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Executive Transition in Nonprofit Organizations

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Gail Q. Knight

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Executive Transition in Nonprofit Organizations

by

Gail Q. Knight

MA, University of Phoenix, 2001

BA, University of Phoenix, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

Many nonprofit organizations lack strategies for succession planning and executive transitions. Without effective talent management and succession planning strategies, nonprofit organizations are in jeopardy of survival. The purpose of this multiple qualitative case study was to explore how nonprofit organizations in a southwestern state without a succession plan in place prepare for executive transition when an impending change is imminent. These multiple case studies were based on the conceptual framework of transition management. Identified through purposive sampling, 12 participants (two senior-level executives and two board members) from three nonprofit organizations in a southwestern state were interviewed using semi-structured questions. Also, archival documents, specifically draft succession plans, transition plans, and minutes for the strategic plans meeting were reviewed. Braun and Clarke's thematic process was applied to conduct the thematic analysis. It was identified that nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent through (a) strategic planning, (b) job description and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, and (e) role subdivision. The implications for positive social change include providing useful knowledge for the southwestern nonprofit organization's board of directors, executives, consultants, and nonprofit associations on the importance of having a succession plan in place to ensure an effective executive transition.

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Dedication

First and foremost, I give all praises to God for blessing me with patience and perseverance to achieve this lifelong goal! I dedicate my doctoral study to my beloved late husband, Leonard G. Knight, and a heartfelt thanks to my dear wonder loves -- Rosslyn, Steven, Saleemah, and my adorable granddaughter, Loni. You all are my rock and inspiration. I am most grateful for a dynamic family of leaders who worked very hard to ensure me, my siblings, off springs, great/grandchildren, and the many generations that follow will have a life of freedom and prosperity. A special dedication is given to my great grand, grandparents, and parents who inspired all of us to soar with our strengths and maintain the Beck, Adams, Lane and Mayes family legacy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Executive positions across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors are occupied by aging baby boomers, and labor forecasts predict significant turnover in the coming years (Stewart, 2016). For the nonprofit sector, a 2011 national survey found that 7% of 3,000 respondents had already given departure notice, and another 67% reported intentions to exit within 5 years; of these, 10% were actively considering leaving but had not yet given notice (Cornelius et al., 2011). While there is a growing recognition that the mass exodus of baby boomers is real, research indicates that executives and the board of directors do not have a high priority for developing a succession plan within nonprofit organizations (Bell et al., 2006; Gothard & Austin, 2014; Santora et al., 2011).

Research finds that most U.S. nonprofits do not plan for executive succession even though it is one of the most important events in an organization's life (Santora et al., 2011). It is in the best interests of both current leaders and their potential replacements that comprehensive succession plans are developed (Santora et al., 2011). An executive exit can be planned or unexpected and, though it can be difficult to discuss, it is an organization's responsibility to be prepared for either one (Gothard & Austin, 2014).

As record numbers of nonprofit founders and executives near retirement age, further investigation into the complex nature of an executive exit is critical to the future health of the non-profit sector (De Vita et al., n.d.; Gothard & Austin, 2014). Nonprofits have been slow to embrace succession planning and adopt practices that equip them to mitigate the disruption of impending and inevitable executive turnover (Tebbe et al.,

2017). LeCounte et al. (2017) noted that without a succession plan in place, the organization will be in a perilous situation.

Despite the increased awareness about the importance of succession planning, there is a gap in the knowledge and process best for nonprofit organizations that executives and their boards need to have when faced with an executive transition (Gothard & Austin, 2014; Wolfred, 2008;). During the 2016 Alliance for Nonprofit Management–ARNOVA joint conference sessions, Tebbe et al. (2017) noted although 2 decades of substantial philanthropic investment toward formalizing approaches to succession planning, executive transition management, interim executive leadership, and mainstream management practices within the nonprofit sector, a significant disparity remains between practice ideals and actual practice.

Nonprofits operating in resource-constrained environments may not have the luxury of hiring an interim executive, and boards or other paid staff may assume interim functions, which may prove to be less than ideal coverage (Stewart, 2016). This case study on nonprofit organizations addressed what plans and processes need to be in place in non-profit organizations to ensure a seamless transition when a leader departs, and a new leader takes over. The results of this study may lead to useful knowledge for boards of directors, nonprofit executives, consultants, scholars, and nonprofit associations on the importance of a succession plan and process to maintain organizational performance and stability, decrease organizational disruption and provide a cohesive workforce to maintain program and service delivery (Adams, 2010; Dym et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2014; Wolfred, 2008).

Chapter 1 focuses on the background of the study, the problem that was studied, the purpose of the study, research study questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions used in the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. The above-named areas are presented in the following sections.

Background

Executive succession planning is not simply about replacing the chief executive (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Important front-end work involves defining desired executive qualifications while aligning succession with strategic objectives often giving rise to significant executive and board introspection around critical environmental trends and resulting in organizational imperatives, resource requirements, and adaptive goals (Gothard & Austin, 2014). With the projected high turnover at the executive level of nonprofit organizations, boards of directors must develop a plan to tackle one of the most crucial events in the life of an organization (Dym et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2014; Santora et al., 2007). However, executive succession planning is still not a priority within nonprofit organizations (Carman et al., 2010; Santora et al., 2011; Tierney, 2006).

Consistent with previous research studies reported in the literature, current nonprofit organizations lack organizational readiness and knowledge of best practices for executive succession (Cornelius et al., 2011; Cragun et al., 2016; Dym et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2007). McKee and Froelich (2016) noted four major themes in the current literature: (a) an immense wave of nonprofit executive turnover is on the very near horizon; (b) top executive turnover is of special consequence in the nonprofit sector; (c)

challenges and obstacles to nonprofit executive replacement are distinctly high; and (d) overall, nonprofit organizations have not adequately planned for an executive leadership transition. With both external and internal labor markets presenting challenges for nonprofit organizations, a prudent course of action would be careful planning for the important event of executive succession (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Relatively large-scale studies in the nonprofit sector provide converging predictions for extensive top executive turnover, beginning immediately (Froelich et al., 2011). Tebbe et al. (2017) noted nonprofit organizations have been slow to embrace succession planning and adopt transition practices that equip them to mitigate the disruption of impending and inevitable executive turnover.

The continuation of current trends may create a need to replace every existing senior executive position within the next 8 years (Landles-Cobb et al., 2015). The nonprofit sector has yet to widely adopt the norm that among the responsibilities of the board are the duties to plan for leadership succession and to manage the transition when it occurs, rather than just “hire and supervise the executive,” as articulated in most bylaws (Tebbe et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

Chiocchio and Gharibpour (2017) reported findings from several non-profit governance surveys on succession planning from 2004 through 2014 suggested that succession planning has been seriously neglected in both small and large non-profits. Despite the increased awareness about the importance of succession planning, executive leaders of nonprofit organizations are not prepared to replace departing qualified

personnel and have no succession plans for transition (Gothard & Austin, 2014; Wolfred, 2009). It was also not known how leaders of nonprofit organizations without a succession plan prepare to address retirement among their executive workforce (Froelich et al., 2011). There was a gap in the knowledge of succession planning and transition for nonprofit organizations among executive leadership and board of directors (Dym et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2014; Wolfred, 2008).

The continuation of current trends in baby boomer retirement may create a need to replace every existing senior executive position within the next 8 years (Landles-Cobb et al., 2015). A large executive transition will affect the nonprofit sector worldwide (McIsaac et al., 2013). Planning and managing executive transition is a critical component of succession, regardless of whether the change in leadership is planned or a result of emergency-based succession (Gothard & Austin, 2014). Tebbe et al. (2017) noted transitions in top-level leadership roles have profound implications for the sustainability of the organization, funding, constituent support, and effectiveness of the mission work of the organization.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change in leadership was within 6 to 24 months. The results of this study could contribute to positive social change by providing useful knowledge for boards of directors, nonprofit executives, consultants, scholars, and nonprofit associations on the importance of having a succession plan in

place for an executive exit to ensure a smooth transition. Additionally, the study results could be used by a nonprofit board of directors and senior executives for the development of a succession plan and process. Further, understanding the need for an effective succession framework by the board of directors and executives in nonprofit organizations may reduce risks, loss of strategic opportunities, and poor leadership (Chapman & Vogelsang, 2005; Dym et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2014).

Research Question

The research question that guided the course of this study was the following: How do nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was talent management. Chambers et al. (1998) coined the term *talent management* in a report in which they predicted that U.S. companies would have to compete fiercely for executive talent, which was becoming increasingly critical to organizational success but also increasingly scarce. The authors developed talent management to serve as an evidence-based approach to corporate recruitment and retention practices, and as a warning to practitioners of the urgent need to prioritize talent management at all organizational levels and argued that talent management could not be confined to a dedicated human resource division but needed to be adopted as an urgent priority throughout an organization. The key elements associated with talent management are *sourcing*, *recruiting*, and *developing* the most capable

employees at all organizational levels (Chambers et al., 1998). These propositions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Cappelli and Keller (2014) defined talent management as the process through which organizations anticipate and meet their needs for talent in strategic jobs. The term talent management has escaped a standard definition, and nearly every article written on the topic begins with handwringing over the conceptual boundaries of the term (p. 397). For example, Lewis and Heckman (2006) noted that there is a lack of a clear understanding about the definition, scope, and overall goals of talent management. Similarly, Collings and Mellahi (2009) concluded that “the concept of talent management is lacking in terms of definition and theoretical development and there is a comparative lack of empirical evidence on the topic” (p. 1264). Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) stated, “it appears that talent can mean whatever a business leader or writer wants it to mean since everyone has his or her own idea of what the construct does and does not encompass” (p. 291). Cappelli and Keller (2014) asserted their definition is consistent with traditional approaches and captures what academic researchers have been doing under the heading of talent management.

Cappelli and Keller (2014) noted their definition of talent management is a new idea in academic studies and is sufficiently suited to the academic need to stimulate theory development while reflecting the interests of practitioners, for whom the interest in talent management is strongly focused on a small number of roles, typically senior management and executive positions (Garavan et al., 2012; Tafti et al., 2017). This research was focused on executive transition in nonprofit organizations which represents

a small number of roles in senior management and executive positions. Therefore, the talent management concept defined by Cappelli and Keller applies to this study. A more detailed explanation was provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The research method for this study was a multiple case study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted a case study design is used when a researcher is exploring a process or a phenomenon in-depth. Additionally, qualitative studies incorporate open-ended questions that represent the basis or the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (Elo et al., 2014; Marshall et al., 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A multiple case study research method is used when the researcher intends to explore a phenomenon that has not been extensively explored in previous studies and is appropriate in three situations: (a) if researchers have little control over events involved in the study; (b) if how what, or why research questions are addressed, and (c) if the focus is on current phenomenon within real-life circumstances (Sanjari et al., 2014; Yin, 2014). The intent of conducting this study was not to test objective hypotheses or theories. Thus, a quantitative method did not meet the purpose of this research. Researchers conduct quantitative studies to address a problem by testing objective theories and examining the relationships and differences among sets of variables (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

A case study design allows researchers to analyze people, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems holistically, using varied sources of data (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), the sources of data for case study research included interviews, archival records, observations, policies, and textual or visual

analysis so the researcher can acquire adequate and quality information to address questions related to why, how, and with what results. Before selecting the case study design, a review of the following designs were also reviewed and not considered a good fit. Ethnography strives to understand the interaction of individuals not just with others, seeking to understand how they collectively form and maintain a culture (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Thus, culture is a central concept for ethnographies rather than a specific phenomenon.

Narrative analysis uses stories people tell, analyzing them in many ways to understand the meaning of the experiences as revealed in their stories (Merriam, 2014). A narrative analysis seeks to describe the sense of experience for those who frequently are socially marginalized or oppressed (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Based on the research question for this study, a narrative study design would not be appropriate since the study is fact-based and not story-based.

Grounded theory design relies heavily on interviews, as does the case study design. Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants (Anselm & Corbin, 1998). The grounded theory study is designed to understand but uses precise processes to generate the theory that derives from participants' views, as well as to consider alternative meanings of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). This research did not create a new theory; therefore, I did not choose a grounded theory design for this study.

Finally, phenomenology was not selected because of its focus on the lived experiences of participants told through in-depth interviewing of one's past association with the phenomenon of the study. Phenomenological research is not used to examine processes (Merriam, 2014). Merriam (2014) noted a phenomenological analysis is well suited for studying effective, emotional, and often intense human experiences. According to Patton (2002), phenomenological approaches are used to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of individual lived experience: how participants perceive the experience, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others.

Case study researchers can collect different types of data that can furnish information to answer the research question and are not limited, for example, to conducting just interviews as may be the case with other qualitative research strategies (Yin, 2014). Data collection and analysis will include in-depth interviews of nonprofit executives and the board of directors and documents of written policies created by executives and board members without a succession plan in place where an impending change in leadership is imminent.

There are various analytic techniques and strategies that can be used in the analysis of data in case studies. The techniques proposed by Yin (2014) include pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case desirable techniques. Pattern-matching techniques will be employed to provide an understanding of the multiple findings. Patterns are arrangements of incidents,

occurrences, behavioral actions, or outcomes apparent in the raw data (Almutairi et al., 2014). Data collection and analysis are described in detail in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Board chair. A member of the board of directors is elected by their peers to lead the board of directors in their fiduciary responsibility of the nonprofit organization (Dym et al., 2011).

Board of directors. The board of directors is a group of volunteers who serve as the nonprofit organization's governing body with the primary role of a fiduciary, which is to say they are entrusted to look after the interests of the organization (Adams, 2010; Dym et al., 2011; English, 2019; Murray & Harrison, 2014).

Chief executive officer (CEO). The top leader at most nonprofit organizations has the title of executive director or chief executive officer and is responsible for the day-to-day leadership of the organization, supervision of staff, and is the primary advocate and face of the organization (English, 2019).

Nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations are incorporated entities with financial and operational concerns to provide social, health, and human services for low to no fees that do not generate profits (McClellan & Sanders, 2014).

Succession planning. Succession planning is a strategy to fill key positions and implementation of a transition process that will strengthen the organization's capacity and long-term sustainability (Calareso, 2013; Wolfred, 2008).

Talent management. Talent management is the process through which organizations anticipate and meet their needs for talent in strategic jobs (Cappelli & Keller, 2014; Garavan et al., 2012).

Assumptions

Several assumptions are pertinent to the study. First, it was assumed that the participants provided honest responses. Honest responses are important in qualitative studies because results are primarily based on the responses of the participants (Creswell, 2012). The second assumption was that participants shared their experience in a nonprofit organization where an executive leadership change is imminent to understand how the nonprofit organization is planning for its future given an impending change in leadership. Third, it was assumed that all identified stakeholders would participate in this study (current employees, executives, and board members). Lastly, it was assumed that the audio recording of the interviews would be a consistent and accurate representation of each participant's perspectives.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for leadership transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change was within 6 to 24 months. Data collection included interviews with study participants (executives and board members) from nonprofit organizations. This qualitative study had the following delimitations: (a) only nonprofit organizations were included in the study; (b) the geographic location of the study was limited to cities in the southwest region of the United States; (c) the results

of the study may not be similar to nonprofit board members, executives, and staff in other locations; (d) only three nonprofit organizations were selected for the study; (e) The perspectives represented the purposeful sample size of those interviewed and are not generalizable to agencies or geographic locations; and (f) The purposeful sample size was 12 participants comprised of two senior executives and two members of the board directors from three nonprofit organizations (Yin, 2014).

Elements of transferability were included in this qualitative study. Transferability involved the replication of a study within a similar setting or context (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Researchers might be able to replicate this research study in other nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place where an executive leadership change is imminent to understand how nonprofit organizations plan for their future given an impending change in leadership. However, the results may differ, depending on the design of the interview questions, the background of interviewees, the settings, and other factors.

Limitations

This qualitative study was limited to nonprofit organizations located in cities within the southwest region of the United States. The findings of this study cannot be directly generalized to the larger population and the participants were not randomly selected. The limitations of this qualitative case study are: (a) nonprofit organizations may be different in size and resources; (b) time limitation; (c) the number of executives, board members, and managers that represent the executive leadership; and (d) organizational changes that may make some executives ineligible to participate in the

study. Issues associated with the biases of the researcher include (a) the researcher's interactions with the outcome of the research study, such as misinterpreting or miscoding the participants' responses and (b) the influence of the researcher's introduction to participants' responses and environment (Miyazaki & Taylor, 2008).

The researcher's choices around the ordering of themes, selection of participant quotations, providing context for participant narratives, and application of theories to explain or understand the data may be influenced by preconceptions (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Given the sometimes-close relationship between the researcher and the research topic that may both precede and develop during the process of qualitative research, this study used bracketing to protect the researcher from the cumulative effects of examining what may be emotionally challenging material (Tufford & Newman, 2012). A discussion on bracketing is provided in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

The exploration of how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent may allow executives and the board of directors to address a foreseeable need before an unexpected departure or retirement of an executive leader. This study was significant for numerous reasons: (a) it provides information on practices for sustaining healthy organizations; (b) it identifies a systematic process for building leadership and professional development plans for staff around organizational identified needs; and (c) it conveys why organizations need to develop plans that establish leadership succession.

Results of the study may contribute to scholarly literature and positive social change by providing useful knowledge for boards of directors, nonprofit executives, consultants, scholars, and nonprofit associations on the importance of having a succession plan in place for executive exit to ensure stability and a smooth transition (Dym et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2014; Wolfred, 2009). The participants identified for this study were significant because of the lack of research studies on nonprofit organizations without a succession plan during an executive exit. The results may also lead to the implementation of best practices in succession planning for nonprofit organizations to strengthen relationships, create a leadership pipeline, cohesive workforce, and sustainability. Study results may be used by the board of directors and senior executives for the development of a comprehensive succession plan and process.

Summary

Chapter 1 includes the problem, purpose, background, and conceptual framework for this qualitative case study. At its very best, succession planning can provide a nonprofit organization with a blueprint for sustainability that will help it thrive far into the foreseeable future (Santora & Bozer, 2015; Wolfred, 2009). As record numbers of nonprofit executives near retirement age, further investigation into the complex nature of executive exit is critical to the future health of the non-profit sector (Gothard & Austin, 2014). Gothard and Austin (2014) noted the topic of leadership succession planning can stir up considerable emotion, fear, stress, conflict, and questions, and thereby create potential discomfort between nonprofit boards and executives. A qualitative case study design was used to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan are in

place and where an executive leadership change is an imminent plan for the future.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on nonprofit organizations, the responsibilities of executives and boards of directors, workforce changes, talent management, succession planning, and executive transition.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

As record numbers of nonprofit executives and managers near retirement age, further investigation into the complex nature of the executive transition is critical to the future health of the nonprofit sector (Gothard & Austin, 2014). However, the literature on nonprofit succession indicates boards of directors are unprepared for a CEO transition (Stewart, 2016). The mass retirement of executive baby boomers at nonprofit organizations poses a problem due to the lack of a formal strategic talent management and succession plan to replace the incumbent CEO (Cornelius et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2011). Nonprofit organizations also risk the loss of valuable institutional knowledge, skills, and organizational accomplishments (Allison, 2002; Carman et al., 2010; Pfeiffer, 2015; Stewart, 2016). Further, transitions in essential leadership roles have profound implications for sustainability, funding, constituent support, and the effectiveness of the organization's mission (Tebbe et al., 2017).

Nonprofit boards are constrained by their capacity or failure to view turnover as an organizational change, and may be pressured, even hasty in their recruitment, rather than conducting a comprehensive search or retaining an executive recruiter (Peters et al., 2002; Stewart, 2016). Moreover, Stewart (2016) noted leadership development and talent management programs as a strategy connected to succession planning could serve as critical opportunities for nonprofit organizations to develop and expand potential executive positions for employees and to ensure effective organizational change.

The purpose of this study was to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for executive transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change in leadership was within 6 to 24 months. The results of the study could contribute to positive social change by providing useful knowledge for boards of directors, nonprofit executives, consultants, scholars, and nonprofit associations on the importance of having a succession plan in place to ensure a smooth transition during the executive transition (Dym et al., 2011; Gothard & Austin, 2014; Wolfred, 2009). Additionally, the study results may be adopted by the nonprofit board of directors and senior executives for succession planning and the transition process.

Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, key concepts, summary, and conclusions. Each of these topics contributes to the discussion of succession planning and transition in nonprofit organizations. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary of the main points presented in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

Databases and Search Engines Used

In researching literature, informational sources included peer-reviewed scholarly journals, books, and articles accessed through December 2019 using the Walden University Library databases ProQuest Central, AB/Inform Complete, the Business Source Complete, EBSCO host databases, and Walden Dissertations. Additional searches included GoogleScholar.com and Questia.com. Supplemental documents and studies obtained include a monograph series on succession planning and executive transitions

funded in part by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. There was limited information available on succession planning in the nonprofit sector. Statistical data were gathered from the United States Department of Labor, Daring to Lead 2011, Society for Human Resource Management, Urban Institute, and the United States Census Bureau. Various articles identified during the search provided information on succession planning in businesses and corporations.

Key Search Terms

Key search terms used to access the literature included: *Baby boomers, employee motivation, employee attitudes, nonprofit organizations, succession planning, nonprofit management, nonprofit board of directors, nonprofit leadership development, talent management, human capital, and executive transition*. Various articles identified during the search provided a large volume of information on succession planning for profit and limited information on nonprofit organizations. The sources for the literature review included 325 peer-reviewed, journal, and Internet articles, 45 books, 10 doctoral dissertations, and seven conference reports that address the topic of succession planning in nonprofit organizations.

Iterative Search Process

An iterative search process was adopted to increase the knowledge obtained in each search, refine the search, and select the relevant information from the literature. The approach facilitated the appraisal of the quality of individual articles. Further, the iterative approach synthesized and demonstrated the trustworthiness of the available studies.

The following search terms were used for research of the EBSCO database: *baby boomers, employee attitudes, employee motivation, human capital, nonprofit organizations, executive transition, and talent management*. This was followed by critical control over inclusion and exclusion, study quality as well as analysis. ProQuest Central database was used to search for information about succession planning, leadership planning and development, and nonprofit management. Using the iterative search approach, I moved back and forth between selecting the right studies. AB/Inform Complete, the Business Source Complete, Walden Dissertations, and other dissertations were used to search for the following terms strategic leader development, nonprofit board challenges, failed executive transitions, succession process, and executive development.

The search was carried out several times, where I synthesized information collection to come up with the appropriate review of the literature. In cases where there are little current research and few dissertations or conference proceedings, a search was conducted of original research sources listed in the reference sections of studies. Walden Library's EBSCO Host search tool was explored using the referenced titles, authors, and journals.

Conceptual Framework

Talent management is the conceptual framework for this study. Chambers et al. (1998) coined the term talent management in a report in which they predicted that U.S. companies would have to compete fiercely for executive talent, which was becoming increasingly critical to organizational success but also increasingly scarce. As discussed in Chapter 1, Chambers et al. developed talent management to serve as an evidence-based

approach to corporate recruitment and retention practices, and as a warning to practitioners of the urgent need to prioritize talent management at all organizational levels. Chambers et al. argued that talent management could not be confined to a dedicated human resource division but needed to be adopted as an urgent priority throughout an organization.

The key elements associated with talent management are sourcing, recruiting, and developing the most capable employees at all organizational levels (Chambers et al., 1998). Sourcing talent begins with defining the talent that is needed to advance organizational strategies. Defining the needed talent involves aligning the description of the desired employee's skills, knowledge, and traits with organizational strategies, goals, and culture (Bolander et al., 2017). Once the needed talent has been defined, the organization must engage in the process of sourcing that talent through innovative strategies and channels (Bolander et al., 2017). An example of an innovative sourcing channel was an internship program for high school students, whom the company was then able to cultivate from a young age.

Chambers et al. (1998) found that the organizations that were most successful at recruiting the talent they needed did so through the creation of a strong employee value proposition (EVP). Companies created a successful EVP by aligning recruitment goals with organizational strategies, and then by designing the offered jobs to appeal to the specific talent they want to recruit. An EVP may be summarized as an answer to the question, "Why would anyone want to work here?" (Chambers et al., 1998, p. 47) that is

tailored to attract the needed employees. Examples of EVPs may include “Go with a winner,” “Save the world,” and, “Big risk, big reward” (Chambers et al., 1998, p. 47).

Chambers et al. (1998) maintained that it was not sufficient merely to source and recruited talent, rather companies needed to cultivate talent internally, through a rigorous and ongoing process of candid performance and potential evaluations. To provide meaningful performance evaluations, the authors argued, companies must foster a culture in which the performance of executives at every level is discussed frankly in a meeting with peers and supervisors. Incentives, such as bonuses tied to executives’ success in implementing needed talents and abilities, were also found to be effective in developing employees (Chambers et al., 1998).

Carpenter and Qualls (2015) emphasized overlooking talent management as a viable option for organizational success cannot be ignored by nonprofit organizations. The academic literature in this evolving field has been paralleled, and some might argue led by a practitioner concern around effectively managing those individuals from a select few to many, who are most important to the strategic success of enterprises, big or small, domestic or international, and public or private (Morley et al., 2015).

Armstrong (2014) described talent management as the process of ensuring that the organization has the talented people it needs to attain its business goal. However, Cappelli and Keller (2014) noted talent management escaped a standard definition, and nearly every article written on the topic begins with handwringing over the conceptual boundaries of the term. For example, Cappelli and Keller pointed out that Lewis and Heckman (2006) indicated a disturbing lack of clarity regarding the definition, scope, and

overall goals of talent management. Lewis and Heckman (2006) defined talent management in three ways: (a) as a combination of standard human resource management practices such as recruitment, selection, and career development; (b) as the creation of a large talent pool, ensuring the quantitative and the qualitative flow of employees through the organization (i.e., akin to succession or human resource planning); and (c) as a good base on the demographic necessity to manage talent.

Garg and Rani (2014) defined talent management as a process that facilitates the identification, development, engagement, retention, and deployment of those individuals who are leaders and of particular value to an organization. Additionally, Garg and Rani noted that talent management could encompass different features that include recruitment, selection, onboarding, mentoring, performance management, leadership development, replacement training, recognition, and reward. Therefore, Garg and Rani recommended organizations that want to achieve a competitive edge and performance carefully consider their approach toward attraction, recruitment, retention, and development of intellectual capital.

Cappelli and Keller (2014) maintained talent management is the new idea a business leader or writer wants it to mean since everyone has their sense of what construct does and does not encompass. Thus, Cappelli and Keller defined talent management as the process through which organizations anticipate and meet their needs for talent in strategic jobs; and as a recent, practitioner-generated term covering a range of long-standing practices that aim at getting the right person in the right position at the right time that includes workforce planning, succession planning, employee development,

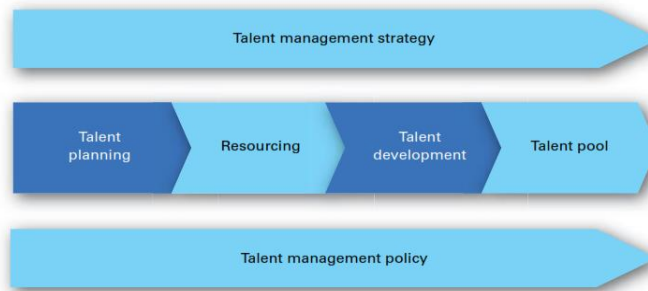
and career management. Cappelli and Keller postulated their definition is consistent with academic studies and is sufficiently suited to the academic need to stimulate theory development while reflecting the interests of practitioners, for whom the interest in talent management is strongly focused on a small number of roles, typically senior management and executive positions. This research study is focused on executive transition in nonprofit organizations, which represents a small number of roles in senior management and executive positions. Therefore, the talent management concept defined by Cappelli and Keller (2014) applies to this study.

Armstrong (2014) maintained talent management starts with the business strategy and what it signifies in terms of the future demand for talented people (p. 266).

Armstrong described the process of talent management as a pipeline, as illustrated in Figure 1 below, that operates within the parameters of talent management strategy and policy and starts with talent planning, followed by a sequence of resourcing and talent development activities to produce a talent pool. Ultimately, Armstrong argued the aim is to develop and maintain a pool of talented people through the talent pipeline, which consists of the processes of resourcing, career planning, and talent development that supports the flow of talent needed by the organization.

Figure 1

The Talent Management Pipeline



Note: From Armstrong's handbook of human resource management practice (13th edition), by M. Armstrong, 2014, Kogan Page.

Armstrong identified and defined the following critical elements of a talent pipeline:

- Talent planning – the process of establishing how many and what sort of talented people are needed now and in the future. It uses the techniques of workforce planning and leads to the development of policies for attracting and retaining talent and for estimating future requirements as monitored by talent audits.
- Resourcing - the outcomes of talent planning are programs for obtaining people from within and outside the organization (internal and external resourcing). Internally they involve the identification of talent, talent development, and career management. Externally, they mean the implementation of policies for attracting high-quality people.
- Talent development – learning and development policies and programs are critical components of talent management (Kim et al., 2014). They aim to ensure that people acquire and enhance the skills and competencies they need.

Policies should be formulated by reference to ‘employee success profiles,’ which are described in terms of competencies and define the qualities that need development. Leadership and management development programs play an essential part.

- Talent pool – the resources of talent available to an organization.

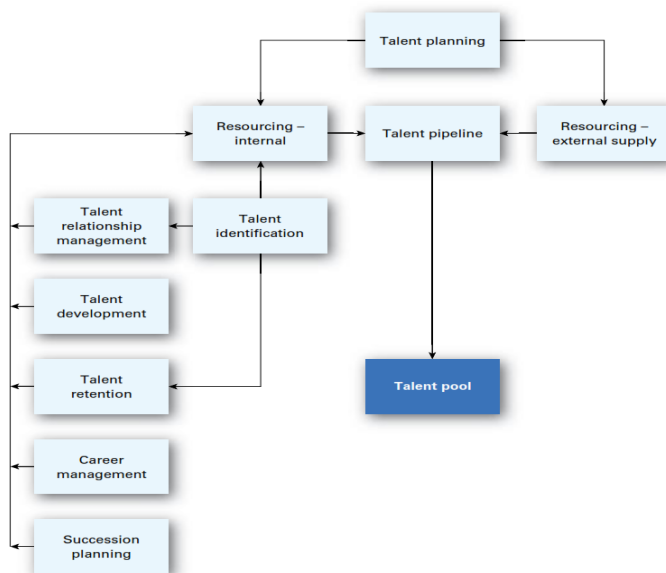
Armstrong (2014) provided a more detailed flow chart for the process of talent management in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

The Talent Management Process

Note: From Armstrong’s handbook of human resource management practice (13th edition), by M. Armstrong, 2014, Kogan Page.

Santora and Bozer (2015) posited connecting succession to a talent management



strategy would not only ensure seamless succession outcomes but also enhance the sustainability of organizations by perpetuating and improving the cultures of those

organizations. Rabbi et al. (2015) noted that an organization's image and performance can be enhanced if the capabilities of individuals are utilized accurately and successfully. Rabbi et al also explained talent management leads to increased employee engagement, enhanced retention of employees, improved productivity, and develops a culture of excellence in an organization.

Hejase et al. (2016) emphasized human resource leaders also use talent management practices and policies to create a talent pool of internal candidates for future growth and developmental opportunities, empower employees to make decisions that affect their work, and provide organizations with a competitive advantage by finding the best talent with the needed skills and competencies. Stewart (2016) maintained providing an opportunity for high-potential employees to advance internally in nonprofit organizations should be an essential goal. Mulului and Muathe (2017) noted talent management has the enormous potential of retaining and developing the most valuable assets of an organization to gain critical competitive advantage and success in the market today. Additionally, Mulului and Muathe maintained talent management is a core competitive asset and an important factor of organizational performance as the world's economy shifts from a production-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.

Since competitive advantage for a firm may be attained in a variety of different ways, a compendium of empirical results will contribute to a collective understanding of the talent management framework as well as its ramifications in many organizational contexts. The strategies involved in talent management and the interdependence between individuals involved in the process interact to create the most beneficial situation arising

out of a succession process (Turner, 2018). The focus in this research was the aspect of succession planning for nonprofit executives

LeCounte et al. (2017) drew inferences from insights from theories of human capital and talent management to construct a model of succession success. LeCounte et al. emphasized organizations must conduct due diligence to mitigate risks associated with negligent CEO hiring, indicated the talent management process is critical to screening candidates at this level and recommended the conceptual framework in Figure 3 below may be useful to organizations as they develop a succession planning process.

Figure 3*Conceptual Framework*

Note: Adapted from “CEO Succession Planning and Organizational Performance: A Human Capital Theory Approach,” by J.F. LeCounte, L.C. Prieto, and S.T. Phipps, 2017, p. 52 (http://www.na-businesspress.com/JLAE/LeCounteJF_Web14_1_1_.pdf).

Spofford (2017) posited studies of organizations with exemplary talent management systems consistently report that the first and most crucial step to building a best-in-class process is the development of a compelling business case, engaging senior leadership teams, and the governing board. Spofford maintained **talent management** is fundamentally designed to improve the process of recruiting and developing people with the required skills and aptitude to meet organizational needs. Additionally, Spofford pointed out many organizations have proactively invested in the development of talent management and succession planning capabilities.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The focus in this study was exploring how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for an executive transition when an impending change is imminent. I explored what plans and processes are implemented by nonprofit organizations without a plan for a successful transition when an executive departs, and a new executive takes over. The literature review includes a discussion on nonprofit organizations, workforce changes, succession planning, nonprofit succession planning, talent planning, employee attitudes, and motivation.

Nonprofit Organizations

Liao and Huang (2016) define nonprofit organizations as institutions that support public causes such as arts, education, politics, public policy, health, human services, religious issues, scholarships, charity, and the environment. There are over 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the United States, a number that has increased by over 30 percent in the past decade and is defined as organizations legally constituted, nongovernmental entities incorporated under the state law as charitable or not-for-profit corporations that have been set up to serve some public purpose and are tax-exempt according to the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS) (Cornelius et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2011; Stewart, 2016; Wolf, 2012). Additionally, Santora et al. (2011) indicated the public charities identified with the 501(c)(3) designation by the IRS alone number over a million organizations, and all must have the following five characteristics:

- A public service mission.
- Determined to be a not-for-profit organization or a charitable corporation.

- A governance structure that precludes self-interest and private financial gain.
- Exemption from paying federal tax.
- A particular legal status that stipulates gifts made to them are tax-deductible.

Consequently, Santora et al. (2011) pointed out nonprofit organizations do not include three other categories of organizations:

- Entities that have been set up to make a profit but are failing to do so.
- Organizations that are governed informally by a collection of people who, although they have banded together to serve some public good, have been granted no special corporate status by federal and state authorities.
- Organizations that are recognized as nonprofit by the IRS but do not have a public purpose (for example, trade associations, labor unions, country clubs, and fraternal organizations).

Board of Directors. Bailey (2014) noted nonprofits resemble an hourglass, with the board of directors at the top, the staff, and programs at the bottom, and everything flowing through the executive director/ president. The board of directors determines the organization's mission, selects, evaluates, and supports the executive director or president; monitors financial resources, and programming; owns the corporation, and has the responsibilities and liabilities of ownership. Thus, the board of directors' role is not a position to be taken lightly.

Johnson (2019) cited the three overarching duties of individual directors serving on nonprofit boards are:

- **Duty of care.** The duty of care requires directors to be familiar with the financial position of the organization and to act prudently in using and protecting its assets. Exercising good judgment in making decisions is part of this responsibility.
- **Duty of loyalty.** The duty of loyalty requires directors to understand and advance the mission of the organization. It includes identifying and disclosing conflicts of interest and making decisions that are in the best interests of the organization rather than the individual.
- **Duty of obedience.** The board's role is to make sure that the organization is following rules and regulations, including its internal governance documents. It includes keeping the organization focused on its mission. These duties sound straightforward, but how the organization operationalizes them is key. The better-informed board members are, the better equipped they are to make a positive contribution.

Executive Director/President/Chief Executive Officer. The executive director/president/ **CEO** manages the operations and staff, serves as the public face of the organization, and assures that the board chair and owners are well-informed and involved (Bailey, 2014). Additionally, Bailey specified the staff carries out the organization's mission. It is essential that board members and the executive director/president respect these roles -- the board determines organizational needs and creates a strategic plan with input from the executive director and staff with the executive director implementing the plan (Bailey, 2014).

Workforce Changes

Gothard and Austin (2014) noted as a substantial number of baby boomers reach retirement age, the significance of succession planning and executive transitions will become more urgently felt in nonprofit organizations. Cole (2015) posited while globalization and the advances in technology have helped make the competitive environment increasingly challenging for business today, companies have to cope with an aging workforce and a shortage of young workers available to fill the voids left by retirements. McKee and Froelich (2016) indicated a review of the literature revealed four major themes: (a) An immense wave of nonprofit executive turnover is on the very near horizon; (b) top executive turnover is of special consequence in the nonprofit sector; (c) challenges and obstacles to nonprofit executive replacement are distinctly high; and (d) overall, nonprofit organizations have not adequately planned for an executive leadership transition.

Kosterlitz and Lewis (2017) indicated by 2020, millennials (born between 1980 and 2000) will make up almost 50% of the nation's workforce, capturing the crown from the baby boomer generation. Organizations must have educational and financial resources budgeted for succession planning (Kosterlitz & Lewis, 2017). Chiochio and Gharibpour (2017) emphasized today's public organizations must develop strategies to ensure their future leadership capacity, address changing worker beliefs and wavering workforce values, prepare top performers for promotion and advancement, and provide leadership continuity in key areas of the organization. According to a report by the Pew Research

Center approximately 10,000 baby boomers have been retiring at a rate of 10,000 a day since Jan. 1, 2011, and will continue until December 31, 2030 (Frederick, 2018).

Employers are facing a demographic shift in today's workforce as baby boomers retire (Yawson, 2019). Yawson noted in the coming years as baby boomers are replaced by those in Generation X and the Millennials, their knowledge and experience in the workforce will be lost. Tebbe *et al.* (2017) noted the workload and time for establishing a succession plan, creating a talent management process, retaining employees, and managing an executive transition are often underestimated, and too many organizations do not understand and mishandle their transitions. These mistakes can result in financial losses, opportunity costs, negative shifts in organizational culture, greater staff turnover, and more.

Succession Planning

Gandhi and Kumar (2014) defined succession planning as a strategic approach to ensure that necessary talent and skills will be accessible when required, and that essential knowledge and abilities will be maintained when employees in critical positions leave.

Additionally, Gandhi and Kumar identified the following benefits of succession planning:

- Integrating strategic goals and human resources to enable the right people in the place at the right time to achieve the desired business goals.
- A qualified pool of employees trained and ready to fill critical positions.
- Helps to sustain a high-performing public service and ensure the smooth and continuous delivery of services and programs.

- Identify workforce needs as a means of targeting necessary employee training and development.
- Individuals realize their career plans and aspirations within the organization.

Managing the succession of talent is a vital strategic process that minimizes gaps in leadership and enables the best people to develop the skills necessary for possible future roles (Day et al., 2004; Gandhi & Kumar, 2014). Fundamental to successful succession planning is a philosophy of recruitment of the best talent possible, and subsequent management approaches that ensure opportunities for professional development with a specific emphasis on leadership skills (Cavanaugh, 2017). Gordon and Overbey (2018) noted succession planning is a relatively new idea in the USA, especially in government, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. Tebbe et al. (2017) indicated as a systematic, ongoing process, succession planning must be developed by team members from vital functional groups who understand the organization's vision and mission, immediate goals, and future direction and opportunities. Thus, Gordon and Overbey indicated investing in a succession plan that focuses on all essential roles is wise, fiscally responsible, and should become a top priority for any organization.

Nonprofit Executive Succession Planning

Investment in internal talent is not what most nonprofit organizations do when looking for a leader. Gothard and Austin (2014) noted as a substantial number of baby boomers reach retirement age, the significance of succession planning and executive transitions will become more urgently felt in nonprofit organizations. Bailey (2014)

asserted a succession plan for a nonprofit organization is a primary risk management exercise, yet many nonprofits have not taken the time to consider how they will continue their essential work in the wake of leadership changes. Landles-Cobb et al. (2015) indicated despite the many articles and numerous discussions about the need for organizations to develop their human capital, too many nonprofit CEOs and their boards continue to miss the answer to succession planning sitting right under their noses—the homegrown leader. However, true succession planning involves a deliberate process of identifying and developing future leaders among individuals who are already part of the organization (Armstrong, 2014).

Harley-McClaskey (2015) posited developing a pipeline of leaders within the organization is critically important to a nonprofit organization both to carry out the mission and strategic plan, to be trained, and ready to fill a vacancy or void. Santora and Bozer (2018) viewed the recommendations below as representative of ways in which human resources can be a strategic partner with nonprofit boards and the incumbent CEOs in succession planning issues:

1. Nonprofit boards of directors and CEOs must acknowledge and confront the issue of succession head-on rather than bury their heads in the sand. Human resources can take an active role as a change agent in brokering the succession plan with boards and CEOs. Once committed to the design of a succession plan, they should revisit the plan annually to ensure its efficacy.
2. The board and the CEO must commit to a leadership development planning strategy. While finances may be an issue at times, human resources play a vitally

important role in this initiative. These strategies may include outsourcing or embedding the **human resource** function in another management function (usually finance).

3. The board and the CEO must make critical strategic human resource decisions about hiring insiders or outsiders as successors. Conventional wisdom suggests that employing insiders signals maintaining the status quo while hiring outsiders signals a change in organizational strategy. Of course, such an approach depends on several factors, including organizational performance, size, and whether or not there are internally qualified candidates.
4. The board and the CEO must declare their human resource philosophy. Do they believe in “developing and managing internal talent,” or do they believe in “buying talent”? Does the former approach send a strong message to employees, one that suggests there is an opportunity for career advancement? Or does the latter approach (often, though not exclusively employed by smaller organizations) suggest that career advancement does not matter, and then the organization is likely to experience a brain drain among talented internal staff?

Chiocchio and Gharibpour (2017) noted there is a compelling need for all public organizations to consider the consequences of not planning for executive succession or to devise an appropriate strategy to improve the selection and appointment process to replace departing executives. The authors stated by governing bodies of public organizations providing their staff and their constituents the benefits of a coordinated strategy, they ensure seamless succession outcomes, enhance the sustainability of

organizations and perpetuate cultural improvement. Word and Sowa (2017) posited one of the most significant obstacles to addressing the issue of succession is the failure of current leaders to make addressing the issue a priority.

In today's dynamic environment, especially in the nonprofit sector, traditional succession planning, which encourages organizational stability, needs continuous modification to remain useful in addressing various organizational challenges (Word & Sowa, 2017). CEO succession is also considered to be particularly significant because the stakes are high for both internal and external constituencies, and CEOs carry with them tremendous symbolic and substantive weight (Word & Sowa, 2017). Therefore, LeCounte et al. (2017) assert that CEO succession planning that is organized and dynamic should always be a central focus of the board of directors. Word and Sowa (2017) noted effective succession planning should be a system and program that address each organization's unique situation and helps address future challenges.

The significant and impending talent depletion unfolding as baby boomers retire from leadership positions increases the need for succession planning as a strategic issue (Taylor & Youngs, 2018). The key to a successful transition is to be prepared for both the planned and the abrupt departure of the CEO (Yawson, 2019). Yawson maintained having a succession plan for an abrupt departure of the CEO allows for the preparation and adequate decision-making when choosing a new candidate.

Talent Management

Tamunomiebi and Worgu (2020) noted talent management offers immense benefits to both the organization and the employees. The authors posited to organizations,

talent management increases productivity and capability, offers a better linkage between individual's efforts and organizational goals, ensures the commitment of valued employees and reduces turnover, and increases bench strength and a better fit between people's jobs and skills. While to the employee, they maintain talent management offers high motivation and commitment, opportunities for career development, increasing knowledge about the organization and contribution to organizational goals and sustained job satisfaction.

Armstrong (2014) defined talent management as the process of creating and maintaining a strategic pipeline of skilled employees to ensure that the organization attains its business goals. Cappelli and Keller (2014) indicated it was not until 1997 when McKinsey and Company coined the term 'war for talent' that the concept of **talent management** became a dominant subject in practitioner discourse and signaled a paradigm shift from the traditional view of human resource management to one that emphasized a focus on the process by which organizations could systematically anticipate talent needs and develop the talent pool to fulfill those needs. Nonprofit organizations have historically neglected **talent management** in favor of maintaining focus on the mission and vision of serving a population or community doing the best (Nikolova, 2014; Selden & Sowa, 2015).

Anwar et al. in 2014 found that 86% of employers faced difficulties in attracting employees while 58% of employers found problems in retaining highly skilled employees. They also found that only 5% of organizations say they have a clear talent management strategy and operational programs in place today. This is despite the huge

importance of talent management in organizations. Rabbi et al. (2015), posited the benefit of talent management cannot be overemphasized because the success of an organization is anchored on the TM. Rabbi, et al noted in their study that effective talent management will create a career path for talented employees, which will be of advantage to the organization by having high-quality work and subsequent organizational performance. Carpenter and Qualls (2015) recommended talent management as a viable option for nonprofit organizational success.

The goal of talent management is to create a talent pool from which to select leaders at various levels when a vacancy occurs (Cavanaugh, 2017). Mulului and Muathe (2017) stated that talent management has the enormous potential of retaining and developing the most valuable assets of an organization to gain key competitive advantage and success in the market today. Mulului and Muathe further indicated that talent management is a core competitive asset and an important factor of organizational performance as the world's economy shifted from a production-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.

Mensah (2019) asserted the success of organizations is partially dependent on the challenges faced in the effective identification, attraction, management, and retention of talent, as well as adapting to these challenges as they evolve and develop. Mensah noted this requires the management of talented employees. The 'war for talent', the knowledge economy, and the subsequent aging and exodus of the boomer generation have put the topic of talent management at the forefront of practitioner literature for the past 30 years (Walker, 2020).

Companies that practice talent management concepts have used it to deal with employee retention issues (Damarasri & Ahman, 2020). Talented employees are those individuals who have the capability and exhibit the potential of making a difference in organizational performance, either through their immediate efforts or in the long run (Alparslan & Saner, 2020). Alparslan and Saner maintained for an organization to attract and retain talented employees, such an organization must at all levels have an integrated approach to talent management.

Employee Motivation. Employees' motivation is intrinsically linked to the orientation of their work and how the workplace complements the employee's greatest needs and desires for growth (Osabiya, 2015). Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of need theory provides a significant understanding of employee motivation (Tahir & Iraqi, 2018). Maslow's philosophy is based on five primary stages of satisfaction (physiological, social, ego, self-actualizing, and safety), in that when one need is fulfilled, the other arises (Tahir & Iraqi, 2018). Johennessee and Chou (2017) posited if organizations can onboard motivational theories when managing their employees, they may further position themselves more positively in the effective management and retention of a capable, high-performing workforce.

Employee motivation and talent management play a significant role in employee retention and satisfaction (Kontoghiorghes, 2015). Employees feel motivated when they are valued and of importance to the organization (Johennessee & Chou, 2017). Kontoghiorghes (2015) noted the concept of talent management has been directly linked to employee motivation, as both include a constant process involving the attraction and

retention of employees. The implementation of talent management ensures practical motivation approaches are developed and applied within the organization to avoid the risk of having employees leave (Lee & Raschke, 2016).

Employee Attitudes. Failure to engage in talent management and to develop positive employee attitudes is detrimental in the workplace. Rampal and Arora (2017) found in their study that many organizations fail to engage in talent management and attitude-shaping activities. As a result, they miss an opportunity to improve organizational outcomes, including productivity improvement and other positive effects. Rampal and Arora recommended organizations engage in proactive planning and development practices that promote talent development and positive attitudes. According to these two authors, some actions that promote positive workplace attitudes and talent management include training and development, competitive rewards, and effective recruitment measures.

Chakrabarti and Guha (2016) explored the concept of employee attitudes and staff turnover propensity. In every company, attracting and retaining high-value talents was a prime concern (Chakrabarti & Guha, 2016). The two authors explored the concept of employee attitudes and staff turnover propensity. They argued that earlier studies revealed an intricate connection between employee attitudes and organizational commitment, workplace stress, and job satisfaction. In their study, Chakrabarti and Guha sought to explore differential employees' attitudes toward staff turnover. The researchers found that employees naturally have differential attitudes, which also shapes their turnover intention (Chakrabarti & Guha, 2016).

The personality differences between various employees are a factor that shapes their attitudes and evokes their turnover intention. Therefore, Chakrabarti and Guha (2016) emphasized the need for employees to learn about different employee personalities and how their personalities define their turnover intentions. By doing this, organizations understand how to uniquely structure their talent management strategies to suit different people's needs and demands.

Wang et al. (2018) noted according to psychological and social models such as Maslow's needs hierarchy theory, satisfied employees are happy and have positive attitudes toward the employer. Wang et al. noted companies seeking to foster positive employee attitudes can use Maslow's theory to learn how to enhance motivation and job satisfaction. Companies with effective talent management strategies are better at attracting and retaining talents than those with weak talent management strategies (Hedstrom & Malmgren, 2016). Hedstrom and Malmgren also found talent management has a positive relationship with job satisfaction, commitment, and employers' positive attitudes.

Ways Researchers Approached the Problem

Neighborhood Reinvestment (NR), now referred to as NeighborWorks America, pioneered transition services between 1992 and 1997 that provided transition and capacity-building services to its member organizations across the country under the leadership of Tom Adams with funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004). The project under Tom Adams was a five-year national field research project focused on executive and board leadership changes in community-based

nonprofit organizations, a study of executive transition in over a hundred organizations in three regions of the country, and hands-on comprehensive executive transition work with a dozen organizations (Adams, 2010).

In 2003, the Annie E. Casey Foundation surveyed nonprofit organizations to determine the percentage of nonprofit organizations with succession plans (Adams, 2010). The findings of the study resulted in funding for a national collaboration of capacity builders, the creation of a monograph series on executive transition and training to help nonprofit organizations prepare for the anticipated wave of founder and long-term executive transitions through 2020 (Adams, 2010; Teegarden et al., 2010; Wolfred, 2009). Teegarden et al. (2010) pointed out the executive transition monograph series also provided a condensed best practices framework for nonprofit executive successor planning that advocates the identification of internal and external organizational stakeholders to be involved in the planning process.

For over 10 years, nonprofit researchers at CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and Transition Guides have been the leading providers of executive transition management training (Adams, 2010). According to Adams, the two organizations have offered services to over 350 organizations, and approximately 85 percent of these organizations have had an executive who has led the organization for three years or more. Further, Adams posited while the field is young, and the two organizations lack clear-cut evaluative research, the common-sense case for investing in executive transition management is compelling.

Rationale for Selection of Concept

Martin et al. (2013) noted for succession planning to work effectively and to build an active workforce, current leaders must know their human capital to better complete talent transformation activities that will result in competent people placement within the organization. Thus, Martin et al. emphasized by identifying critical operational positions and understanding the competencies of one's human capital, an organization can begin to build a pipeline of ready personnel. Wellins et al. (2015) reported research has shown that through implementing talent management strategies, organizations will not only build a pipeline of agile leaders and successors, but they will also stimulate and encourage a culture of learning by engaging the organization's entire population to create an association that is hungry for continuous development while simultaneously improving performance.

LeCounte et al. (2017) maintained scholars believe that managing the CEO succession process is a board's ultimate responsibility and senior executives' primary function is organization development, talent management, career planning, and talent development in the organization. LeCounte et al. asserted decision-makers must take full ownership of ensuring a CEO succession plan should always be a central focus of the board and in place regardless of if the organization is a corporation, government agency, or non-profit. Additionally, LeCounte et al. noted implementing a talent management strategic process identifies candidates for CEO, creates a pipeline for other top executive positions, provides a foundation for succession planning, and overall stability for a nonprofit organization.

The Pew Research Center reported baby boomers have been retiring at a rate of 10,000 a day since Jan. 1, 2011, and will continue until December 31, 2030 (Frederick, 2018). Yawson (2019) noted that effective succession planning **is not** merely about what occurs next in the boardroom; it's about identifying which roles are critical to the organization, regardless of seniority. Thus, succession planning is a fundamental component of the success and longevity of organizations in the nonprofit sector and the vital responsibility of those in executive leadership positions (Yawson, 2019).

Review and Synthesize Studies Related to Key Concepts

Regardless of whether planning for change in leadership occurs as a result of retirement or emergency-based succession, the executive (incoming and outgoing), staff, board, and other stakeholders all experience the transition in different ways (Gothard & Austin, 2014). In a study conducted by Sareen and Mishra (2016), the researchers noted **talent management** encompasses essential aspects of an employee's life cycle that included recruitment and selection, enhancement of knowledge by providing appropriate training, performance management, as well as succession planning for the future. Additionally, Sareen and Mishra maintained the organization's performance, and success is dependent on how the organization manages and retains its talent pool, and therefore, proper measures should be taken to implement the best talent management practices in the industry. Consequently, Sareen and Mishra (2016) posited these factors when properly addressed will make the organizations a competitive edge over their rivals, improve the organization's performance, retain employees, stay ahead in the market, and ultimately lead to the success of the organization.

A research study conducted by McKee and Froelich (2016) explored factors that may influence executive succession planning in nonprofit and cooperative forms of organizations. Using multiple regression analysis, the researchers surveyed 242 records resulting in the identification that both barriers to and substitutes for executive succession planning that help explain the apparent dearth of succession planning efforts in these organizations. The analysis of McKee and Froelich (2016) indicated that governance quality – whereby the perceived ability of the board to perform well on succession planning tasks is relied upon instead of substantial planning – and efforts to find an internal successor, a highly desirable goal in nonprofits, can both serve as substitutes for a more visible succession planning process.

Respondents to the survey led by McKee and Froelich (2016) showed a clear preference for internal candidates rather than equally qualified external candidates. A majority of respondents reported relatively stable efforts (four or five on the Likert scale) for key employee mentoring (59% of all respondents) and annual reviews (62%), ensuring key employee contact with stakeholder groups (61%), and professional development training (63%). McKee and Froelich indicated that given a choice for internal candidates, it would seem important to undertake specific efforts toward employee development.

Review and Synthesize Studies Related to Research Question

Gothard and Austin (2014) noted although effective succession planning requires a commitment from all levels of an organization, executives and their boards need to initiate and lead the process. It is beneficial for nonprofit organizations to have a

succession plan in place for planned and unplanned exits of executives (Santora & Bozer, 2015). Critically important to charitable organizations is to develop a pipeline of leaders within the organization both to carry out the mission and strategic plan of the organization and to be trained and ready to fill a vacancy or void (Harley-McClaskey, 2015).

Prosperity Indiana (formerly known as the Indiana Association for Community Economic Development [IACED]), operates their organization under a current board-approved plan that ultimately informs every staff member's annual work plan to ensure the highest level of staff and organizational capacity, service delivery, and attainment of their otherwise lofty goals (Frazier, 2016). Additionally, Frazier maintained adding the development and maintenance of a succession plan work hand-in-hand to direct and protect the future of an organization. Results from a University of Washington Waldron survey revealed that 54% of nonprofit leadership teams could not identify potential successors if their chief executives were to depart suddenly (Gamble & Ingersoll, 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

Based on research discussed in the literature review, succession planning, and talent management are essential for board members to undertake on behalf of the nonprofit organization (Adams, 2010; Armstrong, 2014; Gothard & Austin, 2014). However, only 17% of nonprofit organizations have documented succession plans (Cornelius et al., 2011). A succession and talent management plan is beneficial to have in place to ensure an efficient and effective executive transition (Ariss et al., 2014; Frazier, 2016). A successful executive transition is contingent upon the willingness of executive

staff and board members to invest time in planning to avoid disruption during a period of organizational change (Gilley et al., 2009; Gothard & Austin, 2014).

Research studies indicate that failure to plan for executive succession tends to jeopardize organizational stability (Adams, 2010; Gothard & Austin, 2014; Santora et al., 2007, 2011). Trepanier and Crenshaw (2013) noted having a formal process for the executive transition will contribute to improving the nonprofit organization's financial health, strategic continuity, and operational effectiveness. LeCounte et al. (2017) asserted other studies (qualitative and quantitative) should also examine some of the competitive talent management practices companies are utilizing to ensure that their talent pipeline is producing future executive talent for their organization.

Succession plans help to ensure a smooth transition of power from one leader to another, adequately prepare the successor for their new position, and, most importantly, reduce the amount of disruption to stakeholders working to fulfill the organization's mission (Yawson, 2019). Findings from this study may help nonprofit organizations effectively plan and implement succession and talent management plans to increase sustainability. Chapter 3 covers the research method and design, data collection and analysis process, reliability, and validity of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

As a substantial number of baby boomers reach retirement age, the significance of executive transitions will become more urgently felt in nonprofit organizations. Vivian and Hormann (2015) noted the sudden departure of an executive leader can create distress that impacts personnel behaviors, organization processes, and sustainability. Although executives and boards of directors are aware of the need to have a succession plan and process for transition, 65% of nonprofits are not prepared. As such, finding qualified leaders to fill vacated positions by this generation presents pressing challenges (Gothard & Austin, 2014; McKee & Froelich, 2016). Additionally, most CEO succession studies examine immediate causes or consequences of succession, without carefully explaining the ongoing process, in part because the existing theory cannot explain. Scholars rarely observe succession planning processes in action (Schepker et al., 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for executive transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change was within 6 to 24 months. The study directly addressed this phenomenon with nonprofit executives and board members who did not have strategies for succession planning and executive transition. A qualitative research approach was undertaken for this study. Findings from this study provide information that may help board members and executives understand the importance of succession planning for executive transition in nonprofit organizations.

Knowledge of transition processes implemented by nonprofit organizations without a succession plan may also contribute to current research. It may help increase awareness for scholars, consultants, boards, and executives in nonprofit organizations on strategies for planned and unplanned executive transitions. This chapter includes a description of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, interview questions, procedures for data collection and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations, and concludes with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Question

How do nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for an executive transition when an impending change is imminent?

Central Phenomenon of the Study

The central phenomenon of this study was what organizations without a succession plan in place do when the executive leader is leaving within 6 to 24 months. The executives and board members of nonprofit organizations need to develop a plan of succession pending an imminent change in leadership. Succession planning is essential to sustain organizational effectiveness, maintain performance, preserve knowledge, promote innovation, attract and retain talented employees, and manage risks (Gothard & Austin, 2014; Hannum et al., 2011; McKee & Froelich, 2016).

Research Tradition and Rationale

A qualitative research method provides a naturalistic approach to studying real-world situations by focusing on the research questions of the study (Livingood et al.,

2013; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) noted the qualitative study method is appropriate in three situations: (1) when researchers have little control over events involved in the study; (2) if how what or why research questions are addressed, and (3) if the focus is on current phenomenon within real-life circumstances. Case study research applies to a broad variety of topics, including small groups, communities, organizational change, and specific events (Yin, 2014).

According to Yin (2014), the qualitative method is used to explore a problem through the lens of those undergoing it. Additionally, the sources of data for case study research include interviews, organizational documents, archival records, observations, and textual or visual analysis. These sources help the researcher acquire adequate and quality information to address questions that reflect on a real-life setting related to why, how, and with what results instead of how often or how many (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014; Runfola et al., 2017; Yin, 2014).

In a quantitative study, a researcher tests a theory or theories using predetermined variables but cannot explore the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; O'Reily & Parker, 2012; Yin, 2014). The use of quantitative research requires the extraction of data in a larger volume, using standardized methods that include more generalized samples, where the emphasis is on statistical information rather than individual perceptions (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Quantitative researchers concentrate on experimentation, analysis, and testing hypotheses to examine relationships or differences among variables (Yin, 2014). Formulating and testing hypotheses for examining relationships or differences among variables was not the intent of this

exploration. Thus, a quantitative research exploration did not support the purpose of this study.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) defined the five qualitative methods: a phenomenological study is used to understand the essence and the underlying structure of the phenomenon. Ethnography is designed to understand the interaction of individuals not just with others, but also with the culture of the society in which they live. The researcher of a grounded theory study seeks not just to understand, but also to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest. The narrative analysis uses the stories people tell and analyzes them in various ways to understand the meaning of the experiences as revealed in the story. A case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit. Among these various qualitative research designs, the case study was the choice of design for this research.

Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted a case study design is used when a researcher is exploring a process or a phenomenon in-depth. A case study design allows researchers to analyze people, events, decisions, periods, projects, institutions, or other systems holistically using various sources of data (Yin, 2014). A case study design provides an in-depth understanding of a significant issue. It is a method to use when the researcher intends to explore a phenomenon that has not been extensively explored in previous studies. It also helps to answer exploratory or descriptive research questions such as how or what (Yin, 2014). In conducting a case study, researchers are not limited to one method of data collection. Case study researchers can collect different types of data that

can furnish information to answer the research question and are not limited, for example, to conducting just interviews as may be the case with other qualitative research strategies (Yin, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to explore in-depth the phenomenon of how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent. The plans and processes of executives and the board of directors were explored. For this study, the imminent period of change in leadership was within 6 to 24 months. A qualitative case study was the best method to find answers to the research question(s).

Case study research applies to a broad variety of topics, including small groups, communities, organizational change, and specific events Yin (2014). Additionally, Yin noted the sources of data for case study research include interviews, organizational documents, archival records, observations, and textual or visual analysis. They are all fundamental for the researcher, so they can acquire adequate and quality information to address questions related to why, how, and with what results.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) noted a case study is the best reporting form for evaluations. It provides a thick description, simplifying data for the reader, illuminating meanings, and communicating tacit knowledge. Stake (2005) noted the specific entity under study can be a person, a group, an organization, a relationship, an event, a process, a problem, or any other specific entity. Thus, case study research is the appropriate methodology when studying an organizational phenomenon. Through the design, I provided factual information on the actual practices of nonprofit organizations without a

succession plan and executive transition process when a change in leadership is imminent (Boblin et al., 2013).

Santora and Bozer (2015) noted that several nonprofit governance surveys from both small and large nonprofits on succession planning from 2004 through 2014 have overwhelmingly not planned for executive transition and succession planning. Executive succession planning and the transition of retiring executives are critical to the sustainability of nonprofit organizations and can create organizational chaos (Adams, 2010; Dym et al., 2011; Santora & Bozer, 2015; Wolfred, 2009).

Case study evidence may come from the following sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and participant observation (Yin, 2014). The collection of data for this study included semi-structured interviews and archival records from each organization, specifically draft succession plans, transition plans, and minutes for the strategic plans meeting. The interviewees were 12 participants comprised of senior executives and a board of directors from four nonprofit organizations. They had to know of and be responsible for the creation of organizational policies and practices related to succession planning and implementation of an executive transition. Santora and Bozer (2015) noted there is certainly a compelling need for nonprofit organizations to consider the consequences of not having a succession plan, policies, and procedures for the transition that will eventually be needed to replace departing nonprofit executives. A case study was an appropriate method for this qualitative research.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative research study, the primary instrument is the researcher (Patton, 2002). Researchers are responsible for interviewing, observing, collecting, and analyzing data (Carter et al., 2014). The researcher also listens to the participant actively to understand and appropriately document their perspective (Anyan, 2013; Yin, 2014). Researchers are data collection instruments to understand and identify central themes from the participants' perspective (Yin, 2014).

The identification and recruitment of 12 participants (executives and board of directors) from three nonprofit organizations took part in this study. The sources of data included semi-structured interviews and archival documents, specifically draft succession plans, transition plans, and minutes for the strategic plans meeting. Preparation of the following documents was undertaken to recruit participants for the research study:

1. Letter of request to participate in the research study and introduction of the researcher (Appendix A);
2. Letter of Cooperation (Appendix B) for recruitment and interview of study participants and access to documents (human resource policies, strategic plans, and archival records);
3. Consent Forms for Research; and
4. Interview Protocol Guide (Appendix C) for review and approval by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (WUIRB - Approval # 04-28-21-0048438).

As the former CEO of two nonprofit organizations and executive to the board of directors, my responsibilities have included the management of the organization and the creation of organizational policies and practices for finance, human resource, strategic, and succession plans. This experience provided an understanding of the role of nonprofit organization executives and boards of directors in organizational management, executive transition, and strategic and succession planning.

Serving as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis for this study, the possibility of researcher bias (and error) existed (Patton, 2002). To minimize the influence of biases, I remained neutral and bracketed personal feelings, ideas, and biases related to the perception of the research topic to experience the participant's viewpoint clearly and open-mindedly during the interview process (Yin, 2014). Additionally, the member-checking process was used throughout the data collection and analysis. It included interview participants to share interpretations and have the opportunity for discussion, clarification, and the contribution of new or additional perspectives on the issue under study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014).

To establish credibility, I adhered to the ethical principles of the Belmont Report that emphasize respect for beneficence, persons, and justice for human participants (Friesen et al., 2017). Credibility in the study was maintained through the use of a reflexive journal to document beliefs and field notes (Pezalla et al., 2012). Further, I implemented the methodological triangulation of data collection that included semi-structured interviews and archival records. Additionally, there was no affiliation or relationship between the organizations and their participants for this study, thus

diminishing the assumption that the responsibilities of each individual or organization were similar or the same as my previous experiences across agencies.

Methodology

Participation Selection Logic

The criteria for inclusion or exclusion when establishing the sample for this study is specified by the researcher (Robinson, 2014). In qualitative studies, the sample size is usually small because the process requires the collection of in-depth data (Yin, 2014). The selection criteria for participants and data in this research study were described below.

Sample

The sample for this research study included:

- Three nonprofit organizations in the Southwest region of the United States;
- Twelve participants served as senior-level executives and on the board of directors.

The participants had responsibility for the development of operational and personal policies for hiring, training, strategic planning, and implementation of the executive transition process. Nonprofit personnel in non-executive positions and board members who had not worked with executive personnel in the development of personnel policies for hiring, training, strategic plans, development, and implementation of the executive transition process were not selected to participate in this study. The Arizona Alliance of Nonprofit Organizations (AANPO) was the potential source for screening and

recruiting participants as a source for this study. AANPO is comprised of 1,000 nonprofit member organizations in the state of Arizona.

Inclusion criteria for the archival records were documents in a digital format or could be converted to a digital format and included explicit descriptions, discussion, or reports of transition or the implementation of transition plans for executives. I specifically requested copies of organizational bylaws, personnel policies for hiring and training, and strategic, and transition plans. I asked participants if there were additional documents that could have contributed to a more thorough description of transition planning. Documents were excluded if their content included sensitive information that cannot be mentioned in the study results.

Sampling Strategy

Gentles et al. (2015) define sampling in qualitative research in its broadest sense as follows: The selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives. To explore and gain information about current executive transition practices, the use of purposeful and criterion sampling occurred for the selection of research study participants.

Purposeful Sampling. I used purposeful sampling to select information-rich cases to gain an understanding of succession and executive transition in nonprofit organizations. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). Gentles et al. (2015) noted purposeful sampling is probably the most commonly described means of sampling in the qualitative methods of

literature today. Nonprofit executives and board of directors were selected participants because they embodied knowledge of organizational strategies that support essential business objectives with leadership succession and transition planning. Thus, the executives and board members were engaged to provide useful knowledge that should illuminate the questions under study.

Criterion Sampling. The participants chosen to interview for this study were executives and board members of 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. The sample was limited to individuals who are responsible for and directly engage in executive transition (Adams, 2010; Dym et al., 2011; Wolfred, 2008). There were no restrictions on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities.

Criteria for Participation in the Study

A criterion for participation in this study was leaders who function at the executive and board levels in nonprofit organizations. The organization had to be located in the Southwest United States. The participants had to be responsible for the development and approval of organizational documents, personnel policies, practices, strategic and transition plans, and implementation of executive transition.

Organizations

The criteria for participation of nonprofit organizations in the study included: (a) organizations with a 501(c)(3) nonprofit status determination letter from IRS; (b) nonprofit organizations without a succession plan for implementing an executive transition within 6 to 24 months; and (c) nonprofit organizations with executives and board members responsible for developing and implementing the executive transition.

Participants

The criteria for individual participation in the study included individuals in a senior-level executive position and board of directors members responsible for developing and implementing executive transition plans in the nonprofit organization. As the creation of an executive transition plan for a nonprofit organization is the responsibility of its executives and board members, these participants provided the most vibrant and relevant information for this research study (Gentles et al., 2015).

Sample Size

The general aim of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire information that is useful for understanding the complexity, depth, variation, or context surrounding a phenomenon (Gentles et al., 2015). While quantitative research requires sufficiently large sample sizes to produce statistically precise quantitative estimates, qualitative researchers use smaller samples (Merriam, 2014). Patton (2002) noted the sample size in purposed sampling depends on the number of interviews that are needed to produce rich, useful data.

Guest et al. (2006) found in two Western African countries that saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews of 60 women that included purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviews. Additionally, Gentles et al. (2015) noted the number of interviews for data saturation to occur depends on participants' experience or knowledge about the phenomenon under study, how similar participants' experiences or perceptions of the phenomenon were, and the extent participants were asked the same questions. Marshall et al. (2013) conducted a research study to explore how well researchers have

justified their sample sizes for qualitative interviews in leading information systems journals with the hope of establishing evidence-based guidelines for researchers who intend to use qualitative interviews in their research. Based on the examination of qualitative interviews in information systems studies, Marshall et al. recommended between 20 and 30 interviews for grounded theory and 15 to 30 interviews for single case studies.

According to the Walden University Ph.D. Academic Guide, a multiple case study having 3-4 distinct cases is the most a researcher can handle. Based on the review of studies provided by various scholars and the Walden University Academic Guide, the sample size for this study was 12 participants representing three nonprofit organizations.

Recruitment of Organizations and Participants

Nonprofit organizations were recruited from the AANPO website for this research study. Members are listed on the AANPO website and can be freely accessed through a drop-down box on the AANPO website. To obtain participants for this study, a letter (Appendix A) was sent to the executives and board members of the AANPO members explaining the purpose of this study and inviting them to participate in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary. Four participants (two senior-level executives and two board members) who met the criteria for this research study were selected from each of the three-identified eligible nonprofit organizations to achieve 12 participants for this research study.

The survey included a description of the study, the role of the researcher, questions to determine eligibility and the requirements for participation in the study, as

well as the reassurance of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time (Yin, 2014). If potential participants agreed to participate in the study, the CEO and Board President reviewed and signed the letter of cooperation on behalf of the nonprofit organization. Scheduled individual interviews were held on a date, time, and location that was convenient for each study participant. Study participants also received, reviewed, and signed a consent form before the commencement of the interview. Participants received a \$20 Starbucks gift card for their participation. The recruitment letter, letter of introduction, consent form, interview questions, and letter of cooperation received approval from WUIRB before starting the research study.

Instrumentation

My role was to function as the primary instrument for the data collection process and to maintain strict adherence to ethical guidelines. As the primary instrument, data were collected via semi-structured interviews with nonprofit executives and the board of directors and archival documents, specifically draft succession plans, transition plans, and minutes for the strategic plans meeting. Sensitive documents that were not open to official organizational representatives were excluded. One of the primary methods for the collection of rich text data for qualitative research is the interview (Cleary et al., 2014; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Merriam (2014) noted in qualitative research, interviewing is often the major source of the qualitative data needed for understanding the phenomenon under study.

Yin (2014) noted the process of conducting interviews could be expensive and time-consuming. Thus, an interview protocol served as a guide to assist with administering the interview efficiently and equitably and to render reliability and validity (Chetty et al., 2014; Schwab & Syed, 2015). An interview protocol enhances consistency and provides standardization to the interview process. The interview protocol guide in Appendix C provided a process for implementing the semi-structured interviews of study participants.

The use of an alphanumeric code for each helped to maintain confidentiality and the protection of the identity of each participant. Harris and Atkinson (2013) noted that to comply with IRB confidentiality guidelines and privacy, the participant's identity should not appear in the study. Thus, the first five characters of the interview protocol guide form are NPETS, which were an acronym for the nonprofit executive transition study.

The interview questions were based on the alignment of the problem and purpose statement to the research question. Probing questions were important while seeking additional and detailed information during the interview with participants. The probing questions enabled the researcher to follow up on interview responses, especially when answers were ambiguous (Yin, 2014). The questions also assisted in seeking clarification. Additional sources for data collection and analysis included organizational documents and archival records. The process for data collection and analysis is discussed below.

Organizational documents contain critical information on planning and strategy. Within some documents, it is possible to find the selection, transition, and strategic plans for filling positions. An organization's strategic plan or human resource plan is likely to

incorporate a plan on succession. However, others have a very specific transition plan penned down and filed as part of the organization's documents. Thus, for each of the three organizations, interest was in their human resource plans, strategic plans, and transition plan documents. Archival records of the organization included past transition processes, hiring procedures, the bylaws of the organization, and personnel selection policies.

Data Collection

There were multiple sources of data in this study. The sources included recorded face-to-face or phone semi-structured interviews, organizational documents, and archival information. Before the collection of data from the organization and study participants, I sought approval from WUIRB. Once the WUIRB was approved, I performed the following tasks:

1. Identified and contacted the CEO of three nonprofit organizations responsible for succession planning and executive transition to participate in the study.
2. Scheduled an initial meeting with the CEO and Board President to discuss the study and to obtain a letter of cooperation on behalf of the organization.
3. Scheduled follow-up meetings with each representative of the four nonprofits for an interview.
4. Before the start of the interview, applied the guidelines for obtaining informed consent from the American Psychological Association (2010) ethical standards for research and the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) code

of federal regulations for the protection of human participants (DHSS, 2009). The consent forms included the following information:

- a. Purpose of the research;
- b. How the information obtained was used;
- c. The expected level of involvement and time commitment of participants;
- d. Procedures of the study;
- e. Any foreseeable risks, discomfort, or benefits associated with the study;
- f. The right to decline to participate and to withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty or repercussions;
- g. Procedures for dealing with already collected data should a participant withdraw from the study;
- h. Reasonable guarantees of privacy and confidentiality, including any limitations to confidentiality, and the concept and promise of anonymity;
- i. Incentives for participating in the research study; and
- j. Provided a point of contact if the participant(s) have any questions about the research or their rights regarding participating in the research.

5. At the beginning of the interview, I greeted the participant and briefly reviewed the purpose and nature of the study. I then presented the participant with a printed copy of the terms of informed consent (if the interview was in person) or emailed the form as an attachment to the participant (if the interview was via video chat). I reviewed the terms of informed consent with the participant and asked the participant to voice any questions or concerns. When questions or concerns were addressed, I asked the

participant to sign the form. Emailed forms were returned by email before data collection began.

6. I requested the participant's consent to turn on the audio-recording device.

7. I asked the questions from the interview protocol, with probing follow-up questions being asked when additional information is needed.

8. I verified the participants' contact information and confirmed that they had my contact information.

9. I turned off the audio recorder and thanked the participants for their time.

10. I transcribed the recorded interview within five days of the interview. The participant's name was replaced in the transcript with an alphanumeric code (i.e., P1, P2, etc.). The organization's name was also replaced with an alphanumeric code (i.e., O1, O2, etc.), and any potentially identifying details were omitted from the transcript. The original audio recordings were preserved only on a password-protected flash drive to which only I had access.

11. I requested organizational documents (policies, strategic plans, archival) following an interview with the CEO/Executive.

12. I transcribed interviews and reviewed organizational documents.

13. I contacted study participants to schedule a meeting for a review of the interview transcript and document review information for approval of content.

Interviews

Merriam (2014) indicated a face-to-face interview is a major method of data collection in qualitative research. A researcher can use prompts other than direct research questions. Prompts are not separate questions; rather, they are used during the interview depending on the study participant's response to a question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Below is an illustration of the research question prompted in an interview.

Research question: How do nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent?

The interview: "For the Board of Directors and Executive Leaders: Thank you for meeting with me to discuss how your organization is planning for its change in leadership. I am interested in learning from you how [board of directors/executive leaders] will be involved in the executive transition/process."

Interview Questions

1. To begin, how long have you served [as a board member/executive leader] at [name of org]?
2. During the time you have been [a board member/executive leader], what types of responsibilities have you had in [name of org]? (Note: This is a general question about roles and responsibilities and not specific to the recruitment of a new person. Probes: developing long-term goals for [name of org]; developing a strategic plan; developing and implementing a succession plan and transition)
3. When did you first learn that [name of executive title] was going to leave/retire? (Probe: how did you learn this?)

4. How do you identify your employees as high-potential talent? (Probe: to cover the following in this question so, if it is not brought up, I will inquire about: [developing a selection process for a new leader; recruitment of potential candidates for the position; developing interview questions for potential candidates; conducting interviews]).
5. In your role as [board member/executive leader], at [name of org], how do you develop your high-potential talent for leadership positions? (Probe: to cover the following in this question so if it is not brought up I will inquire about: professional training and development; creating a talent pool)
6. In your role as [board member/executive leader], at [name of org], what factors were evident that indicated a need for a succession plan? (Probe: to cover the following in this question so if it is not brought up, I will inquire about: unexpected retirement of leadership; a high number of employees in leadership positions eligible for retirement).
7. How do you identify the critical job roles that, if vacated suddenly, would require an urgent replacement? (Probe: [identifying competencies needed for a new leader]).

In closing, I stated the following remarks to interview participants: “Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study to discuss how your [board of directors/executive leaders] is planning for its change in leadership and will be involved in the executive transition process/executive transition. Is there any additional information about [name of organization] executive transition process/executive transition?”

Archival Documents

Archival records to be collected included draft succession plans, transition plans, and minutes for the strategic plans meeting. No other documents were required or used. These documents were collected and analyzed to develop an understanding of what information and tools if any contributed to talent management and the executive transition process within a nonprofit organization without a formal succession plan. The archival records were not public documents accessible on the nonprofit organization's website. Thus, I included permission to access these documents in the letter of cooperation provided to the CEO and board president of each participating nonprofit organization.

A collection of archival documents assisted in gaining a deeper understanding of the history and practices of an organization. These documents gave me an understanding of the activities taken by the participating nonprofit organizations during the planning and process for executive succession and transition.

Data Analysis

Raw data collected from the sources needed to be analyzed. When dealing with qualitative data, there is a need to saturate the information pool to aid with proper decision-making. Grbich (2013) posited that qualitative data required an extensive combination of factors and parameters from different sources to conclude. Therefore, the researcher made conclusions by aligning information from interviews and archival records, specifically draft succession plans, transition plans, and minutes for the strategic

plans meeting without bias. According to Grbich (2013), data analysis involved the following steps:

1. Transcribed interviews member-checked by study participants for accuracy.
2. Interview transcripts and organizational and archival documents uploaded into NVivo 12 [<https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo>] software for analysis.
3. Transcripts and organizational and archival documents analyzed using the thematic analysis procedure developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The six steps of the analysis were:
 - a. Reading and rereading the data to gain familiarity;
 - b. Initial coding, in which excerpts from participants' responses that express similar ideas or themes were grouped together into a code;
 - c. Thematic clustering of the data, in which similar initial codes were grouped;
 - d. Reviewing and refining the themes and codes to ensure all data were appropriately grouped;
 - e. Naming and defining the themes, and;
 - f. Creating a presentation of results, using quotations from the data as evidence for themes, and including frequency counts for themes presented in a table.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research methods must be subjected to trustworthiness. To develop trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1990) presented four criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. A discussion on trustworthiness was discussed in the subsequent sections.

Credibility

The reliability of the study was achieved through data triangulation, which is a technique that facilitates the validation of data through cross-comparison from two or more sources (Carter et al., 2014; Patton, 2002). In this study, there were three nonprofit organizations with a total of four participants (two executives and two board of directors) from each nonprofit organization who were interviewed.

Cresswell and Miller (2009) asserted that triangulation is a validity procedure taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. A prevalent practice is for qualitative inquirers to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes.

It is imperative to use multiple sources of evidence in case studies (Yin, 2014). The advantages of document review are: Accessibility to confidential information, the ability to review documentation to strengthen and support the information retrieved in interviews, and the ability to determine whether or not the information should be researched more in-depth (Yin, 2014). This method of triangulation provided an understanding of the process that prepares executives and boards of directors in nonprofit organizations to plan for executive transition without a succession plan when a leadership change is imminent and provides credibility to the study findings (Carter et al., 2014).

Transferability

The use of thick description involves the researcher elucidating all the research processes, from data collection, and the context of the study to the production of the final report (Cresswell & Miller, 2009). The thick description helps other researchers to replicate the study with similar conditions in other settings (Cresswell & Miller, 2009). With this vivid detail, the researchers help readers understand that the account is credible. The more similarity is demonstrated in a study, the likelihood for transferability.

Dependability

To ensure the dependability of the study, I clearly described the research design of the study. Also, I explained how the study was conceptualized in the research report. This information was illustrated with a detailed target population of the study, the sampling size, data collection methods, instruments used, and the data analysis tool (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Confirmability

Confirmability involves evaluating how the research findings are supported by the data collected. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) stated confirmability or generalizability is the degree to which the data sets of a study can be confirmed by other researchers to review the study results. In this study, confirmability was enhanced by checking the consistency of the research process. I provided detailed information on the internal consistency of the research products, which included the data sets, research findings, and recommendations. To enhance the confirmability of the initial conclusion, an audit trail was initiated and completed throughout the study to demonstrate how each decision was made.

Ethical Procedures

The development of consent forms for study participants is under the guidelines from the American Psychological Association (2010) ethical standards for research (DHHS; 2009) code of federal regulations for the protection of human participants. Documents were written in language that is understandable by all participants.

Ethical standards outlined in the Belmont Report were upheld by treating each participant and all organizational documents with respect by not exploiting information shared during confidential sessions. The incorporation of standard elements -- credibility, transferability, and trustworthiness, along with moral and ethical requirements, were protected in all phases of this research inquiry (Wahyuni, 2012). A review of organizational documents collected for research purposes was unbiased, ethical, and trustworthy (Chenail, 2011).

The researcher made every effort to conduct this study under the principles of ethical academic research. As part of this goal, the researcher first submitted to the procedures of WUIRB for approval before conducting this research study. Participants received an invitation to participate in the study and received a description of the study, the approximate amount of time needed to complete the interview and the nature of participation required from study participants. Informed consent also outlines the following study policies, which are articulated to protect participant welfare and data confidentiality:

1. Participants were advised in writing of the voluntary nature of their participation and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. They were

also advised that at any time during the process, they could decline to answer any question and may answer in as much or as little detail as they were comfortable with.

2. The research objectives, nature of participation required, and time commitment from participants were identified and articulated to the participants through the consent form.
3. Provisions were made for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the participants (DDHS Title 45, Sec .111(a)6, and the procedures for data disposal.
4. The participant's rights, interests, and wishes were considered first when choices are made regarding the reporting of data, and the final decision regarding participants' privacy rests with the participant (DHHS Part 45.Sec. 46.111(a)(7).
5. Participants were assured that although they were asked to provide basic demographic information, such as their gender, age, education, and position within the nonprofit organization (executive, or board member), their information would be kept confidential and that no names would not be used in the study. A pseudonym was used throughout the study, i.e., Executive # 1, or Board Member # 1.

The participants were informed that the results of the study were for purposes of the dissertation, but also may be used for journal articles or presentations (scholarly and professional). Storage of data collection, transcription of audiotapes, and data analysis was maintained in a locked computer file with backup copies created. High quality tapes for audio recording information during interviews were used, and a master list of types of

information gathered was created. The anonymity of participants was protected during the study, and a matrix of data collected was developed as a visual means of locating and identifying information for this study. All materials relevant to the data will be retained in my office for five years after the publication of the dissertation. After this time, I will destroy all data associated with the study.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change was within 6 to 24 months. To achieve this purpose, I conducted individual interviews with senior-level executives and board members of nonprofit organizations responsible for planning and implementing the executive transition. Data collection involved extracting patterns or main themes from participants' interviews, strategic plans, and archived documents. The focus of the research method and design in this study was to explore the strategies nonprofit organizations leaders use for executive transition without a succession plan. The method and design provided awareness for the research question. A qualitative research study design was appropriate for this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change in leadership is within 6 to 24 months. Additionally, the study results could be used by a nonprofit board of directors and senior executives for the development of a succession plan and process. The following research question guided the course of this study:

How do nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent?

In this chapter, I will provide information on the setting of the study, data collection and analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness, and study results.

Setting

The nonprofit research partners (the participating sites) included three nonprofit organizations located in the southwest region of the United States. Each nonprofit organization's CEO that agreed to participate in the study signed letters of cooperation, which gave me the authorization to conduct interviews with two board members and two executives and review organizational documents

Demographics

I used purposeful sampling to recruit nonprofit organizations that met the criteria for inclusion in this study through the use of the AANPO free and open member website. The AANPO is located in the southwest region of the United States. Gentles et al. (2015)

stated that a purposeful sampling strategy is efficient when scholars desire to understand the participant's point of view. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002).

The participants in this study are leaders of nonprofit organizations in the southwest region of the United States. Every participant interviewed is either a current executive leader or board member, and all 12 were representatives of the organizations participating in this study. Demographic information for the leaders within this study is provided in Table 1 below. This table represents the average number of years each participant had worked in the participating nonprofit organization as a manager or in a decision-making position, and gender. The overall analysis of the qualitative research data indicated that the executive staff or board members had little or no formal training in developing a succession plan.

Table 1*Participant Demographic Information*

Organization	Participant	Title role	Gender	Years of service
091	1	Board vice president	Female	2 ½
	2	Co-founder/director	Female	11
	3	Education & strategic practices manager	Female	4
	4	Board treasurer & executive committee	Female	6
092	1	Board, fundraising & strategic planning committees	Female	10
	2	Director of programs	Male	8
	3	Board president	Male	20
	4	Program manager	Male	13
093	1	Founder & board chair	Male	8
	2	Assistant director	Female	5
	3	Board, chair of marketing committee	Male	6
	4	Executive director	Female	7

Data Collection

The CEOs of 20 nonprofit organizations were contacted via email to request their participation if they met the criteria for inclusion and had an interest in participating in

the study. A sample copy of the Letter of Cooperation (see Appendix B) was also attached to the email for the CEO to submit on their organizational letterhead if they met the criteria and agreed to participate in the study. The nonprofit organizations were located on the free and open membership website of the AANPO. Five CEOs responded to the email stating they would be willing to participate and included the Letter of Cooperation signed by the CEO. Three CEOs promptly identified participants (two executives and two board members) that met the criteria for inclusion in the study. Two responding CEOs could not provide the four required participants promptly due to the impact of the pandemic on their organizational operations, employees, and board of directors.

Following the submittal of the Letter of Cooperation from each of the CEOs who agreed to participate, the contact information was provided via email for the four participants needed (two executives and two board members) responsible for or participating in strategic planning, development of personnel policies, hiring of executives and implementation of the organization's executive transition process. Each of the potential participants was contacted by the researcher and Informed Consent forms were individually sent. Participants did not have to sign the consent form; they only had to respond to the email with the I consent phrase as a means of consenting to participate in the study. An e-mail reply of I consent is sufficient documentation of consent. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requires that scholars receive consent from the potential participant and issue potential participants a consent form in conjunction with IRB guidelines before the collection of data (DHHS, 2009).

Virtual interviews were scheduled at the convenience of each participant. Each interview used the researcher-developed Executive Transition in Nonprofit Organizations Interview Protocol instrument (see Appendix C). Interviews were conducted from a private home office and lasted 45-60 minutes. All interviews were held via Microsoft Teams technology [<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>] (Microsoft Teams, 2020)

All study participants received semi-structured questions and each session was recorded. The Microsoft Teams technology allowed participants to decide if they wanted to be visual during the interview. All participants were visual during the interview. Before beginning the interview, participants were thanked for agreeing to participate in the study. The interview process was reviewed with all participants so that they knew what to expect. A review of the Informed Consent Form was provided and all participants were provided the opportunity to ask any questions and confirm their agreement to participate in the study. Participants were asked for permission to record the interview and informed that they would receive a transcript of their interview. The interviews were recorded, and transcripts were provided to the participants to review for accuracy and return to me within 5 days.

Before beginning the interview, participants were thanked for agreeing to participate in the study. The interview process was reviewed with all participants so that they knew what to expect. Participants were asked for permission to record the interview and informed that they would receive a transcript of their interview to review.

Participants were also informed their privacy would be protected, confidentiality maintained, and the right to withdraw at any time from the study.

Once an interview question was presented, I allowed the participant to provide as much information as they desired. Occasionally, I included probing questions or repeated questions when the participant requested, but primarily used the exact interview questions in Appendix C. All interviews were transcribed promptly following completion of the interview and submitted to each participant within 5 days for a review to ensure clarity and accuracy and allow them to provide additional information on their responses. As interview data were collected and recorded, they were transferred to my personal password-protected computer and stored with a recording date and no name or personal information.

Over 6 months, 12 interviews of study participants (six board members and six senior executives) representing three nonprofit organizations who met the criteria for inclusion in this study. A review of archival documents, specifically draft succession plans, transition plans, and minutes for the strategic plans meeting was performed. Letters of appreciation were sent to each participant by email after their interview.

Files were created for each study participant from each cooperating nonprofit organization. The files contain interview transcriptions, interview protocols, records of communication, participants' contact information email correspondence. To protect participants' identities, all files were labeled according to the assigned pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

In this study, there were three data sources: a statement of organizational mission; strategic plans; minutes of strategic planning meetings, and interviews. Initially, the plan was to collect archival data on (a) board minutes related to the discussion about the executive transition process, (b) organizational/personnel policies, (c) bylaws, and (d) strategic plans. Conversely, 091's CEO was only willing to provide the nonprofit organization's strategic plan and a draft of the succession plan. In contrast, 092's CEO provided the strategic plan and minutes for the strategic plan meeting. In comparison, 093's CEO provided the nonprofit organization's strategic plan. Interviews were also included for study participants from all three cooperating nonprofit organizations

Interviews Data Analysis

The six data analysis steps of Braun and Clarke (2006) are (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating codes, (3) constructing themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Thus, the data analysis of this study began by reading and rereading the 12 transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' responses. When reading the transcripts, concepts, and ideas were identified from the participants' responses that I perceived to be relevant to answering the research question in a reflective journal. Some concepts and ideas included a lack of succession planning, new nonprofit organizations, mentoring, recruiting, training, and onboarding. Once I had read and re-read all the transcripts, I uploaded them to NVivo 12 to facilitate data management (NVivo, 2022). Subsequently, I began the initial coding process, which involved retrieving NVivo terms from the

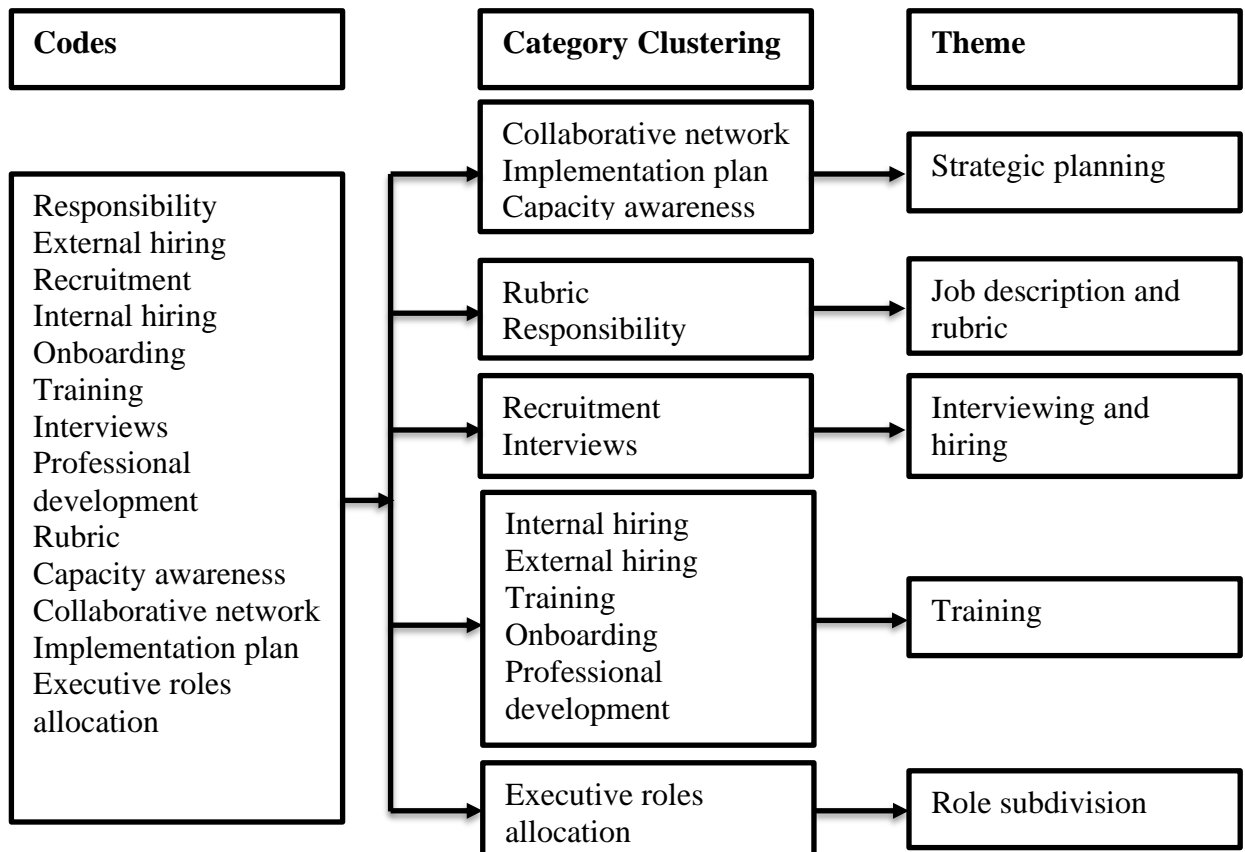
participants' transcripts. The codes included internal hiring, external hiring, collaborative network, onboarding, recruitment, interviews, rubric, professional development, implementation plan, capacity awareness, executive roles allocation, training, and responsibility. Table 2 contains a summary of the identified codes and their respective frequencies.

Table 2

Code Frequency

Code	Frequency
Responsibility	9
External hiring	8
Recruitment	8
Internal hiring	6
Onboarding	6
Training	6
Interviews	5
Professional development	3
Rubric	2
Capacity awareness	2
Executive roles allocation	2
Collaborative network	1
Implementation plan	1

Consequently, clustering was performed, which involved grouping the codes to create themes (see Figure 4). The identified themes were (a) strategic planning, (b) job description and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, (e) role subdivision, (f) entrepreneurship training program, and (g) professional development. Then, participants' verbatim responses were assigned to the specific themes.

Figure 4*Code Clustering*

Reviewing and refining the themes helped identify two additional themes -- entrepreneurship training program, and professional development, that could be combined into the training theme. Hence, the five themes are (a) strategic planning, (b) job description, and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, and (e) role subdivision. Table 3 contains a definition of the respective themes. Finally, the results section of the study is based on the themes identified from the participants' verbatim responses. No single discrepant case was identified during the thematic analysis process.

Table 3*Themes and Respective Definitions*

Theme	Definition
Strategic Planning	An organization's process for defining strategy, vision, goals, and objectives.
Job Description and Rubric	The specific requirements that a person must fulfill or possess to be considered eligible to fill a specific position in a nonprofit organization
Interviewing and Hiring	The process of recruiting executives from within the organization or externally.
Training	Offering formal and informal approaches to improve the staff's capacity to transition into leadership positions.
Role Subdivision	Creating several positions from the numerous roles clustered into executive directors' responsibilities.

Archival Data Analysis

The archival data provided included 091's, 092's, and 093's strategic plans; 091's draft succession and transition plan; and 092's minutes for the strategic plan meeting. Reading and re-reading the provided archival data helped identify ideas and concepts that confirmed the participants' interview responses. Notably, there was limited information in the archival records directly related to answering the research question. However, combining the participants' verbatim responses and information from the archival documents supported the development of sufficient content to answer the research question.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Methodological rigor in qualitative studies is essential in improving the findings' trustworthiness (Forero et al., 2018; Stahl & King, 2020). In this study, trustworthiness was promoted through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A discussion of each concept is provided in the subsequent sub-sections.

Credibility

In this qualitative study, credibility was promoted through transcript verification and saturation. Transcript verification involved sending each executive staff or board member their respective transcript to confirm accuracy. As a result, all participants confirmed that the transcribed data accurately represented their responses. Saturation achieved at the 12th participant involved collecting data until no new information was identified in the respondents' answers. As such, collecting more data could not have resulted in the identification of new information.

Transferability

Transferability was achieved by comprehensively describing the core methodological activities, specifically sampling, data collection, and data analysis. In chapter three, a description of the sampling process was provided. Subsequently, in chapter 4, a description of the participant's demographic information was included to help the readers determine the study's relevance in their setting. Additionally, including a description of the data collection and data analysis process provides readers with the procedure to replicate the conducted study.

Dependability

The dependability results were promoted through initial coding and interpreting the findings in the conceptual framework and literature review context. Initial coding involved retrieving the themes from the participants' verbatim responses, which ensured the results were not from my imagination. Then, in chapter 5, interpreting the findings in

the conceptual framework and literature review context supported in determining how the study results are congruent, advanced, or contradict what is already known.

Confirmability

Maintaining a reflective journal promoted confirmability and helped decrease the effect of personal bias, the influence of an individual conceptual lens, assumptions, values, and preconceptions on the study. Also, performing an audit trail ensured a rationale for the major decisions performed, in particular methodology selection, design identification, sampling, data collection activities, member checking, and data analysis procedure.

Results

The research question answered in this study was how do nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for an executive transition when an impending change is imminent? Based on the thematic analysis, five themes that directly answer the research question were identified; (a) strategic planning, (b) job description and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, and (e) role subdivision (see Table 4). In the analysis, no discrepant cases or nonconforming data were identified. In all three nonprofit organizations, a succession plan has never been implemented. Conversely, 091 had a draft succession and transition plan, which has not been implemented. In the subsequent section, the findings were presented in themes. In addition, the approaches of nonprofit organizations without a succession plan were provided and supported using the participants' verbatim responses and content from the archival documents.

Table 4*Research Question and Themes*

Research question	Themes
How do nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for an executive transition when an impending change is imminent?	Strategic Planning Job Description and Rubric Interviewing and Hiring Training Role Subdivision

Strategic Planning

It was identified that all organizations have strategic plans where approaches to prepare for an executive transition when an impending change is imminent were included. Succession and transition planning was part of the initiatives in the nonprofit organization's strategic plans per the participants' responses and archival data. Conversely, other than 091, where a succession and transition draft plan has been developed, all the other two nonprofit firms have not implemented the initiatives. Additionally, the respondents indicated that succession planning is not a priority because COVID-19 significantly impacted nonprofit organizations, making it essential to focus on sustainability first.

Interviews

Based on the interviews, it was identified that despite not having formal succession plans, all three nonprofit organizations had performed strategic planning, which the board members mainly implemented. For instance, 091P1 explained that the board provides suggestions for the individuals who they perceive can perform well in a vacant position naturally. Similarly, 091P2 added, "the co-leader and the CEO/Founder have discussed a strategic plan in which succession is an initiative; we are yet to

implement an official transition strategy.” Subsequently, 091P4 added, “per the strategic plan, a search committee to review any executive replacements needed has been developed.” Additionally, the respondent noted that replacing the current CEO/Founder would be challenging without an effective succession and transition plan.

A participant, 092P1, explained how a talent pool for management was developed through the strategic plan. 092P1 said, “a talent pool was created for program managers, coordinators or below but not for the upper leadership position (executive director or Chief Operating Officer).” Another respondent, 092P2, explained that “the board created a strategic plan, but not a succession plan. However, COVID has impacted how we view our focus on services.” Additionally, 092P4 explained that

We create implementation plans. In those implementation plans, personnel is identified as part of the staff team to assist with particular tasks and objectives of various funding streams. We have asked people we have on staff if they want to serve in certain roles. We do not have a succession plan. However, the staff creates an implementation plan to accomplish the goals and requirements of service programs. Also, our strategic plans are shared with the staff and team.

In addition, 093P1 responded to the theme by positing, “we have created strategic plans for executing an entrepreneur training program. However, the organization has not yet approached proper succession planning, being seven years young. In addition, we are still working towards achieving sustainability.” Another participant, 093P2, explained that “we perform strategic planning, which helps us bring ideas and resources that facilitate to maximize the mission and goals of the organization.” 093P4 noted that “part

of the strategic planning is identifying an organizational consultant who will educate the board, founder, and executive vice president on the development of a transition plan and recruitment of a qualified individual to run the organization.”

Archival Data

All nonprofit organizations have strategic plans containing information about succession or transition. For instance, in 091’s 2020 to 2025 strategic plan, the nonprofit organization’s next steps are implementing a succession plan, hiring a chief operating officer, performing leadership development, and redefining the staff position. Similarly, 092’s strategic goal related to the nonprofit organization’s infrastructure pillar is recruiting qualified candidates. Additionally, one of the goals in 092’s strategic plan is creating an emergency succession plan. The authors indicated the aim would be to provide an action plan in the event of a temporary or unplanned leadership change within the organization. The strategic plan was written that “the plan would provide for an orderly progression of successors necessary to maintain the leadership and integrity, promoting transition” (092, strategic plan, p. 3). Congruent with 091 and 092, 093’s first and third objective per the nonprofit organization’s strategic plan is improving the organization’s and board’s capacity. The strategic plan to enhance organizational capacity is to increase executive staff leadership. Additionally, the strategic plan for enhancing the board’s capacity is increasing its leadership and officer succession.

Job Description and Rubric

The respondents indicated that all jobs in the organizations have job descriptions, making it easy to identify individuals with the competencies to fill the vacancies.

Additionally, the participants indicated some rubrics are applied to help determine whether the identified participants are adequately qualified. The participants' verbatim responses and supporting evidence from the archival data were provided in the subsequent section.

Interviews

It was identified that nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for an executive transition when an impending change is imminent by using the job description and rubric to determine the participants' qualifications. For instance, 091P1 posited that "all of these job functions have a job description where it is noted the absolute needs that one should have to be in charge of that part of the organization." The respondent continued by explaining that the job description provides the governing body with the baseline factors assessed to determine where there is an employee within the organization who fulfills the qualifications. Conversely, if no employee fulfills the qualification, the decision to recruit from outside is made. As such, 091P1's specific response was, "so first we would look inside to see who might be a potential match, maybe with a little training or maybe just ready to go, and then if that does not happen, then we would go outside." 091P2 added to the discussion by positing that "all job functions have a job description containing competencies so that individuals know the absolute needs that one should have to be in charge of that part of the organization."

092P2 introduced the concept of using a rubric to prepare for an executive transition. The respondent said, "the board creates a profile for the executive director candidate and submits it to various agencies for posting. Also, the board establishes a

rubric to evaluate the applicants.” The respondent indicated that per the current rubric, an executive director should be an analytical and strategic thinker, service-oriented, empathetic, transparent, and bilingual in some cases. From the same organization, 092P3 explained that in addition to rubrics, “there are job descriptions that contain specific definitions of the critical role of each program manager. For example, the executive director meets weekly with program managers and is responsible for identifying those with the appropriate skills and knowledge to achieve success and potential for the higher leadership position.” In addition to qualifications posited by 092P2, 092P3 indicated that additional competencies are “an individual experienced in managing a nonprofit organization and is familiar with the organization’s history and services provided to the community.”

Additionally, 093P1 indicated that a job description is essential because “it helps identify those people that are very much committed to the mission and the process of helping entrepreneurs, women, veterans, and marginalized communities.” The respondent acknowledged that the executive director roles are important because “the position requires meeting people and communicating with consumers and the organization’s email base.” 093P2 added to the discussion by positing that “we are identifying high core talent based upon what they have accomplished, what they have done, what they are doing, pretty much who is in it to win.” The participants continued by indicating that “it is the best way we have to validate who can take it to the next level.” 093P4 responses encapsulated all those above by positing that

The organization identifies critical positions and creates job descriptions if there is a need for an individual or individuals to assume a critical position. Moving towards a possible replacement will require a serious look at current individuals and possibly outside candidates who are qualified, knowledgeable, and have a passion for the organization's mission and the ability to raise funds to maintain the organization.

Archival Data

Two organizations' archival data supported the availability of job descriptions as a strategy. In 091's draft succession and transition plan, the authors emphasize that the initial steps should be to create job descriptions and identify candidates. According to 093's strategic plan, the nonprofit intends to increase the organization's capacity by updating the executive staff leadership position descriptions.

Interviewing and Hiring

The theme is closely related to the second one because the interview and hiring processes depend on the developed job descriptions and rubrics. Notably, there are distinct differences in the ideas posited by the participants relating to themes two and three. The job descriptions underpin performing interviews, recruiting, and hiring as strategies for preparing for executives' transition. The subsequent sections provided evidence from the participants' responses and archival data.

Interviews

The respondents posited that the hiring could be from within or outside the organization. For example, 091P1 indicated that "hiring from within is always the first

choice. The second is hiring from outside if no employee can match the organization's needs." The participants added that "current employees are usually evaluated on how they have fulfilled their job requirements. If they are high achieving, then the next steps are considered in terms of promotion in the organization." According to 091P2, the organization does not have anyone to move into a leadership position. Hence, the participant indicated, "we will need to interview and hire someone from the outside. I have prepared meticulous files/notes to guide the person." The participant's rationale is based on the fact that most of their employees in the organization are in their first real job and have not worked in an office environment before. 091P3 responded that "there is no selection process; however, having worked with most of the staff for over two years, there is an awareness of their capacity and abilities if there was a need to select a new leader."

092P1 indicated that "when hiring, we will ensure that whoever is employed will be onboarded in a formal process, especially if they are recruited from outside of the organization." The participant emphasized the essence of appropriate hiring because it could improve staff and board relations. The respondent posited that "the onboarding process is in writing, where the interim director will work closely with the new executive and current staff to establish camaraderie. There is a plan also to hire an operations director to increase stability within the organization." Another participant, 092P2, indicated that "the board is responsible for hiring the executive director, who hires other staff. We recruit and identify individuals with the experience needed to run these programs." 092P3 elaborated by positing that the board and executive director have not

created a system for identifying high potential talent. Hence, interviews are performed. 092P3 said, “internal candidates are subject to an interview process. There is also external recruitment; in most cases, internal candidates are usually selected because they have more knowledge about the organization and partners.” Similarly, 092P4 explicitly stated that “we recruit, interview, and hire employees.”

093P1 indicated that “at any given time, there are many capable participants in the organization that can step up and continues to execute the program services.” Another respondent, 093P2, emphasized the essence of “having a strong vetting process (reference and being able to make sure that individuals go through a background check).” In addition, the respondent supported the essence of a reference check when hiring from outside the organization because it helps identify the proven track record, which ensures that the nonprofit organization has high-quality talent as part of the board. Congruent with 093P2, 093P4 said, “high potential talent is identified through interviews to determine if they are a match for the organization.” 093P2 continued by positing that “we come together as a board and assess who has leadership qualities, values, and understands the mission.” Similar to 093P2, 093P3 confirmed that “currently, individuals are selected to serve on the board based on experience. Also, the individuals are observed on their commitment and follow-through on various assignments.”

Archival Data

In 091’s strategic plan, a chief operating officer was hired, and the next organization’s initiatives were proposed. Additionally, in 091’s draft succession and transition plan, the need to identify candidates was supported once the job descriptions

were formulated. Subsequently, an in-depth search for the Chief Revenue Officer (CRO), which would involve hiring, should be performed. Similarly, in 092's strategic plan, an initial action is creating a cross-reference list of competent and experienced individuals from different fields, such as education and business. Subsequently, the need to review and update the screening and selection process has been proposed in the strategic plan. Also, per 093's strategic plan, the nonprofit intends to increase the organization's capacity by recruiting and hiring executive leadership.

Training

Data from the interviews and archival documents helped identify that training is applied to prepare for the executive transition. The training was both formal and informal. Data from the interviews and archival documents were provided in the following subsections.

Interviews

The participants indicated that there is some form of formal and informal training. For instance, 091P1 posited, "we have time set aside for board of directors' training." Another participant, 091P2, said that "there has been a lot of mentoring, but not in a formal way. Also, there has been a lot of communication about individuals with talent and potential." Additionally, 091P3 elaborated on the nonprofit organization's approach by indicating that "staff receives training and individuals are regularly observed in their position to determine ability to lead the crew when needed or on a long-term basis." Notably, 091P3 explained the lack of professional development training. Rather 091P3 posited, "we have a pool of potential talent specifically for this role."

092P2 explained that training is mainly provided to the executive director, who subsequently performs the role internally. The participant indicated that “the board focuses on the executive director’s professional development. However, the executive director usually identifies high-potential talent within the organization. Hence, programmatic training for staff is strictly left up to the executive director.” 092P2 continued by explaining that “the board has received Board Capacity training through the Piper Foundation. Also, no staff has the knowledge and skills to serve as the executive director.” In addition to the Piper foundation, the board of directors’ training is provided in different forms. The forms include retreats, where speakers assist and guide the board through strategic initiatives. Another respondent, 092P3, explicitly explained that “the organization does not provide professional development and training for the current pool.” However, the participant acknowledged that “there is a need to identify talented staff and provide training opportunities for program managers.” In their response, 092P4 indicated that “the program manager has the responsibility to make sure employees are aware of training provided by outside resources and the importance of attending.” The participant stated training is ongoing. Additionally, the respondent posited that four or five training sessions are required annually in addition to the virtual training sessions.

According to 093P1, “our organization partners with consulting firms and virtual tools by Microsoft and Zoom to provide employee training.” Similarly, 093P2 stated that “there are series of classes that are implemented that individuals have to take to be considered candidates.” Lastly, 093P4 said that “all individuals are required to undergo

training. Most volunteers underwent the training to increase their understanding of the organization's services and identify the best area for their service.”

Archival Data

In 091's strategic plan, staff capacity building and training were identified as a challenge. As such, the nonprofit organization has made leadership development among its next steps. Additionally, in 091's draft succession and transition plan, it was identified that once the CRO is identified, internal development through training should be performed. After the training, the CRO and CEO would collaboratively work together, underpinning succession. Based on 092's strategic planning committee minutes, the nonprofit organization is focused on assessing and training the management and staff.

Role Subdivision

The need to split the roles held by the CEO/founder was supported. Generally, subdividing the role could help better define the responsibilities and improve succession planning because it would distribute the core jobs to different individuals. Although a limited number of individuals provided the theme, it provided unique insights into the phenomena.

Interviews

The role subdivision theme was only discussed by the participants from 091. Specifically, 091P1 indicated that the board reviews the executive director's roles and responsibilities to ensure they are adequately categorized. Additionally, 091P2 noted that “the individual hired will not be able to step into the current role of Co-leader because it should be split among several employees. There is a need for someone to take over

human resource because it is very time-consuming.” 091P2 provided more explanation by indicating that “the co-leader along with the CEO/founder has filled so many roles that there needs to be a division, which will facilitate the sub-division.” Similarly, 091P3 noted that

The crew leader holds multiple roles that require three people. There will be a need to identify three people instead of one for this position to sustain the role. Looking at current crew members, the organization will need to also hire from outside. To achieve sustainability, staff need to have a clearly defined role and not always anticipate picking things up because it results in chaos.

Archival Data

In 091’s strategic plan, it has been indicated that the next step is redefining the staff position. As such, redefining the positions could result in an appropriate distribution of roles and responsibilities. However, a limitation is that there was inadequate information on how the individuals intend to redefine the staff position.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent. An analysis of the twelve transcripts and archival document data helped identify that other than 091 that had a draft succession and transition plan, all the other nonprofit organizations had strategic plans. In essence, it was determined that the participant's responses were consistent with the nonprofit organizations’ strategic plans and draft transition/succession plans. Additionally, it was identified that nonprofit

organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent by (a) applying strategic planning, (b) adhering to job descriptions and rubrics, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, and (e) role subdivision. In Chapter 5 discussion, recommendations, and conclusions are included.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Introduction

The aim in this study was to address the gap in the knowledge on succession planning and transition for non-profit organizations among executive leadership and board of directors. According to Froelich et al. (2011), it is not known how leaders of non-profit organizations without a succession plan prepare to address retirement among their executive workforces. The purpose of this study was to explore how non-profit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent. A qualitative multiple case study was conducted to attain the purpose of this study.

It was anticipated that the findings of this project would contribute to scholarly literature and positive social change by providing useful knowledge for boards of directors, non-profit executives, consultants, scholars, and non-profit associations on the importance of having a succession plan in place for executive exit to ensure stability and a smooth transition. It was also anticipated that this study would lead to the identification of best practices in succession planning for non-profit organizations to strengthen relationships, create a leadership pipeline, cohesive workforce, and sustainability of the organizations. Additionally, it was anticipated that the results of this study would be used by the board of directors and senior executives for the development of a comprehensive succession plan and process.

The research question answered in this study was: How do non-profit organizations without a succession plan prepare for an executive transition when an

impending change is imminent? The results indicated that (a) strategic planning, (b) job description and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, and (e) role subdivision were the five themes identified that directly answered the research question. For strategic planning, the respondents indicated that their organizations had incorporated transition plans in the strategic plans. Job descriptions and rubrics were reported as giving detailed requirements and qualifications for the vacant executive position. Interviewing and hiring was the formal process of recruiting potential candidates. Training consisted of formal and informal professional development to improve staff skills for the vacant position. The participants reported role subdivision as a strategy for assigning executive roles to different current staff based on their qualifications.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study confirm and extend the knowledge relating to succession planning in non-profit organizations reported in the literature. For example, the findings indicated that non-profit organizations prioritize recruiting their current employees by evaluating how they match the vacant position before seeking potential candidates outside the organization. This finding confirms what has been reported in the literature that non-profit organizations prefer recruiting internally before seeking external candidates. Armstrong (2014) argued that true succession planning involves a deliberate process of identifying and developing future leaders among individuals who are already part of the organization. Additionally, Harley-McClaskey (2015) argued that developing leaders within the organization is critical to a non-profit organization's ability to carry out the mission and strategic plan, be trained, and readiness to fill a vacancy or void.

The analysis of McKee and Froelich (2016) revealed that efforts to find an internal successor are a highly desirable goal in nonprofits because it can serve as a substitute for a more visible succession planning process. McKee and Froelich's findings further indicated that non-profit organizations had more preference for internal candidates rather than an equally qualified external candidate. Additionally, the response from one of the participants indicated their organization prefers promoting current staff support. Stewart (2016) pointed out that providing an opportunity for high-potential employees to advance internally in non-profit organizations should be an essential goal. The participant indicated that the executive director usually identifies high-potential talent within the organization.

The study's findings further indicated that non-profit organizations use strategic planning during the transitioning and succession process. For example, 091 had a strategic plan whose goal was to create an emergency succession plan. The major component of the strategic plans identified was training and teamwork, whereby the members collaborate to facilitate effective succession. For example, some respondents indicated that part of their strategic plan was to seek a search committee and use program managers to oversee any executive replacement. According to Tebbe *et al.* (2017), succession planning must be developed by team members from vital functional groups who understand the organization's vision and mission, immediate goals, future direction, and opportunities. Additionally, Gothard and Austin (2014) noted that although effective succession planning requires a commitment from all levels of an organization, executives and their boards need to initiate and lead the process. The training components of the

strategic planning were reported through training programs and plans for professional development. For example, one respondent indicated that part of their strategic planning is identifying an organizational consultant who will educate the board, founder, and executive vice president on developing a transition plan and recruitment of a qualified individual to run the organization. Training and professional development align with the concept of talent development, whereby the aim is to ensure that people acquire and enhance the skills and competencies they need (Kim et al., 2014).

Another significant finding of this study was that non-profit organizations used job descriptions and rubrics to prepare for an executive transition. The job descriptions outlined the requirements and qualifications for the vacant position. In addition, the participants indicated using job rubrics to help determine whether the identified participants are adequately qualified based on their competencies. The findings on using the job description and rubric in preparation for an executive transition align with the elements of talent management, a conceptual framework used in this study. The core elements associated with talent management are sourcing, recruiting, and developing the most capable employee at all organizational levels (Chambers et al., 1998). Sourcing talent begins with defining the skill sets needed to advance organizational strategies. From the findings of this study, sourcing was reported through organizations' descriptions of the requirements and qualifications for a vacant position. The job description included the core competencies and requirements for the vacant position. Consequently, the findings on using job rubrics during the preparation of executive transitions align with defining the needed talent. According to Bolander et al. (2017),

defining the needed talent involves aligning the description of the desired employee's skills, knowledge, and traits with organizational strategies, goals, and culture.

Organizations must engage in the process of sourcing that talent through innovative strategies and channels once the needed talent has been defined (Bolander et al., 2017).

This study indicated that non-profit organizations use interviews to hire potential candidates for vacant executive positions. In addition, the findings of this study indicated that non-profit organizations used a rubric to identify candidates' competencies based on the job requirements and qualifications. Therefore, the process of recruiting potential candidates to fill the vacant executive positions aligns with the constructs of the conceptual framework used in this study.

The training was another strategy identified in this study that non-profit organizations without succession plans use to prepare for executive transitions. The respondents reported on formal and informal training. The formal training includes directors, executives, and board training from external professional bodies. The informal training reported included mentoring of staff. The results on the use of training to prepare for executive transitions confirms other findings in the literature reporting the efficacy of training and professional development for talent management. For example, Rampal and Arora (2017) found that training and professional development are some strategies organizations can use to promote positive workplace attitudes and talent management.

Interviewing as a recruitment process was another notable finding of this study. The respondents reported that potential candidates for a vacant position undergo a systematic recruitment process through formal interviews. Through interviews, the best

candidate is selected based on their competencies and qualifications that match the identified job descriptions and rubrics. The systematic recruitment process is supported by Cavanaugh (2017), who argued that recruiting the best talent and subsequent management approaches that ensure opportunities for professional development with specific emphasis on leadership skills is fundamental to successful succession planning.

The participants in this study acknowledged the importance of a succession plan to organizations by indicating that replacing the current CEO would be challenging without an effective succession and transition plan. The importance of the succession plan is supported by Yawson (2019) and Santora and Bozer (2015). Yawson argued that having a succession plan for an abrupt departure of the executive officers facilitates the preparation and adequate decision-making when choosing a new candidate. In addition, Santora and Bozer posited that it is beneficial for non-profit organizations to have a succession plan for planned and unplanned exits of executives.

In this study, the participant emphasized the essence of appropriate hiring through a formal process because it could improve staff and board relations and the stability of the organization. This emphasis is supported by LeCounte et al. (2017), who posited that hiring for executive positions is critical to organizations. Based on human capital and talent management theories, LeCounte et al. noted that organizations must conduct due diligence to mitigate risks associated with hiring negligent CEO. LeCounte et al. also indicated that the talent management process is critical to screening candidates for executive positions. In addition, Gandhi and Kumar (2014) and Day et al. (2004) argued that managing the succession of talent is a vital strategic process that minimizes gaps in

leadership and enables the best people to develop the skills necessary for possible future roles.

This study extends the existing knowledge on preparation for the succession of executive positions through the finding on role subdivision (Cavanaugh, 2017; Rampal & Arora, 2017). Role subdivision was supported by the need to split the responsibilities held by the executive officers and distribute those roles to different individuals. A rationale is given for subdividing the executive roles during the succession to reduce the burden of the new roles to the recruited executive. Role subdivision can be a significant finding for facilitating effective and prompt succession during the unplanned exit of the executive officers in organizations. For example, executive roles for the unplanned vacant position can be subdivided to the current employees based on their skill and competencies to act in interim capacities. Role subdivision will ensure the routine running of the organization while the board is planning for the appropriate recruitment process for a qualified candidate to fill the vacant position.

Limitations of the Study

Among the issues associated with trustworthiness during the process of the study includes misinterpreting or miscoding the participants' responses and the influence of their introduction into the responses and environment. Although there were chances of misinterpreting and miscoding participants' responses, the accuracy of the data was enhanced through transcripts validation. My choices for ordering of themes, selection of participant quotations, providing context for participant narratives, and application of theories to explain or understand the data may have been influenced by preconceptions

(Tufford & Newman, 2012). In this study, the ordering of themes was based on the frequency of the participants who supported the theme. In addition, the selection of the participants' narrative to support the theme was based on the relevance of the verbatim about the theme. Another notable limitation of this qualitative case study is the extent to which the result can be generalized. Considering the specific context and setting in which the study was conducted, the findings can only apply to a non-profit organization with the same size and resources as those included in this study.

Recommendation

Only three non-profit organizations were used in this study, therefore limiting the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the case study design focused on specific organizations' contextual aspects. Therefore, researchers in future studies should consider using a larger sample size of non-profit organizations to improve the generalizability of the findings.

The four findings of this study, (a) strategic planning, (b) job description and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, and (d) training, align with other findings based on the synthesized literature in Chapter 2. The finding of role subdivision as a strategy used during the succession of unplanned executive positions in non-profit organizations emerged as a promising new practice that can improve transition within the organizations. Therefore, more studies should focus on the impacts of role subdivision among the current staff during the abrupt exit of the executive employees in non-profit organizations.

Implications

Methodological

Transitions in top-level leadership roles have critical implications for the organization's sustainability, funding, constituent support, and effectiveness of the organization's mission work (Tebbe et al., 2017). In addition, Santora and Bozer (2015) argued that connecting succession to a talent management strategy would ensure seamless succession outcomes and enhance the sustainability of organizations by perpetuating and improving the cultures of those organizations. Based on the result of this study, non-profit organizations can use strategies such as strategic plans, job descriptions, rubrics, interviewing, and role subdivision to enhance the sustainability of the organization by improving the success of the executive vacant positions.

Empirical

Training and professional development were the strategies identified for improving leadership and developing staff to acquire the skills needed to execute their roles in the organizations. Therefore, the findings of this study imply that non-profit organizations can improve their staff's performance and competencies through appropriate training and professional training initiatives to improve and align their skills with their roles. In addition, the finding of this study revealed that the staff at the non-profit organization are aware of the importance of succession planning to the sustainability and functionality of the organization. Notably, 091 had a draft of the succession plan in its strategic plan. Considering the benefits of succession plans to an organization and the awareness of the staff of the associated benefits, there is potential

for advocating for the development of succession plans in non-profit organizations. These findings can have positive implications for developing the non-profit organization's policies. For example, the board can use the existing potential of staff awareness of the benefits of the succession plans to support the enactment of the organization's policies that integrate the use of succession plans as a policy.

Theoretical

The findings of this study have positive implications for the organization's sustainability. For example, the practices identified, including (a) strategic planning, (b) job description and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, and (e) role subdivision, can be used to ensure effective transitions of the abrupt vacant executive position in the organizations. Effective transitions will ensure the sustainability of the organizations by avoiding disruption that could have occurred due to delayed or inappropriate transitions of unplanned executive exits. The positive social change includes effective and efficient management of non-profit organizations. The constructs of the conceptual framework used in this study aligned with the main concepts identified, such as the recruitment process. Therefore, this study supported the application of talent management as a conceptual framework.

Conclusion

A large population of executive baby boomers is projected to create a significant turnover in nonprofit organizations due to retirement. The transition of top-level leadership roles can have critical implications for the organization's funding, sustainability, constituent support, and mission. Additionally, the exit of executive baby

boomers creates a gap in the knowledge of succession planning and transition for non-profit organizations among leadership and board of directors. Executive leaders of non-profit organizations are not prepared to replace qualified departing personnel and have no succession plans for transition despite the increased awareness about the importance of succession planning. Therefore, there was a need to understand the best practices of non-profit organizations without a succession plan for an executive transition.

This qualitative case study was conducted to explore how non-profit organizations without a succession plan prepare for the executive transition when an impending change is imminent. Five major themes were identified in this study: (a) strategic planning, (b) job description, and rubric, (c) interviewing and hiring, (d) training, and (e) role subdivision. A non-profit organization without a succession plan can prepare for the executive transition using strategic plans, job descriptions, and rubrics whereby the requirements for the vacant job roles are detailed and used to assess the qualification of the potential candidates. In addition, non-profit organizations can conduct interviews to assess candidates' qualifications for the vacant position based on the identified job description and rubrics. Formal and informal training and professional development can be used to improve the skills and competencies of the current staff to act in the vacant executive position. The emergent findings of role subdivision can also be used to divide roles of the vacant executive position among the current staff based on their qualification to act in interim positions while the appropriate plans are being undertaken by the board to replace the vacant executive position. These findings are relevant because they provide

practical strategies that non-profit organizations without a succession plan can use to facilitate unplanned transitions and ensure the organization's sustainability.

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Appendix A: Initial Letter of Introduction

Date

Dear

My name is Gail Knight and I am currently pursuing my Ph.D. in Organizational Psychology at Walden University. I am planning a study for my dissertation that focuses on Executive Transition in Nonprofit Organization. The purpose of this study is to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for leadership transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change is within 6 to 24 months. My study involves interviewing sixteen participants that represent paid executives and volunteer board members of a nonprofit organization. The interview will take 45 minutes. I will be glad to share a draft of my interview with you. All of the information shared during interviews will remain confidential without the name of the organization, its location, or the names of the participants. I will share the results of the study with you at a time that is convenient for you.

As part of my recruitment, I am allowing interested participants to choose if they would prefer a face-to-face interview or a phone interview. A room at a library close to the participant will be reserved to interview if a participant selects doing a face-to-face interview. All interviews would be conducted before or after the work hours of participants. Each interview will be approximately 45 minutes. I will also conduct a 10-minute interview after the data have been analyzed to verify the results of each interview

with each participant. All participation in the study is voluntary and participants, as well as the organization, can withdraw at any time.

I am aware that some organizations have their own ethics review board or policies for conducting studies with personnel and I want to accommodate these requirements. My dissertation chair will ensure that I am following the ethics requirements prescribed by Walden University. I would like to schedule a phone call with you to go over the study and meet with you if you would like to go over the study in person. If there is an individual within the organization I should talk with in addition to you I will look forward to scheduling an appointment with that person.

Sincerely,

Gail Knight
000-***-000
email@waldenu.edu

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

Date

Letter of Cooperation

(Send to two potential participating executives who will transition and two participating Board members in the transition)

Name of nonprofit

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear

By way of introduction, my name is Gail Knight. The purpose of this correspondence is to invite you and your organization to participate in a study on Executive Transition in Nonprofit Organizations.

The purpose of this study is to explore how nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place prepare for leadership transition when an impending change is imminent. For this study, the imminent period of change is within 6 to 24 months. The study's goal is to answer the research question: How do nonprofit organizations without a succession plan in place to prepare for their future when an impending change in leadership is imminent.

To answer this question, I would like to conduct a forty-five (45) minute interview with two executives and two board members from your organization that are responsible for strategic plans, succession, and executive transition. I would also like to review primary documents like your organizational policies and strategic plan(s) to gain a better understanding of your organization's planning process for executive transition.

In consideration of convenience, one-on-one interviews with executive staff will be conducted in a meeting room at the Library located near your organization. Primary and Secondary documents that are requested for analysis will be photocopied at the offices of the organization and analyzed off-site.

Supervision of this research project will be provided by Walden University faculty members Dr. Amy Hakim, Committee Chair, Dr. Michelle Ross, Committee member, and Dr. James Brown, University Research Reviewer. The information collected during this study will address what needs to be in place in nonprofit organizations to ensure a seamless transition when an executive leader departs and a new leader takes over. Your participation in this study will be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Gail Q. Knight

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Title: Executive Transition in Nonprofit Organizations

1. The interview protocol begins.
2. I will introduce myself to the participant.
3. The participants of the study will have beforehand read the informed consent form and provided their consent via e-mail, agreeing to participate in this research.
4. I will thank the participant for his or her agreement to participate in this research study.
5. I will provide the participant with the information on how to withdraw from the study.
6. I will seek permission to digitally record the interview.
7. I will provide information regarding the member checking process which is after the transcript interpretation.
8. I will schedule a time with each interview participant.
9. During this time with the participants, they will review the analyzed data for the member-checking process to assist with ensuring the reliability and validity of the data.
10. I will start the audio recorder and note the date, time, and location of the interview.
11. I will also have writing tools ready to take notes on the responses.
12. I will introduce the participant to his or her alphanumeric code for identification (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3) on the audio recording and a copy of the consent form.
13. I will begin the interview.
14. The interview will begin with Question #1 and will follow through to the final question.
15. I will conclude the interview sequence.
16. I will thank the participant for his or her time and participation in this study.

17. I will reiterate my contact information for follow-up questions and any concerns from the participants.
18. The interview protocol ends.