure confidentiality on consent documentation and confirmed the participants were aware of their role in the research. I maintained data integrity by ensuring that the personal data of participants was not used for any purpose outside the study. I did not use the firehouse name or location where participants were employed. I affirmed to participants that their confidential information and privacy was essential and would be protected throughout the study. The intention to follow ethical protections is imperative for the protection of participants. I offered each participant information about the research that detailed study-related risks and benefits and a copy of the consent form they signed as verification of a willingness to participate.

According to Grossoehme (2014), researchers are not allowed to start collecting data until after IRB approval. Therefore, when I obtained approval from Walden University IRB (approval number 08-06-18-0296236) and permission to conduct research at two public sector firehouses, I emailed prospective participants invitations to participate. I ensured that I received an IRB number before I started collecting data.

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

To ensure anonymity, the researcher must protect participant identity (Honan, 2014). Confidentiality of participant answers to interview questions must also be guaranteed (Alby & Fatigante, 2013). I assigned participants a unique alphanumeric identifier. Participants had fire chief (FC) abbreviated and a number as an identifier, such as FC-1 and FC-2. I protected confidentiality and ensured that participants fully understood how the information would be used in the study.

Data Collection Instruments

In qualitative studies, researchers are the instruments for data collection and control (Cairney & St Denny, 2014; Katz et al., 2016; Vasquez-Tokos, 2017). Moyer, Sinclair, and Quinn (2016) affirmed that a researcher’s responsibility is to collect substantive data for exploration as the primary instrument of inquiry. I acted as the primary instrument in the data collection process in this qualitative case study. As the data collection instrument, I conducted semistructured interviews with fire chiefs after city managers from the southern United States granted me access to prospective participants. I also reviewed organization SOPs on succession planning. The process I used for data collection in this study included asking participants questions, documenting responses with written notes in my reflective journal and audio recording. Interview questions in qualitative research should be written to prompt an individual's uniqueness using open-ended questions in qualitative research (Alby & Fatigante, 2013). In this study, participants were asked open-ended questions during the interview which helped me understand their insight on the central research question. According to Yin (2014), the use of multiple sources may establish validity in data collection for a case study. Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter (2016) indicated that semistructured interviews, member checking, and document review are data collection methods that enhance the reliability and validity of a study. According to Katz et al. (2016), semistructured interviews can be open-ended and rely on the experience and integrity of researchers. The interview is the primary source to explore and gain participants' perspectives (Anyan, 2013; Pechurina, 2014).

The process of member checking lessens the chance of accidental researcher influence on participant data, misrepresentation of information, or the introduction of personal bias in collected data (Yin, 2014). I used member checking to enhance the reliability and validity of the data I collected from participants in my study. For this study, the data collection process included semistructured interviews with fire chiefs, member checking of interview documents, and a review of organizational SOPs. According to Simpson and Quigley (2016) member checking in research is an opportunity to verify collected data, ensuring participant interpretation is correct, and data analysis reflect the participant's viewpoints.

The interview protocol is a document developed to include detailed interview procedures and guidelines and support the reliability and validity of the study (Platt &

Skowron, 2013). The interview protocol (see Appendix) included a detailed interview process that entailed interview questions and member checking. The interview protocol was used to ensure the consistency of data collected from participants. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix) to ensure consistency, which prevented bias, when interviewing participants throughout the study. I verbally provided transcribed responses of my interpretation of the interview questions that I asked each participant during the Skype interview to the participants and the opportunity to verify accuracy. After discussing my interpretation of interview results, each participant verified their interview responses and provided clarification to several responses, which aligned to member checking requirements. Utilizing the interview protocol, which included interview questions and member checking, enhanced the reliability and validity of the study.

Data Collection Techniques

Methodological triangulation is used to ascertain the validity of the study and enhance the understanding of the research phenomenon (Burau & Andersen, 2014). Yin (2014) noted that a case study requires multiple means of data collection methods to support a case. I used multiple methods and sources to collect data to ensure methodological triangulation. Data collection techniques for this study included semistructured interviews and a review of organization SOPs.

The first data collection technique I used to begin the data collection process was semistructured interviews using the interview protocol. I began the interview process by obtaining contact information of prospective participants from city managers for my study. Next, I sent out invitation letters via e-mail to potential participants. Two fire chiefs agreed to participate in the study and acknowledged my e-mail indicating their agreement. The invitation sent to participants included a copy of the informed consent detailing information about the study and a written acknowledgment that each participant returned to me via email as their approval to participate in the interview process of my study. Before each Skype interview, I advised participants that I was the interviewer and explained the informed consent form. Each Skype interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Participants were advised that they could stop the interview at any point and I would destroy all data. No participants stopped or delayed the interview once it began. I ensured participants were aware I was recording the interview and that I was taking notes during the interview.

The advantage of semistructured interviews is that researchers can interact directly with participants in their natural work environments (Cairney & St Denny, 2014; Katz et al., 2016; Vasquez-Tokos, 2017). I conducted interviews using Skype so that participants could interview in their work office for convenience. The disadvantage of semistructured interviews is the potential stress on participants who may feel critiqued when answering questions (Katz et al., 2016). After the interview, participants stated they felt comfortable answers my interview questions. With reference to the use of audio recording devices during semistructured interviews, an advantage was that my Bluetooth live scribe pen was able to play back the recording so that I could verify written notes, while equipment failure constitutes a disadvantage when using electronic instruments. To prepare for this possibility, I ensured I had a live scribe pen, handheld digital recorder, and the voice memo application on my iPhone available.

Organizational SOP documents were used as a secondary source of data collection in this study. The advantage of reviewing organization SOPs was that they represent official documentation of the succession planning standards for employees. The disadvantage was that information might be different for each organization, which lengthens the data collection and analysis process.

The process of member checking reduces accidental researcher influence on participant data, thereby limiting data misrepresentation (Yin, 2014). The purpose of member checking was to allow participants the opportunity to verify that I interpreted their interview responses as they envisioned. I used follow-up member checking interviews with participants in my study to clarify the interpreted summary as an accurate representation of interview responses, enhancing reliability and validity of the study.

Data Organization Technique

Securing and organizing collected data with recognizable and stable software is vital for tracking collected data in a research study (Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). I cataloged and maintained all data labeled in this study by using identifiers in NVivo. I also used NVivo software to track and categorize raw data and imported collected research notes using a word processor, and then stored codebooks on my computer’s database. The systems that I used to keep track of collected data were notepads and reflective journals where I logged information captured during interviews and data obtained from organization SOPs.

After 5 years have passed from the conclusion of a study, researchers should completely delete all digital data to ensure confidentiality of each participant (Anney, 2014). Personal storage of raw data consisted of recorded interviews, transcribed interviews, and consent forms. I secured all data upon completion of my study in separate data files to be stored for 5 years.

Data Analysis

The use of methodological triangulation supports crosschecking of various references and data sources to correlate information (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested the use of triangulation as a method for incorporating multiple sources of data and to confirm study validity. Fusch and Ness (2015) also noted that correlating data using multiple collection methods can enrich the reliability of results. Obtaining the confirmation of validity of data is an advantage of methodological triangulation (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). Researchers use triangulation to describe participant interpretations and perspectives of a similar phenomenon (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). I used methodological triangulation to collect and analyze data from semistructured interviews and member checking, and from data collected from organizations' SOPs. Methodological triangulation was beneficial for this study because it ensured that data were rich and adequate in quality. In this study, I used methodological triangulation by integrating data from organizational SOPs and open-ended interviews to enhance the validity of the research.

According to Zamawe (2015), researchers can encrypt and store data by utilizing software programs such as NVivo. The NVivo software is useful for analyzing data, coding interview data, and mapping data with diagrams that relate to each other (Glaser

& Laudel, 2013; Woods et al., 2016). Data analysis takes place through a set of sequential steps put in place for theme building, document review, and organizing data obtained from participants (Cope, 2014; Nassaji, 2015; Watkins, 2017). Yin (2014) identified a process of data analysis that included five parts: (a) compiling, (b) disassembling data, (c) reassembling data, (d) interpreting data, and (e) concluding data. In the first step of data analysis, I compiled all data collected from the interview responses, including responses from member checking and from organizational SOPs. In step two, I disassembled this data and reviewed content from all data sources: interview responses, reflective journal data, and organizational SOPs. In step three, I reassembled the data and sorted them into categories, and then coded information with identifiers from its source. In step four, I interpreted the data collected so that I could describe events that led to participant actions and to understand any process inconsistencies. Finally, in the last step, I summarized and compared relevant content for identifiable themes. Most notability from the data, I identified that monetary influences could improve employee performance and the importance of creating a mentoring plan and promoting recognition incentives to improve succession planning. Using the identified data, I was able to finalize the three themes that emerged. I recognized similarities to tenants of the transformational leadership theory supportive of optimizing employees' performance and transitioning a high-quality employee to an administrative leader.

Data coding, word mining, node data for themes, and the creation of word banks can be quickly accomplished by using NVivo, also allowing users to catalog data intuitively for topic placement (Castleberry, 2014; Brandão & Miguez, 2016). I extracted codes and notes from collected documents to create word banks that were easy to access during research. Using nodes supported the categorization of data into various definable sections and subsections for easy recovery. With word mining, research data were queried for the most common words in each document and then organized by data hierarchy.

I combined all the data collected and then analyzed it to generate three key themes and ensured that relevant evidence from the literature review and transformational leadership theory supported findings, a process that was vital to the success of my research study. I presented key findings on successful strategies that fire chiefs used to improve succession planning for their employees, and then compared and classified key themes from the literature review to support my findings.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

Reliability is achieved when a researcher generates consistent results (Dikko, 2016). Birt et al. (2016) affirmed that obtaining consistent results throughout a studied population could indicate reliability. Acquiring reliability in a study is important to verify thoroughness and consistency (Noble & Smith, 2015). According to Harvey (2014), researchers should enhance the dependability of their studies by employing a member checking procedure. Member checking included a review and validation of data collected from interview responses with participants. I analyzed the participants' interview responses from the data collected then validated these responses in a synthesized summary. My study included follow up interviews using member checking with participants. Therefore, as the data collection instrument, I ensured reliability with consistent follow-up and dependability of collected data by validating accuracy of the interview responses.

Validity

The criteria to enhance validity in a qualitative study include: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) confirmability. Yin (2014) described validity as a means of verifying credibility, which includes what a participant affirms through the interpretation of data as determined by the researcher. Credibility is not a fixed conceptual idea; rather, it is the goal of establishing research findings that are robust and believable from the perspective of the reader (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015). Methodological triangulation combines wide-ranging source data to enhance the strength of the study and is intended to reduce bias and improve data integrity (Burau & Andersen, 2014). I used methodological triangulation, data from multiple sources, to enhance the validity of my study. Lincoln et al. (1985) posited that credibility establishes trustworthiness in a study. Enhancing study credibility in relation to data collection can be completed by using member checking (Cope, 2014; Lincoln et al., 1985). Credibility provides value to the findings of a study in qualitative research. I collected data using two data collection techniques. I followed the interview protocol during the interview process, which included member checking to ensure that interview responses from the fire chiefs were candid and honest, and to advance the credibility of the study. I analyzed the interview data looking for common points of agreement among fire chiefs to validate the collected data.

Incorporating validity in the data collection practice required the interpretation of participant data and synthesizing interview responses to establish credibility in documents presented to participants for review. To enhance the credibility of this study, I analyzed participants' interview data transcribed from my reflective journal, compared with audio recording for consistency, then I conducted follow-up interviews to validate my interpretations of interview data. Analyzing data occurs after obtaining participant's acknowledgement of transcribed interview data (Christie et al., 2015). Participants in my study provided additional feedback during follow-up interviews that I incorporated to enhance the clarity and credibility of study findings.

Transferability occurs when study findings can be duplicated or extended beyond the original researcher's scope and can be replicated in another researchers' work (Cope, 2014). According to Anyan (2013), transferability can also happen when the perspective of the study participants as observed in the findings, is understood by readers and can be applied in future research. Since transferability of findings could have varying perceptions to future researchers, I ensured transferability of this study by presenting research findings for future researchers to consider for their research studies. I also present study findings, so that data may be transferable when compared or analyzed to similar situations or research projects. The study findings may support other researchers in possibly repeating methods in my study and validating the findings. I utilized the database created with NVivo software to support my data analysis and to identify common patterns obtained from the data to support the validity of the findings. I followed interview protocols during interviews with participants, also ensuring the study validity.

Confirmability in a study is a way to have someone other than the researcher validate the findings, as a step to ensure trustworthiness (Anney, 2014; Birt et al., 2016). Research findings that are well supported by meaningful and non-biased data when evaluated by other researchers enhance confirmability (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015). Having someone external to the research project scrutinize collected data is an effective way to ensure trustworthiness, such that as having the committee review a student's research. The committee reviews aid in confirmability of student research.

Research validity is improved by reaching data saturation in a study (Moritz et al., 2015). Data saturation refers to the point of information repetition or no new incoming information (Tran, Porcher, Tran, & Ravaud, 2017). Varpio, Ajjawi, Monrouxe, O'Brien, and Rees (2016) indicated that a researcher achieves data saturation in a case study by assembling multiple sources of evidence until no more substantial data emerges. The data I collected by using semistructured interviews, member checking, and a review of organizational SOPs ensured data was saturated. I know data saturation was reached in this study because no additional information or new nodes emerged from the data collected.

Transition and Summary

Section 2 included an overview of the role of the researcher, participants, population and sampling, and ethical research practices to justify undertaking this study. I explained why a qualitative multiple case study is the appropriate method and design for this study. I specified that I will be the data collection instrument and described the multiple sources for data collection that include (a) semistructured interviews, including member checking, and (b) organization SOPs detailing business objectives and strategies for succession planning. I also discussed the interview protocol, member checking, and how data interpretation can enhance the credibility of my study. I further explained how methodological triangulation combines multiple data sources that strengthen and validate a case study. Moreover, in this section I described data collection techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, as well as how I will ensure reliability and validity. In Section 3, I will present the findings, application to professional practice, along with implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research. Finally, I conclude Section 3 with a personal reflection about the doctoral study process and a conclusion to the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

In Section 3, I present findings and briefly discuss the literature I reviewed in Section 1 to support the findings of my research study. Next, I identify three themes associated with three successful strategies that public sector fire chiefs use to improve succession planning for their employees. Additionally, I explain the findings, applications to professional best practices, and the implications for positive social change. Last, I present recommendations for action, recommendations for further research, and reflections on my research journey.

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore successful strategies that fire chiefs used to improve employee succession planning. I analyzed and collected data from interviews with two supervisory fire chiefs in the public sector with succession planning experience and a review of organizational SOPs. I also identified three significant themes from the findings to address strategies in support of answering my research question that are presented here.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: What strategies do fire chiefs use to improve succession planning for their employees? I collected data from semistructured Skype interviews with two fire chiefs and organizational SOPs from two public sector firehouses in the southern United States. The participants described strategies used to improve employee succession planning and identified some organizational strategies that improved employees' succession planning. The findings revealed three prominent themes that managers used for employee succession planning. These themes were: (a) identify monetary influences that improve employee performance, (b) create a mentoring plan, and (c) promote recognition incentives. I found that participants utilized a variety of strategies for employee succession planning. Organizational documents I reviewed outlined procedures for standardized succession planning for employees. In addition, participants reported openness to growth opportunities that could advance high performers.

Theme 1: Identify Monetary Influences That Improve Employee Performance

The first theme I identified in my study findings was identify monetary influences that improve employee performance. According to Van der Voet and Van De Walle (2015), employee cutbacks generally minimizes an organization's capital budgets and reduce opportunities to allocate money for employee performance awards. Yuliansyah and Khan (2017) emphasized that an organizations' budgeting functions are positively correlated with employees' performance. However, De Wolde et al. (2014) indicated that financial gain is a primary driver for improving performance for some employees and not others. The findings I identified in this study indicated that money and leadership training influences performance and that employees recognized the value in promotions and not only the extra pay. Table 1 displays three topics (staffing budgets, training costs, and monetary drivers) discussed by participants and accounted for through Theme 1.

Table 1

Theme 1: Identify Monetary Influences That Improves Employee Performance.

	Nodes	Sources	References
1	Staffing budgets	16	34
2	Training costs	12	21
3	Monetary drivers	7	10
Total		35	65

Participants discussed SOPs that reflected the importance of identifying budgetary funds used for purchasing popular training courses that provided value to the organizations' bottom line and improved employees' performance. Participants indicated that monetary influences were important to employee succession planning because it drives organizational staffing and the extent to which employees view the benefits associated with a promotion. I found that information in organizational SOPs outlined standard operating procedures for employee succession planning. These procedures included a standard process for succession planning that references an aging trade model of using only tenured employees in some public sector firehouses. According to the findings in the study, these practices support succession planning, although the procedures used are outdated and without transparency. According to participants, without clear and updated guidance, the process might be understood differently by different fire chiefs.

Fire chiefs in this study used the strategy of reducing the costs associated with overtime for additional leadership training courses to motivate employees to want promotions that may enhance organizational efficiency. Participants selected and mentored high-quality employees and provided specialized training that increased opportunities for success and helped propel the organization into the future. Participants also noted that employee performance that was in-line with the organizations' missions and visions was positively acknowledged and nurtured with reinforcement practices, including monetary awards that compensated employees for performance. Participants reiterated the desire to reduce the costs associated with overtime, then increase budgets to include added funding for employee performance awards. Finally, FC1 stated that, "performance in-line with the organization missions and visions were reflected in the positive relationships built in the communities served by successfully prepared employees."

Staffing budgets. The participants in this study reported that employees' work performance improved when offered overtime and when hand-selected by leadership to teach training courses throughout the organization. Participants stated that some employees preferred the responsibility of instructing peers when working overtime in a senior position, which supports the opportunity to showcase leadership skills. According to Smith et al. (2016), transformational leadership theory aligns with leadership strategies used to improve employees' performance. The participants identified overtime and instructing educational courses as financial and leadership strategies used to influence employees' performance. Also, participant FC1 stated that employees must be paid for any hours worked to include training no matter which financial strategy used. Although salary payouts are mandatory, the goal of using financial and leadership strategies for overtime linked with extracurricular training used to influence, inspire and motivate employee performance, according to FC1. Findings from my study about budgets and staffing align with De Wolde et al.'s (2014) results that indicated the application of budgetary allocations for staffing directly affect employees' work performance. Further, my findings support the transformational leadership theory since participants drove employees' inspirational motivation to exceed minimum performance criteria by reinforcing the practice of succession planning as a gateway to promotional opportunities, then identified staffing budgets and overtime pay as monetary influences on employees' performance. In addition, organizational SOPs outlined staffing practices and indicated the organizations' use of extracurricular training as a tool to reinforce employee performance that could incur overtime costs for staffing shortages.

Participants supported improvement strategies such as offering extracurricular training to inspire positive change in employees and motivate them to work towards achieving a leadership position. FC1 suggested that employees forecast an individual plan for organizational longevity and not focus on extracurricular training offered as a path for extra pay or as leadership reinforcing a financial trade for service. According to participants, the purpose of incorporating additional overtime for training is to allow high-quality employees the opportunity to sharpen leadership skills and increase motivation for obtaining a future position in leadership. Doing so supported organizational efficiency, which aligned with the theory I used in this study. Also, participants discussed employee overtime and its negative impact on an employee's outlook on budgets associated with staffing. Furthermore, fire chiefs identified monetary influences that improved employee performance and impacted employees' behaviors that supported improving workplace performance.

Each participant discussed strategies used in support of employee succession planning. Both participants described how budgetary decisions about staffing influenced employee performance and how practices in place were refreshed for practical and strategic applications designed toward professional development. The SOPs I reviewed provided clear guidance on when to utilize overtime for staffing and contingency procedures for mitigating the potential negative impact it could have on the organization. Participant FC1 described an ongoing process of administrative oversight designed to reduce overtime requirements for staffing and fiduciary constraints that might negatively affect an employees' motivation to seek advancement to leadership positions. Participant FC2 detailed a desire to influence employees to look beyond immediate financial gains to diversify within the ranks. Both participants agreed it was essential to recognize organizational changes for increased efficiency and understand the significance of the missions and visions established to support and inspire employees' performance.

Participants also reported that leading from the front and having a clear plan for succession planning in place improved employee performance and was beneficial in encouraging employees to seek promotions. Participants noted that providing employees opportunities to seek internal promotions influenced participation in the firehouse and improved employees' performance. In return, the organization financially benefited from peer instruction. Therefore, the leadership practice of using intellectual stimulation or influence to promote opportunities to improve employee performance beyond a leaders' expectations conforms with the transformational leadership theory's practice of transforming employees' behavior, sense of identity in the organization, and optimizing performance (Lehmann-Willenbrock et al., 2015).

In fact, participants in my study suggested that obligated funding, specifically overtime and training costs, impacted staffing decisions. After analyzing organizational documents and fire chiefs' responses, I discovered that staffing decisions made in support of overtime and training could provide employees with opportunities to optimize performance using learned skills from advanced trainings. Participants also indicated that these variances influenced discussions of organizational failures and processes needed to prepare employees for opportunities to achieve promotions. Participants improved succession planning by judging ahead to spread out firehouse promotional opportunities for high-quality employees and by identifying costs that could impact organizational efficiency and employee performance.

Training costs. In the interviews, it became apparent that participants worked to align succession planning with organizational training costs in order to meet organizational needs and stakeholder requirements to serve, protect, and provide emergency service to the communities served. Participant FC2 declared that a trained member who shared a learned skill inspired subordinate cooperation. Berns and Klarner (2017) and Ugaddan and Park (2017) posited that career-driven employees are motivated to excel past uninspired counterparts. Each participant site offered training courses taught internally and externally by instructors from within the organization and from partner organizations. The organizational SOPs included information on the necessity of in-house instructors for internal training and historical data that indicated budgetary cost-saving benefits.

According to participant FC1, externally offered courses taught within the organization were motivational, cost-effective, and employees' reciprocated lessons learned downstream, signifying a return on investment. Findings in my study aligned with Berns and Klarner's (2017) study on the value of employee preparation and how succession planning supported career progression. Findings in my study also indicated that participants were supportive of budgetary cost averaging and aware of their employees' motivation to align with organizational efficiency by consistently training and staying abreast to changing trends for improved work performance. Streamlining succession planning processes is instrumental to an organization's success with future leadership (Titzer et al., 2014). Specifically, fire chiefs in my study agreed that a growth plan and positive leadership influences were necessary steps for employee succession planning. The fire chiefs' growth plan and positive leadership influences motivated employees. FC1 stated that succession planning "should be developed at lower ranks to determine gaps," and fire chiefs should be prepared to fill these gaps with employees ready for promotion.

Participant FC1 and participant FC2 suggested that additional monies earned by employees working extended shifts reduced desires of lower-ranking employees to seek progression because income did not always reciprocate favorably with higher positions. During the interviews, it also became evident that participants were impacted by department culture and generational gaps that created conflicts about the associated value of succession and its positive organizational impact. Findings in this study detailed that fire chiefs built a stronger organization using personnel management strategies that exhibited admiration which positively influenced employee succession planning. Therefore, fire chiefs in this study discovered better ways of doing business and setting a leadership example for employees to emulate which aligned with Titzer et al.'s (2014) study results that indicated the necessity of organizational succession planning.

After reviewing organizational SOPs and findings in my study on succession planning, I found that the creation of succession plans by fire chiefs and process oversight had substantial organizational benefits that improved employee's succession and reduced shortcoming in their performance. Demircioglu and Audretsch (2017) suggested that managerial strategies and practices that enhanced the likelihood of employee's advancement in organizations included direct oversight and involvement with personnel and training that improved performance. Participant FC1 incorporated a personal project for employee succession that became increasingly successful during its year's long implementation. Participant FC2 dedicated over 10 years of organizational training specific to meeting the needs of members and preparing them to occupy positions of increasing responsibility. The findings in my study supported strategies fire chiefs used for improving succession planning and what these plans directly affected for employee's leadership progression and stability within the organization. FC1 and FC2 detailed the creation of personal management plans for mentoring employees and optimizing business practices to advance employees' performance in the workplace.

Participants utilized these practices as a tool for employees' development which align with concepts detailed in the conceptual framework used in my study.

Monetary drivers. Each fire chief interviewed in my study described having some budgetary constraints. These constraints included (a) staffing, (b) training, and (c) employee performance. Significant emphasis has been on the public sector to identify methods to increase the cost-effectiveness of business operations (Van der Voet & Van de Walle, 2015; Murphy et al., 2016). Each participant described staffing as being affected by monetary influences and employees' opinions. FC1 explained that budgets are important to fire chiefs because the organizational readiness is determined by staffing levels that drive employee's placement. FC1 and FC2 indicated that succession planning drives the selection and deployment of knowledgeable and experienced employees stepping up into positions of increased authority.

High-quality employees receive compensation the same as employee's receiving overtime, but in many cases, the monies received was more than if promoted into a leadership position, according to FC2. However, the fire chiefs expressed that employees understand the organizational missions and visions and the value of the succession planning process. Participants in my study described some employees "as conflicted" when deciding between benefits of overtime income and income associated with positions requiring increased authority and responsibility. Both participants found that training costs helped balance budgetary scales to favor succession planning.

According to FC1, by slowly reducing overtime costs, the budgetary funding recouped was used towards additional professional development training that improved employee motivation to strive for future promotions. Also, the findings of this study indicated that employees' performance increased with fire chiefs' direct oversight of the succession planning process. Organizational SOPs included data that designated fire chiefs with the responsibility for overseeing the success of employee succession planning. Lastly, after a thorough analysis of SOPs and fire chief's responses, I found that a fire chiefs' interest in succession planning oversight motivated high-quality employees and supported improvement strategies as guidance for advancing subordinate behavior.

Theme 2: Create a Mentoring Plan

The second theme I identified in my study findings was create a mentoring plan. The responses from participants in my study associated mentoring and leadership practices as "indispensable" at encouraging employees' performance. Van der Voet (2016) pointed out that managers in his study who adopted varying approaches to leadership practices and strategies increased employees' career progression and reduced workplace miscommunications. Table 2 displays two topics discussed by participants (mentoring, and professional development) and accounted for theme 2.

Table 2

Theme 2 Create a Mentoring Plan.

	Nodes	Sources	References
1	Mentoring	12	17
2	Professional development	3	6
Total		15	23

Mentoring. Employees working in firehouses achieved positive benefits from mentoring because fire chiefs prioritized this to promote workplace mobility and better communications. Participant FC1 described mentoring as “an organizational effort” where leaders are assigned to employees at in-processing and establishes a path for workplace success supportive of career progression. Fire chiefs in the study utilized in-processing to begin identifying potential employees of high-quality who could benefit from more in-depth mentoring. Participants agreed that high-quality employees immediately accepted organizational values and adapted to the fire chiefs' missions and visions.

As employees continued through the succession planning and mentoring process, leaders took notice of highly motivated employees and included them in a pool consisting of employees to watch for promotional opportunities, FC1 claimed. FC1 and FC2 found that motivated employees were identified early as high-quality usually fast-tracked through the succession planning process and became firehouse leaders. FC1 also noted that some leadership positions take an excess of 20 years to obtain, with this in mind, the organization as a whole continues to showcase the success of succession planning with employees that have the talent needed to compete for higher positions in the organization. As an actively progressing commandant of growth, participant FC2, described fire chiefs who created a plan to mentor employees, “as being examples of leaders to emulate.” The findings in this study also revealed that fire chiefs agreed the responsibility for employees’ succession planning belonged to leadership.

Fire chiefs in this study used key concepts relevant to the theory by implementing strategies that supported mentoring and succession planning practices. Ahmad, Mohamed, and Manaf (2017) indicated that leaders using transformational leadership theory in succession planning must conduct effective mentoring and mold employees as needed by the organization. Further, the findings in this study aligned with transformational leadership strategies fire chiefs used, for example, mentoring to improve succession planning that reduced competency shortcoming and influenced leader’s performance. The autonomy of a manager can be dependent on learned experiences from working in subordinate positions (Piatak, 2017; Van der Voet & Van de Walle, 2015). Managers with backgrounds supported by succession planning were experienced leaders who reinforced the development of comparable employees’ attributes. FC2 noted, “when employees saw benefits of the training opportunities provided by the organization, they seldom looked elsewhere for job promotions.”

However, FC1 and FC2, detailed that work relationships and attitudes were reliant on comprehensive training and preparation displayed in an employee's work ethos. During my analysis of the organizational SOPs, I found that creating a conducive work environment for employees and providing career development training were revealed as steps that strengthen succession planning. Participant FC2 stated that by listening and inspiring employees to challenge themselves continually, it empowers them to commit to the department and work beyond set expectations. The effort enlisted by managers in the process of mentoring and using succession planning for employees was a learned strategy that supported positive work efforts and motivation of employees to excel within respective organizations.

Professional development. Presumably, some organizations faced hardships when their employees lost trust in leadership. Having trust in an organization's strategy and people enhanced employee enthusiasm to achieve organizational goals (Demircioglu & Audretsch, 2017). Additionally, participants in my study stated that relationship building "was crucial to ensure no one felt they were not within reach of being heard," and that "leadership was least effective if communication was poor and employees not developed to their full potential." Fire chiefs in this study discussed organizational goals and utilizing professional development and enthusiasm to build trust as soon as employees entered the workplace by providing a direct report as a first line of supervision. Additionally, employees received mandatory skills training for advancement opportunities, as declared by participants in my study. Findings in this study were synced with the fire chiefs' goals to increase the build relationships with employees and workplace enthusiasm and manage employee advancement in skills and leadership communication strategies. The fire chiefs' strategies supported the subthemes: mentoring and professional development that align with the conceptual framework indicating leadership and progressive planning for employee advancement were strong points related to employee inspiration and professional development.

Participants in my study felt that being dynamic and flexible and willing to look at the strategy used by similar organizations positively affected their employees and the organization. FC1 was inclined to mention, "we need to be one of the first to find the better mousetrap" as a way of combining strategies and being fluid at using improved methods that advance succession planning. In addition, participants in my study agreed that opportunities were not always available and had to be taken when first received to be competitive. According to FC1, remaining receptive to employees' suggestions was one of the best ways fire chiefs could identify better ways of doing business. FC2 indicated that working adjacent to partner organizations; the fire service and its leaders becomes a cohesive force. Overall, the findings in my study supported open workplace relationships with similar organizations and increased the occurrence of a more efficient and successful process dedicated to succession planning and professional development.

Findings in this study revealed that career progression was a state of readiness where fire chiefs were charged to outline the steps required for subordinates to achieve career progression. Responses from participants in this study were in line with Van Wart's (2013) findings on what leaders did to motivate employees to attain higher organization positions. FC2 felt that firefighter's modeling organizational standards and competencies fostered their readiness to promote into a leadership position. The participants in this study suggested the use of the National Fire Academy (NFA), its instructors, and higher-education courses for advanced education that supported employees' growth planning. Therefore, fire chiefs in my study were determined to create work environments where subordinates viewed the value in the organization's established culture as supportive of progressive change not set by a pre-determined culture.

Succession planning was a mutual word used by participants in my study 67 times when succession planning strategies for employees was discussed, 78 times with mentoring, and 100 times with professional development. The reoccurrences of these topics were indicative of the importance of the issues related to the improved process of succession planning and professional development in public sector firehouses. Participants in my study explained the significance of succession planning, professional development, development strategies, and why they incorporated it early in the professional development process to develop high-quality employees. According to Ahmad et al. (2017), commitment from leadership and high-quality employee preparation were necessary to move an organization forward. FC1 stated that succession planning was always a significant component of the relationship-building process and necessary for an efficient department for future leaders.

The idea of preparing employees' early in their careers was shared by FC2, who indicated that his leadership spanned a short period, but his prior work history supported the creation of strategic succession planning and professional development preparation. The organizational SOPs I analyzed revealed that succession planning was most successful when implemented during in-processing and when a direct supervisor is immediately assigned. Leaders that utilize the practice of preparing employees for succession set the trend for culture building and higher-level influence, allowing employees to gauge future performance objectives (Schepker, Nyberg, et al., 2017). The findings in my study confirmed succession planning strategy and professional development strategy used by fire chiefs aligned with Ahmed et al.'s (2017) study on succession planning and professional development strategies for employees and the importance of the organization's commitment of leaders.

Theme 3: Promote Recognition Incentives

The third theme I identified in my study findings was promote recognition incentives. The preparation associated with succession planning by fire chiefs directly impacted employee performance related to the progression into a leadership role. Responses from participants in my study indicated that recognition strategies for influencing employees' performance were consistent with Ahmad et al.'s (2017) study findings on what influences of leaders could be recognized in employee performance and strategic planning. Table 3 displays two topics, (incentives and employee performance) discussed by participants in this study and accounted for theme 3.

Table 3

Promote Recognition Incentives

Nodes		Sources	References
1	Incentives	4	6
2	Employee performance	8	19
Total		12	25

Employee performance. Fire chiefs interviewed for this study considered succession planning as a fluid process that required continuous improvements from leaders to remain successful. FC1 and FC2 stated that "putting the right person in the right job" is not always easy and early identification of the organization's strengths and weaknesses usually minimized weak performance points with incentivized training and maximized strong points with praise.

FC1 indicated that early in an employee's career, succession planning was a key component built into training and worked to improve performance as leaders recognized individual employee needs. Participants also described that offering employees the opportunity to showcase learned skills by instructing courses internally and externally was a good promotion of good will where employees obtained recognition from the organization. Fire chiefs also publicly recognized employees with monetary awards and recognition. FC2 stated the internal benefits and opportunities from outsourced training and utilization of improvement programs improved employee performance and development. Therefore, as reveled in the study findings and organizational SOPs, internal and external plans to improve employee performance with various training incentives and oversight by fire chiefs had intrinsic benefits that improved succession planning and stimulated performance.

Incentives. According to FC1, strong organizations were built with personal management of incentives and leadership admiration from fire chiefs that reflected the organization. Bos-Nehles et al. (2017) indicated that public sector employees often looked for ways to develop new organizational knowledge and progressive trends. Findings in this study supported Bos-Nehles et al.'s study results on employee learned behavior correlated with incentives and succession planning. FC2 described the value in employee promotions using career-specific educational incentives that incorporated fire academies and college institutions with instructors suitable to teach apprentice or senior employees. Incentivized employees were motivational tools that managers used to get non-incentivized employees to commit to an unscheduled task.

The participants in my study organizations used organizational SOPs that outlined employee performance and education incentives that were supportive of financial compensation and gained provisional steps toward advancement. FC2 posited the importance of “setting the standard” or “modeling educational success” as a tangible tool of reference to encourage motivated employees to plan for future organizational advancement. The use of incentives increased employee output when correctly applied and streamlines an organizations structure (Burgess, Propper, Ratto, & Tominey, 2017). Demircioglu and Audretsch (2017) noted that employee drive and the desire to improve performance were linked. Participants in this study used various incentives that improved employees’ performance and stimulated their desire to advance within the organization.

The findings in my study confirmed that fire chiefs used advanced training as an incentive that increased employees' aptitude and value to the organization. Participant FC2 found value with training that used educational incentives that benefited employees who trained and saw the potential organizational opportunities. Participant FC1 described the practice of offering educational incentives to employees who desired promotions while getting them qualified enough to be competitive. Therefore, findings in my study support themes outlined and aligns with the conceptual framework of the study because public sector fire chiefs who undertook the task of managing incentives to improve employee performance for potential advancement into a leadership position in the organization stimulated a culture that valued succession planning.

Applications to Professional Practice

In this study, I explored successful strategies that public sector fire chiefs used to prepare employees for succession planning. The findings included in this study could apply to private or public sector fire chiefs seeking to identify, influence, promote and improve succession planning strategies used for their employees. Implementing a practice for using succession planning is vital for a fire chief to use for employees' professional development to improve employees' overall performance. The findings in this study included successful strategies used by fire chiefs that add additional field knowledge that could advance succession planning strategies and improve employees' succession rates. Succession planning strategies used by leaders are vital components of an organization's mission to appoint employees to fill key leadership positions and increase workplace productivity (Perrenoud, & Sullivan, 2016). I found that increasing leadership oversight for succession planning improved the rate of employees prepared for appointment to a key leadership position in the organization by using the academic literature in my study, as reference, and by using information from my qualitative multiple case study and from my findings.

The results in this study streamlined leadership practices used for the oversight of monetary influences that improved employees' performance, creation of plans for mentoring, and the promotion of recognition incentives that might increase professional competencies for fire chiefs considering improvement alternatives for succession planning. The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that fire chiefs used to improve employee succession planning. The organizations I researched improved their employee succession rates after implementing improvement strategies for succession planning. The findings from this study indicated that fire chiefs can improve employee succession planning by implementing improvement strategies. The strategies identified by participants in my study used for improving succession planning included: (a) identify monetary influences that improve employee performance, (b) create a mentoring plan, and (c) promote recognition incentives. The benefit and alignment of these succession planning strategies was determined by the improvement of employees' performance under the influence of overtime earnings and the success of the leadership mentoring process that started at in-processing and by fire chiefs' practices of promoting training and monetary incentives that improved employee performance.

Findings in my study revealed public sector fire chiefs identified staffing budgets and overtime pay as monetary influences that affected employees' performance. Employee professional development can be proactively managed by leaders to meet the organization's needs (Ahmad et al., 2017). By utilizing these influences, fire chiefs were able to reinforce the practice of succession planning as a gateway to promotional opportunities for high-quality employees that improved performance and advanced training opportunities that opened the organization for better chances for success. Findings also revealed the need to mentor employees early in their career and remain flexible and continuously review strategies used by similar organizations with successful mentoring plans. I also noted in the findings that fire chiefs used advanced training with an educational benefit to incentivize employees to want to improve performance and advance up in the organization. Therefore, fire chiefs are responsible for environmental change and setting a climate for creative learning (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). Each participant in my study felt early adoption of a mentoring plan, oversight of a professional development plan, promoting recognition incentives, and identifying training opportunities improved overall employee performance when applied efficiently.

Public sector fire chiefs can use the findings detailed in this study to increase the number of employees prepared for leadership positions and improve their rate of succession. Both participants I interviewed experienced leadership transition and organizational changes since 2012 and suffered losses of leadership and skilled workers. These organizations then had to modify budgets to compensate for increased overtime costs and the additional operational costs associated with filling positions and promotion preparations. The impact of the change created an increase in the need for improved strategies for the continued development of future leaders.

Fire chiefs in my study felt that monetary compensation was a reliable tool to increase employees' performance and professional development along with the acceptance and flexibility adapting to improved succession planning strategies. The use of improved strategies supported newly trained employees at becoming leaders in public sector firehouses. Although the improvement process is a fluid one, participants in my study continuously look at changing trends and hurdles encountered in other public sector organizations for transparency and approaches to executing better strategies. By using the improved business principles, fire chiefs could apply these best practices to establish more modern standards for the establishment of improved employee succession planning and professional development.

Fire chiefs can increase the number of employees prepared to accept a position in leadership with the creation and use of the improved strategies found in this study. Succession planning is a broadly used process in the public sector, yet development strategies varies among organizations. Comprehensive training throughout organizations was used widely but not understood enough to support future leadership advancement (Larat, 2016). Therefore, succession planning could be used to advance high-performing employees with an internal process streamlined to include a leaders' due diligence at utilizing improved training practices.

Implications for Social Change

The findings from this study could contribute to positive social change that public sector fire chiefs use to improve succession planning for employees in various ways. Fire chiefs are contributing supervisors responsible for the development of high-quality employees using intuitive efforts for succession planning and creating additional opportunities to increase organizational efficiency (Van Wart, 2013). The significance of leaders utilizing successful methods of succession planning are essential for the development of future high-quality employees (Titzer et al., 2014). I found that fire chiefs have the opportunity to identify high-quality employees and improve their performance with monetary influences, thereby increasing organizational efficiency and enhancing advancement opportunities for leadership positions. This strategy was used by the participants in my study for selecting upcoming leaders. The findings in this study confirmed that increased leadership involvement in employees' performance enhanced organization proficiency and motivation creating a proactive work environment.

The participants in my study created and managed a process to develop succession plans that positively influenced high-quality employees' performance. According to Bos-Nehles et al. (2017), ambitious employees usually commit to success and gravitate toward succession planning opportunities. Additionally, the participants in my study described the necessity of supporting employee interest aimed at promotions by creating mentoring plans and promoting training with the use of recognition incentives that acknowledges contributions made by each employee. Participants in my study worked with external public sector organizations to consolidate advanced training and shared strategies that improved employee succession and indicated strong trends in succession planning for employees. Therefore, the benefits for stakeholders were boundless with the inclusion of internal and external training and successful strategies in place for succession planning were used for employees aspiring to become future leaders.

Fire chiefs in this study spontaneously extended their perspectives of the transitioning process and their worldview of succession planning when stakeholders advanced in external public sector firehouses. Smith (2015) indicated that workplace advancement was not likely without a conventional method in place for succession planning that incorporated stakeholder viewpoints. Findings in my study highlighted what succession planning strategies expanded to include more traditional trade practices that incorporated stakeholder viewpoints for improved professional development that in turn supported better communication and involvement in the communities served. Nonetheless, succession planning was an important decision adopted by fire chiefs in this study. Also noted was that each organization developed a path for high-quality employee’s advancement that began during onboarding and continued with the mentoring and professional development process.

The implications for positive social change could include preparing fire chiefs with a better awareness of the process improvements required to implement changes in employee succession planning. Using successful strategies from this study that improved succession planning could contribute to positive social change. Fire chiefs can prepare their high-quality employees using succession planning practices to recognize demands to fill critical leadership positions in support of organizational efficiency and community safety education. FCI provided an example of a plan personally created for the organization that used clear strategies for designing professional development plans that improved relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

Participants in the study anticipated quarterly needs by internalizing the projected staffing needs for continued organizational operations and efficiency in efforts to keep the community protected and informed. Fire chiefs can use the data to update city managers of identified needs and determine the best course of action using their recommendations that keep resources in available status. By integrating improvement opportunities in communities, fire chiefs can reduce fallacies that arise in communities by ensuring employees are adequately trained, incorporate professional development practices, and continually project good showmanship in communities with actions that align with the organization missions and visions.

Fire chiefs promoting incentives for training can increase employees' participation in community service programs. Training programs usually offered by leaders, such as fire chiefs, can assist in the promotion of programs created to employ future fire service membership of community members. Therefore, if fire chiefs implement strategies that I found in my research to identify monetary influences that improve employee performance, create a mentoring plan, and promote recognition incentives, they could increase employee community interactions to work in alignment with improved strategies and increase social involvement and contributions in their communities.

Recommendations for Action

Because fire chiefs are directly involved in employee succession planning, financial decisions on staffing will affect employee performance. The success of mentoring practices implemented will determine which employees progress through the organization. Therefore, the strategic use of educational and financial incentives will improve employee professional development and motivation to attain a future leadership position. The impact of a fire chief's involvement in employee succession planning is a crucial component of an organization's success and should not be overlooked. Fire chiefs in the public sector promote advancement, solicit change, and set a managerial precedent for future leaders (Van Wart, 2013). As a result, the findings in my study reflected a need for continuous improvement in strategies for succession planning practices of public sector fire chiefs.

Based on the findings in my study, I recommend fire chiefs regularly review the impact of inadequate staffing and the financial implications it has on employees considering a future promotion to management. Findings in this study revealed that higher wages that could be acquired from a promotion to a leadership position were not preferred by all employees when wages from overtime work were available. I recommend PSLs continue to establish precedent to consider successful practices used by similar organization that improved employee performance that meets requirements for future promotions to management.

Participants in this study suggested that successful succession planning is a mentoring process in place to develop high-quality employees from a leader's attributes during the progression to a critical position in the organization. Fire chiefs in my study utilized educational and monetary incentives to encourage employee performance. Findings in this study revealed that incentivized employees outperformed those not incentivized, and that high-quality employees instructed courses internal to the organization and represented themselves with high regard outside the organization for additional pay but did not seek employment outside their current fire department. Therefore, fire chiefs should pay attention to the results in my study for insight and suggestions for improvements to the process on employee succession planning.

The three themes identified in the findings (a) identify monetary influences that improve employee performance, (b) create a mentoring plan, and (c) promote recognition incentives can be a starting point that includes actions that were successful in the improvement of employee succession planning. The fire chiefs that participated in this study and city managers who approved cooperation received a summary of results. Because I work in the public sector as a manager and train employees as one of my job tasks, I plan to incorporate this study as a training manual to develop employees. Lastly, working alongside other industry leaders, I plan to include the study findings in academic papers with the intent of publishing in fire service journals and other peer-reviewed journals.

Recommendations for Further Research

Fire chiefs are challenged to identify high-quality employees who exhibit the qualities to lead an organization seamlessly into the future and adopt a fluid succession planning process. The scope of this case study was to explore what strategies fire chiefs used to improve employees' succession planning. I identified several limitations in my study. The limitations identified in this study included the use of a qualitative method, case study design, and only two data collection methods, interviews and review of documentation that include fire chiefs' execution of SOPs. Therefore, I recommend using an alternative method and study design, which could provide additional insights for improving strategies used in succession planning. There are opportunities to explore and/or examine strategies for improving succession planning in public sector firehouses.

In addition, a streamlined process with specific guidance on executing succession planning SOPs would be beneficial. The use of additional data collection methods, such as a focus group or observations at the firehouse sites, in a case study could provide additional rich data to explore strategies used in succession planning. The use of a quantitative study could quantify collected data from a larger sample population of fire chiefs and then hypotheses testing using statistical data could generate additional results. These results could help with the selection of successful strategies to use for improving succession planning. Also, data collection could be more specific with the use of online structured questionnaires, and structured surveys that include participants answering closed-ended questions. Using this method could allow researchers the opportunity to use statistics for proof and recommendations for a final course of action from an examination of the collected data.

Another recommendation for further research could be a qualitative method, but a different research design, such as a phenomenological design. Using a qualitative phenomenological design could provide additional insight into the lived experiences of participants, an event or experience specific to the succession planning processes used by fire chiefs.

Reflections

Obtaining a doctoral degree was not something I initially planned to do when I completed my Master of Business Administration degree. I decided to continue my education when I was unable to find standardized information regarding succession planning in my firehouse. Working in the public sector has been a passion of mine for almost 30 years, and one of my ultimate goals was to provide additional substance to the field. Additionally, I felt that succession planning was a controversial topic and significant source of disagreement between managers. Because of this, my interest in improving succession planning strategies made this journey plausible. My career has piloted me around the world and through several states. The experiences I gained led me to acknowledge dissonance among public sector fire chiefs and the varied effects of succession planning. Therefore, my combined experiences were all reasons for my exploration of improvement practices that encompassed succession planning.

I interviewed public sector fire chiefs and asked detailed questions about their strategies for improving succession planning. I intended to explore succession planning and found that fire chiefs were actively attempting to improve strategies for employee succession planning. I discovered the process was not always implemented according to organizational standards or in a strategic manner. When I started the Walden University's DBA program, I was challenged more than I expected. I faced challenges associated with several injuries that were potentially career ending. Consequently, delays were increasing and the need to stay on task was getting riskier. Nevertheless, this process has taught me about time management and dedication to push through extreme difficulty. I gained immeasurable knowledge throughout this doctoral process. I gained a better comprehension of challenges facing public sector fire department leaders and the importance succession planning has on organizational improvements.

I had no personal bias or preconceived ideas on the topic of succession planning during my research. The information I collected from participants during this study was from semistructured interviews. Although I felt firehouses in the public sector should have a streamlined process on succession planning, this had no bearing on my research or collection of data. Based on the interviews with the participants, there was a genuine professional connection that I did not expect. Because of this, I felt the participants were very engaged and honest. My understanding of the use of succession planning in the public sector slightly changed to recognize the associated responsibilities' fire chiefs face.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I explored strategies fire chiefs use to improve succession planning with employees in firehouses in the southern United States. Participants in this qualitative multiple case study were public sector fire chiefs involved in employee supervision. Fire chiefs in the public use succession planning to improve employee performance and professional development. My findings identified three themes that could be beneficial for improving succession planning strategies. The themes were (a) identify monetary influences that improve employee performance, (b) create a mentoring plan, and (c) promote recognition incentives. Fire chiefs who use successful strategies in their organization could establish a firehouse with employees prepared to move into a leadership position. By preparing employees for future leadership positions, fire chiefs could identify high-quality employees and streamline performance and professional development for the next generation of leaders.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date: ___________
Time: ___________
Interviewee Code #: ____________
Location of Interview: __________

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Interview Purpose and Subject: To explore successful strategies fire chiefs use to improve succession planning for their employees.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Central Research Question: What strategies do fire chiefs use to improve succession plans for their employees?</td></tr>
<tr><th>Parts of Interview</th><th>Interview Questions</th></tr>
<tr><td>Introduction:
• The Skype interview will take place in a private office or private conference room of the participant.
• Begin recording: Time: ______</td><td>Dear Participant:
My name is Vernon L. Easley, and I am a doctoral candidate in Walden’s DBA program. As you know, the purpose of this interview is to talk about successful strategies fire chiefs use to improve succession planning for their employees. This interview should last about 30 minutes and not exceed 60 minutes. I will be using a timer to maintain the interview schedule. Before the interview, I will review the informed consent form with you. Some of your answers will be shared with my supervising faculty for educational purposes. However, I will not identify you in research documents, and no one will be able to identify you by your answers. Also, at any point, you can stop the interview or leave. You may choose to allow me to keep any data obtained or to destroy it. Also, I need to let you know that this interview will be recorded to ensure my note are constant with your interview answers. If you choose to not be audio recorded during interview no audio recording will take place during Skype interview.
• Before we begin, do you have any questions or concerns?
• Are you ready to begin?</td></tr>
</table>

Question 1:	What strategies do you use to support succession planning practices for your employees?
Question 2:	What strategies do you find beneficial for improving and overcoming challenges with employee succession planning?
Question 3:	What strategies do you use to improve succession plans for your employees?
Question 4:	How do you measure the benefits of succession planning for your employees?
Question 5:	How is your strategy for succession planning relevant for employee's training?
Question 6:	How do you prepare for retirement or unexpected vacancies?
Question 7:	What ways do employees respond to your approaches toward succession planning?
Question 8:	What additional information can you provide other fire chiefs regarding objectives improving succession planning strategies for their employees?
Interview Wrap Up: **End Time: -_______________**	Dear Participant: Thank you for participating in this interview. As I explained in the consent form, the information you provided will be compared with my notes and re-checked from recording on my recording devices (if used) for confirmation. I will follow up with a member checking interview via Skype where you will have the opportunity to provide corrections. I will give you a copy of the interview responses and my interpretation to ensure I understood your responses as you intended. • Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you would like to share? • Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your time. Goodbye.

FOLLOW UP & MEMBER CHECKING Schedule follow up member checking interview via Skype and include: • Follow up interview question review and data syntheses • Update question answer as required	Dear Participant, My name is Vernon L. Easley, and I conducted an interview with you on ______. Please review the eight questions and responses from our interview and provide any additional information you feel is relevant or that I may have missed when I reviewed your responses. Please consider the subsequent questions when reviewing. • Did I miss anything? • Would you like to add anything?
Question 1 Review	What strategies do you use to support succession planning practices for your employees? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation A:
Question 2 Review	What strategies do you use to improve succession plans for your employees? A:
Question 3 Review	What strategies do you find beneficial for improving and overcoming challenges with employee succession planning? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation A:
Question 4 Review	How do you measure the benefits of succession planning for your employees? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation A:
Question 5 Review	How is your strategy for succession planning relevant for employee training? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation A:
Question 6 Review	How do you prepare for retirement or unexpected vacancies? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation A:
Question 7 Review	What ways do employees respond to your approaches toward succession planning? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation A:

Question 8 Review	What additional information can you provide other fire chiefs regarding objectives improving succession planning strategies for their employees? Succinct synthesis of the interpretation A:
Record any updated data and summarize interviews. End follow-up member checking protocol.	

Notes: