Education Doctoral   Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

5-2018

How Nonprofit Organization Founding Executive Leaders Assign Meaning to Their Experience with Succession Planning: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

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Recommended Citation

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Abstract

Most nonprofit organizations face a succession of leadership during the life of the organization if the nonprofit organization is going exist past the founding executive leader. Nonprofit organization leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning; yet, succession planning in most nonprofit organizations is nonexistent. This study utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the meaning that seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning. The following themes emerged: (a) the creation and sustainability of the organization were driven by things greater than them, (b) there was an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the organizational identity, (c) there was a desire and a belief that the organization should and will continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader, (d) there was a focus on the future, (e) there was an importance on institutionalizing the culture of the organization, and (f) there was an internal reconciliation between the connection to the organization founded and the work of establishing separation from the organization. The findings present an opportunity for founding executive leaders to focus on how their beliefs impact the extent to which they are thinking about, talking about, and engaging in succession planning in the organizations they created. The conscious knowledge of their character, feelings, motives, and desires about the organizations they created and the continued existence of these organizations is central to the founding executive leaders' self-awareness and intention to engage in succession planning.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Kim VanDerLinden

Second Supervisor
Seanelle Tracy

Subject Categories
Education

How Nonprofit Organization Founding Executive Leaders Assign Meaning to Their

Experience with Succession Planning: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

May 2018

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, my mother, and my daughter -
three influential ladies who have and will continue to shape who I am. I am strong,
resilient, kind, and courageous because of them.

I could not have made this journey without my loving and supportive husband. He
is my biggest fan, and my best friend and his patience and encouragement made this
journey possible. I am truly blessed and eternally grateful for his fierce commitment to
our journey together.

It took a village to achieve this goal, and I am so blessed to have so many
amazing people on this journey with me. Sam and the team at On Point for College for
their ongoing support and encouragement, Mandy and Janet, my editors, and to the
"home team" who made this experience a lot more bearable for Reagan.

Team GEARS, I am grateful for the support, encouragement, and loving push to
be my best self. Team GEARS brought me out of the dinosaur age and into an era of
color, images, and pizzazz. As gears, we are stronger together.

I am fortunate to have been part of Cohort Three, a fantastic group of passionate,
intelligent, and remarkable individuals who have left an imprint on my life. I am forever
grateful to Dr. VanDerLinden, Dr. Tracy, Dr. Robinson, Dr. Pulos, and Dr. Evans who
pushed me along the way, and often reminded me that I was not alone in this journey –
without whom I would not have attained this achievement.

Biographical Sketch

Tanya M. Eastman is currently the Director of Operations and Career Services at On Point for College, Inc., a New York based nonprofit organization that changes the lives of traditional and non-traditional, 17 to 29 year-old students by breaking down barriers through access to training, college, and careers for success in life.

Before joining On Point for College, Inc., she spent 3 years as the Business Manager at Bousquet Holstein PLLC in Syracuse, New York. Ms. Eastman started her career at Merrill Lynch & Co., Manhattan, NY, where she was employed for over 10 years. When she left Manhattan, she was a Vice President in the Investor Client Coverage Group.

Ms. Eastman received her Bachelor of Science degree in Finance and Computer Information Systems from Manhattan College and her Masters of Business Administration degree in Strategy and Management from Columbia University Graduate School of Business. She came to St. John Fisher in 2015 and began her doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Eastman pursued her research in succession planning in founder-led nonprofit organizations under the direction of Dr. Kim VanDerLinden and Dr. Seanelle Tracy, and received the Ed.D. degree in 2018.

Abstract

Most nonprofit organizations face a succession of leadership during the life of the organization if the nonprofit organization is going exist past the founding executive leader. Nonprofit organization leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning; yet, succession planning in most nonprofit organizations is nonexistent. This study utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore the meaning that seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning. The following themes emerged: (a) the creation and sustainability of the organization were driven by things greater than them, (b) there was an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the organizational identity, (c) there was a desire and a belief that the organization should and will continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader, (d) there was a focus on the future, (e) there was an importance on institutionalizing the culture of the organization, and (f) there was an internal reconciliation between the connection to the organization founded and the work of establishing separation from the organization. The findings present an opportunity for founding executive leaders to focus on how their beliefs impact the extent to which they are thinking about, talking about, and engaging in succession planning in the organizations they created. The conscious knowledge of their character, feelings, motives, and desires about the organizations they created and the continued existence of these organizations is central to the founding executive leaders' self-awareness and intention to engage in succession planning.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Community-based nonprofit organizations are of economic and social significance to the communities in which they reside. These nonprofit organizations are tasked with effectively addressing critical societal needs, often with scarce resources and a growing demand for services. Approximately 85% of public charities are community-based (O'Neill, 2002), and the vast majority are small, with more than 86% of nonprofit organizations in the United States having less than one million dollars in expenses (McKeever, Dietz, & Fyffe, 2016). In the United States, community-based nonprofit organizations continue to have increased responsibility for the delivery of what used to be public services, including social services, healthcare, and essential municipal services (Linscott, 2011).

Although various components of modern nonprofits have their origins in the colonial period, nonprofit organizations as we know them today did not exist until the 1970s, at which time the concept of nonprofit organizations as a unified and coherent sector emerged (Hall, 2010). Over 90% of nonprofit organizations currently in existence were created after 1950 (Hall, 2010). Nonprofit organizations exist to assist individuals in need, engage in advocacy to achieve a just and humane society, and to provide a standard structure within which participants share common interests and causes (Til, 1994).

The nonprofit sector is a sizable part of the United States economy. In 2012, the nonprofit sector accounted for 9.2% of all wages and salaries in the United States, and the sector continues to grow (Roeger, Blackwood, & Pettijohn, 2012). From 2007 to 2012

nonprofit employment increased 8.5%, from 10.5 million jobs to 11.4 million jobs (Friesenhahn, 2016). Of the nonprofit organizations registered with the IRS, 501(c)(3) public charities are the most significant category of tax-exempt nonprofit organizations in the United States (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2016). In 2016, public charities accounted for more than two-thirds (more than one million organizations) of all registered nonprofit organizations (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2016). In 2013, public charities accounted for more than three-quarters of the revenue and expenses of the nonprofit sector in the United States, $1.73 trillion and $1.62 trillion respectively (McKeever, 2015). From 2003 to 2013 the number of public charities in the United States increased by 19.5% (McKeever, 2015).

Public charities include arts, education, healthcare, and human service organizations. For this dissertation, a community-based nonprofit organization is a nonprofit organization that falls under this 501(c)(3) category of public charities. Community-based nonprofit organizations work at the local level to improve the life of residents within a community and provide a variety of human, social, and educational services (Wolfred, 2008).

The role of the executive leader. Nonprofit organizations depend on two critical resources to fulfill the mission of their organizations – funding and leadership (Tierney, 2006). Community-based nonprofit organizations are led by executive leaders who commit to improving the lives of the residents within the communities in which the organizations reside. The role of the executive leader in nonprofit organizations is central to sustainability. Nonprofit organization executive leaders are required to lead others, to lead the organization, to lead externally in networks and community, and to have the

capacity to lead self (Cornelius, Moyers, & Bell, 2011). Executive leaders must integrate resource acquisition, strategy, and mission, in ways that are mutually reinforcing (Herman & Heimovics, 1994). Many stakeholders agree that the executive leader is the most significant contributing factor to the success of an organization (Herman & Heimovics, 1994). However, the nonprofit sector has continued to downplay the importance of the role (Allison, 2002).

Executive leaders have a direct and significant impact on the organizations they lead (Allison, 2002; Day, 1988; Kets de Vries, 1994). The executive leader acts as a steward of the nonprofit organization's resources and is responsible for converting funding into social impact (Wolfred, 2008). Within community-based nonprofit organizations, effective leadership is vital to the sustainability of the organization and provides continuity of services (Wolfred, 2008). Executive leaders are a critical piece of organizational performance and must balance an increasing array of stakeholders (Herman, 2010). Executive leaders have the most in-depth understanding of how culture, mission, strategy, and goals connect in nonprofit organizations (Norton & Linnell, 2015).

Founding executive leaders. An executive leader who is also the founding director plays a central role as the nonprofit organization's originator (Stevens, 1999). Community-based nonprofit organizations are created to "give expression" to the social, philosophical, moral, or religious values of their founders (Jeavons, 1992). Through the creation of organizations designed to meet critical humanitarian needs, nonprofit organization founders build and rebuild their communities, thus providing extraordinary social benefits (Adams, 2005). The founder's relationship with their nonprofit organization is unique.

Founders have a calling, a mission, an internal mandate fueled by classic

entrepreneurial characteristics: energy, drive, intensity, self-determination, and

urgency. They are inextricably linked to their organizations. At first, this

connection is virtually synonymous with who they are. Later, at times goes on, the

relationship becomes more like a parent with a child – but always there is pride of

ownership. (Stevens, 1999, p. 2)

In the role of creator, founding executive leaders have a significant level of

influence over the culture and the habits of the organizations that they found (Adams,

2017). The identity of the organization and the identity of the founder may be one. Thus

the culture of the organization is a reflection of the founder.

The nonprofit leadership deficit. More than a decade ago, a pending nonprofit

leadership deficit was identified as the nonprofit sector anticipated a shift in leadership as

"baby boomers" in executive leadership aged closer to retirement. This likely leadership

deficit was noted as one of the most significant challenges facing the nonprofit sector

(Cornelius et al., 2011; Kunreuther, 2005; Stewart, 2016; Tierney, 2006). Although no

dramatic crisis occurred within the initially predicted timeframe, more recent research

shows that the nonprofit sector is finally beginning to experience the most significant

generational shift in leadership as baby boomers near retirement and an unprecedented

number of people will leave their executive leadership roles over the next 10 years

(Adams, 2010a; Gothard & Austin, 2013; Johnson, 2009; Norton & Linnell, 2015). As

the number of nonprofit organizations continues to grow (Roeger et al., 2012), there is

lack of planning for this leadership demand (Tierney, 2006). Fifty-three percent of

nonprofits reported planning for a leadership transition that either occurred in the past 12 months or is planned to take place in the next 12 months (Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2015).

One in four senior leaders of nonprofit organizations left their position in recent years, and as many indicated that they planned to leave their position in the next 2 years (Landles-Cobb, Kramer, & Milway, 2015). A 2011 study noted that 67% of nonprofit executive leaders indicated that they were leaving their leadership positions within the next 5 years and only 7% of them had given notice to the board of directors (Cornelius et al., 2011). How the nonprofit sector addresses this leadership challenge will have a significant impact on both individual organizations and the communities that these organizations serve (Tierney, 2006).

Executive leaders hold the most responsibility and require the highest skill level and experience in their organizations, which are attributes that take time to develop (Johnson, 2009). If nonprofit organizations intend to thrive and continue to serve their communities, they must focus on succession planning to provide a foundation for continuity of leadership.

Defining succession planning. Succession planning continues to be an area of interest in both scholarly and popular press (Gothard & Austin, 2013). The focus on succession planning is an emphasis on taking a proactive strategic approach, rather than merely the mechanics of replacement planning used in response to unexpected departures (Groves, 2007; La Piana, 2016). Replacement planning is the occasional process of recruitment, selection, and hiring. Although succession planning and replacement planning are related, there are key differences (Groves, 2007; La Piana, 2016). Succession planning has most often been described in three forms including as inclusive

of a formal planning process for executive transition (Adams, 2010b; La Piana, 2016); emergency leadership transition planning (Greater Milwaukee Foundation, 2008; La Piana, 2016); and long-term leadership planning involving leader and talent development (Adams, 2017; Conger & Fulmer, 2003; La Piana, 2016).

Planning for executive transition (also referred to as departure-defined succession planning) involves the formal planning process for the transition of an executive leader in an organization with a timeline for the impending transition. The timeline can be as short as 12 months or up to 3 years in advance of the transition, which may be due to a planned retirement, absence, or permanent departure from the organization (Adams, 2006; La Piana, 2016, Wolfred, 2008). Departure-defined succession planning involves devoting significant attention and resources to building the capacity of the board of directors, leadership team, and operational systems based on a defined timeline resulting in the scheduled transition of the executive leader (Wolfred, 2008).

Emergency succession planning includes preparation for an unplanned or unexpected transition where the executive leader or member of the leadership team is abruptly unable to serve in their role within the organization due to factors such as death, illness, or termination (Adams, 2006; La Piana, 2016). Emergency succession planning ensures that crucial leadership, administration, and services can continue with limited disruption to the organization (Wolfred, 2008).

Succession planning can also be placed within the context of strategic planning and can involve a broad, ongoing process throughout an organization, often called "long-term succession planning" that includes strategic leader development (Adams, 2006; Barnett & Davis, 2008; La Piana, 2016; Lynn, 2001; Wolfred, 2008). The purpose of

performing ongoing succession planning is to ensure critical staff continuity in critical positions (on a temporary or permanent basis) and encouragement of individual advancement (Rothwell, 2005). This long-term approach to succession planning identifies and develops talent throughout the organization so that when transitions are necessary, leaders at all levels of an organization are prepared to act (Groves, 2007; La Piana, 2016; The Bridgespan Group, 2011). Through a deliberate and systematic process, there is identification and development of individuals within the organization to fill critical leadership positions.

For this study, a long-term definition of succession planning is adopted and includes a deliberate and systematic process (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Garman & Glawe, 2004). As defined by Rothwell (2005), succession planning is "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (p. 10). The long-term succession planning approach includes, "an ongoing practice based on the organization's strategy that involves identifying the leadership and managerial skills necessary to carry out that vision, and recruiting and maintaining talented individuals who have or can develop these skills" (Wolfred, 2008, p. 4). An integrated approach may ensure that organizational leaders know what skills future nonprofit leaders need as well as how organizational leaders can develop "pipeline leaders" (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). Nonprofit organizations have an opportunity to view themselves through a succession planning lens where there is a focus on ongoing succession planning, and the organization can regularly assess where they are now, where they want to be in the future, and how they will develop the leadership to get from here to

there (La Piana, 2016, p. 2). The process involves building depth in experience and skills throughout the organization by understanding the core skills required for each position, creating articulated skill building plans to fill identified gaps in existing staff skills, and a development plan for staff to continue their professional growth (Wolfred, 2008).

Succession planning is an aspect of long-term sustainability and should be a required component of nonprofit organization capacity building (Adams, 2017). Succession planning is about ensuring organizational sustainability by identifying and addressing core activities to support the success of an organization's mission and its leaders over time (Lynn, 2001; Norton & Linnell, 2015; Wolfred, 2008). One of the most important, yet most overlooked areas of talent management and development in nonprofit organizations remains succession planning (Tierney, 2006; Watson & Abzug, 2010). Succession planning at many levels within an organization is beneficial because an effective succession plan gives employees an opportunity to develop knowledge that is beneficial in their current positions as well as in future positions (Galbraith, Smith, & Walker, 2012). Succession planning also involves an intentional approach to developing and retaining institutional knowledge and memory (Adams, 2005, 2017; Lynn, 2001). The goal is to sustain the work of the nonprofit organization over time through attention to leadership, program, and systems (Adams, 2005). Engaging in succession planning gives executive leaders and board of directors an opportunity to focus on high-level strategy development creating a nonprofit organization that is flexible and nimble by having the capacity to meet leadership and staffing challenges that may arise (Wolfred, 2008). Succession planning provides an opportunity to strengthen nonprofit

organizations, providing space to "prepare, pivot, and thrive" through proactively and adequately managing planning (Adams, 2004, p. 9).

Planning for succession in one nonprofit organization may also benefit the broader network of nonprofit organizations in a community (La Piana, 2016; Wolfred, 2008). With a focus on developing knowledge and skills, staff will migrate between organizations, creating a stronger network of talent (Wolfred, 2008). As succession planning becomes standard practice in the nonprofit sector, the entire nonprofit community will become stronger and more efficient in achieving the missions of their organizations (Wolfred, 2008).

Nonprofit organization executive leaders and boards of directors both play a crucial role in the effectiveness and sustainability of the organizations they lead (Herman, 2010). Board-executive leader relations are often crucial elements of leadership within nonprofit organizations (Allison, 2002; Herman & Heimovics, 1989). The board of directors is responsible for developing and advancing the mission of the organization and acting as stewards of the organization (Herman, 2010). Although the executive leader reports to the board of directors, often members of the board of directors act as though the roles are reversed, even while acknowledging the board of directors' responsibility for governing the organization (Allison, 2002).

The role of the board of directors of nonprofit organizations and the relationship between the board of directors and the executive leader is dynamic and can contribute to the complexity of succession planning (Adams, 2005). If the culture of nonprofit organizations is to create an environment that sustains the transition of executive leaders, the board of directors and the executive leader are encouraged to create a view of the

stewardship of the executive leader as time-limited (Austin & Gilmore, 1993). The board of directors is ultimately responsible for hiring a capable and qualified executive leader, and managing the executive leadership transition is one of the most critical jobs the board of directors faces, as it can have a profound impact on the future of the nonprofit organization (Allison, 2002; Gilmore & Brown, 1985). Planning for succession triggers psychological forces that the executive leader and board of directors are obliged to cope with, such as interdependencies and dynamic relationships (Kets de Vries, 1988). Executive leaders who are planning to transition out of their leadership role ranked working with the board of directors as the second most significant challenge (Norton & Linnell, 2015). Board members ranked support for succession planning as their second greatest need for support in their roles (Norton & Linnell, 2015).

The transition of a founding executive leader is a critical developmental milestone in the relationship of the board of directors and the organization (Gilmore & Brown, 1985). Stevens (1999) argued that in founder-led nonprofit organizations it is imperative that the board of directors take responsibility for sustainability, as this will ultimately ensure both the organization's and the founder's success through the initial transition. The board of directors may have difficulty envisioning the organization without the founder; there may be competing values between the board of directors and the founder regarding what is essential for the future, and also a potential shift in authority and power with the major decisions about the future that is independent of the founder (Adams, 2005). A better practice for the board of directors may be to partner with nonprofit organization executive leaders and approach succession planning as "an essential

governance responsibility related to its duty to provide for staff leadership" (Wolfred, 2008, p. 13).

The role of founding executive leaders in succession planning. Individuals and communities rely on the services and programs provided by founding executive leaders who are the lifeblood of their organizations (Adams, 2005). Given the critical role that community-based organizations play in society, it is essential to explore how these organizations can "live" beyond the founding executive leader. A focus on sustainability forces nonprofit organization founding executive leaders to face the difficult question of whether they want the organization to survive past their tenure as the executive leader (Stevens, 1999).

Organizational life after a nonprofit organization founding executive leader requires thought and planning by the founder for the future sustainability of the organization.

The domain of leaders is the future. The leader's unique legacy is the creation of valued institutions that survive over time. The most significant contribution leaders make is not simply to today's bottom line; it is to the long-term development of people and institutions so they can adapt, change, prosper, and grow. (Kouzes & Posner, 2010, p. xvi)

As the founder thinks about succession planning, their focus and leadership must shift to "the leadership of preparing the way and the leadership of letting go" (Redington & Vickers, 2001, p. 6).

Succession planning in founder-led nonprofit organizations has many layers. The process often involves the transferring of the founder's values and aspirations (Stevens,

2005). Most nonprofit organization founding executive leaders are faced with considerable inner struggle as they contemplate relinquishing their positions at some point in the future (Santora, Sarros, & Esposito, 2014). For a founder, the realization that they will give up power of the organization that they created at some future point may trigger fear and thoughts about immortality (Kets de Vries, 1988). However, if nonprofit organization founding executive leaders put their organization's requirements ahead of their natural inclinations, the organization will be well positioned (Stevens, 1999).

A critical consideration with the succession of a founding executive leader is defining the role of the founder after they have transitioned out of the executive leadership position (Gilmore & Brown, 1985; Leach, 2009). Two published models that exist after the founder has transitioned include the "graceful exit" model and the "mutual success" model (Leach, 2009). The graceful exit model is when the founder leaves the organization entirely, often when the fears about potential problems if the founder stays are well-founded (Leach, 2009). The mutual success model is when the founder stays on in a permanent role or has a specific period of overlap with their successor because there is a belief that there are considerable opportunities and benefits of having the founder stay involved (Leach, 2009).

Nonprofit organizations and the individuals within these organizations are unique, deciding the role of the founding executive leader after the transition is a decision made based on the context and circumstances. For some nonprofit organizations, the expertise, connections, and message of continuity may outweigh the risks of founder interference, confusion, and challenges for the successor and board of directors if the founder remains closely involved (Gilmore & Brown, 1985). For other nonprofit organizations, the

"graceful exit" provides the greatest opportunity for sustainability (Leach, 2009). There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the best type of post-transition relationship between the founder and the organizations they create. Irrespective of the founder's role after the transition in executive leadership, succession planning is valuable.

Problem Statement

Most nonprofit organizations face a succession of leadership during the life of the organization. Grusky (1960) argued that succession is a phenomenon that all organizations will experience if the organization is to exist past the founding executive. Although succession planning has been used in the private sector since the 1960s, the nonprofit sector is not widely implementing succession planning (Sharma, Chrisman, & Chua, 2003). Succession planning is understood to be an essential process in nonprofit organizations and vital to organizational sustainability; however, succession planning is absent in many nonprofit organizations (Rothwell, 2005). There is an acknowledged need for succession planning, but planning in most nonprofit organizations is still non-existent (Carman, Leland, & Wilson, 2011; Comini & Fisher, 2009; Cornelius et al., 2011; Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011; Norton & Linnell, 2015; Santora, Sarros, Bozer, Esposito, & Bassi, 2015).

The lack of succession planning is significant. The Nonprofit Employment Trends Survey produced by Nonprofit HR Solutions (2013), found that of the 588 nonprofit organizations surveyed, 69% reported not having a formal succession plan for the organization's senior leadership. Norton and Linnell (2015) reported that six in 10 New England nonprofit leaders (58%) and board members (62%) said their organizations do not have any succession plan in place, despite nearly two-thirds of responding executive

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leaders indicating that they would be leaving their positions within the next 5 years.

Similarly, a 2011 study noted that just 17% of nonprofit organizations had a succession

plan in place (Cornelius et al., 2011). The lack of succession planning will impact an

organization's ability to effectively prepare for a leadership transition, putting the

sustainability of the organization at risk.

According to Norton and Linnell (2015), the lack of succession planning among

so many nonprofit organizations may be attributed to multiple factors, including a lack of

resources to support the work of succession planning, weak communication between

leaders and the board about succession planning, and a misconception about what

succession planning is and is not. Succession planning is difficult because it requires

nonprofit organization leaders to have critical conversations about the future of

individuals and the organization (Norton & Linnell, 2015). Succession planning also

challenges nonprofit organizations to think strategically about their future, pushes leaders

and followers out of their comfort zones, requires having difficult conversations that

might otherwise be avoided, takes time and effort (which comes at a cost), and it

acknowledges the reality of one's professional and personal limits, even one's mortality

(La Piana, 2012, p. 7).

Poor succession planning often results in poor performance, impacting staff

turnover and organizational instability (Charan, 2005). The cost of a failed transition

occurs on multiple levels, including the direct cost of a transition, the cumulative

organizational cost of staff and board turnover, and in the worst cases, an organization

vital to the community goes out of business (Adams, 2004). Crisis planning may also

result if nonprofit organizations are not proactive in succession planning. An additional

challenge in effective succession planning is implementation and sustaining the day-to-day commitment to systematic and deliberate talent management throughout the organization, creating a culture of succession and learning organization (Adams, 2005; Adams, 2017).

Executive leadership transition has the potential to significantly impact an organization's structure, quality, culture, and effectiveness (Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005; Kesner & Sebora, 1994). Unsuccessful succession planning can result in disruptions and losses to the organization and can include employee anxiety over the insecure future of the organization, new executive leader trauma of a no-win position, the diminishing quality of services provided, and the loss of confidence and reputation by funders and community allies (Adams, 2017). Of greater concern is that the failure rate for new executive leaders is 40% in the new executive leader's first 18 months (Charan, 2005; Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008). Effective succession planning can help sustain the organizational health and productivity before, during, and after an eventual executive leader transition; reducing the potential pain and trauma associated with the transition (Adams, 2017; Carroll, 1984; Haveman, 1993). The transition can also provide valuable opportunities for growth and renewal (Allison, 2002).

Organizations that will experience the transition of the founding executive leader face additional succession challenges with the founder's separation from the organization, such as transference of perceived ownership, and often the desire to leave a legacy (Stevens, 2008). Institutional knowledge and memory may also be lost as founders begin to retire (Adams, 2017). Although nonprofit organization executive leadership understand that the inevitable transition of a founding executive leader may impact

sustainability (Adams, 2005), many nonprofit organizations led by founding executive leaders lack organizational readiness for succession planning (Andersson, 2015; Elkin, Smith, & Zhang, 2012; English & Peters, 2011). For nonprofit organizations led by the founding executive leader, engaging in succession planning may be very personal. Founders may see their organization as a symbol of their success and an extension of their own personality, making it particularly difficult to let go (Kets de Vries, 1988). Founding executive leaders inherently hold privileges and power that are unique to only them as founders, putting more considerable influence on the first succession of leadership (English & Peters, 2011).

Founding executive leaders play a critical role in building and sustaining the nonprofit organizations that they create, and their legacy can be impacted by how succession planning occurs within their organizations (Adams, 2005; Gilmore & Brown, 1985). Kets de Vries (1988) said, "to leave behind a reminder of one's own accomplishments can amount to defeating death" (p. 57). Although the legacy can take physical form, most often it is the intangible of organizational culture and a "way of doing things," that for the founder may be about how the legacy will be memorialized after the founder transitions (Kets de Vries, 1988). It is common for the identity of a founder and their organization to share a single identity (Adams, 2005; Wolfred, 2008). The identity of a founding executive leader often becomes intertwined with the organization, making thoughts of separation difficult and often met with resistance (Sonnenfeld, 1988). For founder succession to be successful, the organization and the founder must reestablish identities separate from each other, often a complicated process (Adams, 2005).

Some founders fear any talk of succession, as discussions about letting go of position and power foster a fear of organizational collapse if they were to leave (Adams, 2005). Consciously or unconsciously, a complete transfer of responsibility, authority, and leadership may not occur easily or completely as the founder transitions out of the executive leadership role (Wolfred, 2008). Many times, founders stay too long in their leadership roles and inadvertently damage or destroy what they have built (Gilmore & Brown, 1985).

The entrepreneurial nature of founders is a driving force in the creation and growth of nonprofit organizations, but in some cases, it may result in under attention to structure and systems (Adams, 2005). Founding executive leaders may want successors who are like them, leading them to look internally for candidates who will maintain and preserve the founder's or long-term executive's values (Comini & Fischer, 2009). Internal candidates may not be found because they have not been developed and prepared for leadership positions, leading to a lack of succession planning or postponed planning.

Other stakeholders besides the founder may be avoiding succession planning in nonprofit organizations. Many volunteer boards of directors avoid the critical conversations and leadership commitment that succession planning requires (Wolfred, 2008). Also, funders of nonprofit organizations that have built trust and confidence in founding executive leaders may pull back funding at the indication of an executive leadership transition (Wolfred, 2008).

Although nonprofit organizations recognize the importance of succession planning, there is still a lack of organizational readiness for executive succession (Froelich et al., 2011). Organizational readiness includes ensuring continuity of effective

leadership preparing for planned and unplanned leader transition, as well as advancing a culture of talent development (Adams, 2010b). Poorly managed executive transitions incur high costs for nonprofit organizations and their communities often because of repeat executive turnover, an extended period of underperformance, and in the worst cases, organizational death (Adams, 2004). Long before executive succession is announced, a systematic effort should be in place within the organization. Bozer, Kuna, and Santora (2015) and Amagoh (2009) argue that it is incumbent upon researchers to investigate succession planning to improve organizational continuity and sustainability in the nonprofit sector.

Although research supports that succession planning is not occurring in many nonprofit organizations, succession planning is taking place in some nonprofit organizations (McKee & Froelich, 2016). There are nonprofit organization executive leaders who do engage in succession planning in ways that are "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (Rothwell, 2005, p. 10). An opportunity exists to understand and learn from these examples of executive leaders who are engaging in succession planning.

While there is growing research on succession planning in the nonprofit sector, there is no existing literature on the specific experiences of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who are engaging in succession planning within their organizations. Understanding the lived experiences of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who do engage in succession planning may provide insights into how

nonprofit organization founding directors who do not engage in succession planning may

move from merely acknowledging the need for succession planning to tangibly engaging

in succession planning within their organizations.

Theoretical Rationale

There are several theories and theoretical models that have been used to examine

succession planning. However, the theory of reasoned action and its extension the theory

of planned behavior are most widely applied. The theory of planned behavior extended

the theory of reasoned action to cover behaviors out of an individual's control. The

theory of planned behavior was developed as an extension of the theory of reasoned

action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), and has been used to predict

behavior by understanding the underlying beliefs that influence intentions. Madden,

Ellen, and Ajzen (1992) stated that the inclusion of perceived behavioral control

enhances the prediction of behavioral intention and behavior. The theory of planned

behavior, illustrated in Figure 1.1, states that intentions drive behaviors and intentions are

influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985).

Ajzen (1985) believed that the stronger the intention, the more likely an individual is to

engage in a particular behavior.
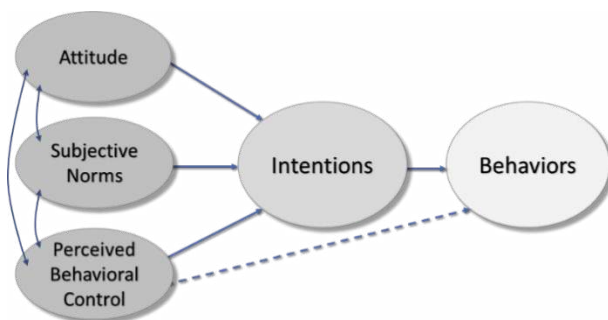
Figure 1.1. The theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985).

When applying the theory of planned behavior to succession planning, Sharma et al. (2003) stated that in order for succession to be considered as planned behavior the initiator must (a) have the "desirability of the anticipated outcomes to the initiator" – a positive attitude about succession planning, (b) believe "acceptability of the outcomes by a reference group" – a positive belief from outside influencers about succession planning, and (c) "the initiator's perception that the behavior will lead to the desired outcomes" – an expectation that engaging in succession planning will lead to positive results (p. 2).

Ajzen (1985) described the beliefs that influence intention in the theory of planned behavior as attitude (behavioral beliefs), subjective norms (subjective beliefs), and perceived behavioral control (behavioral expectations). A person's attitude toward a behavior influences intention, and subsequently, behavior. The more favorable an individual feels about performing the behavior, the greater their intention to carry out the behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Subjective norms include the importance of the approval or disapproval of the behavior by other people. Social pressure to behave a certain way by significant others influences intention to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1985). Perceived behavioral control refers to the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior as indicated by the resources and opportunities that individuals think they possess. Resources and opportunities include internal factors such as information, skills, and abilities as well as external factors that are situational and environmental (Madden et al., 1992).

Understanding more about the attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders provide insights into why there is an acknowledgment of the importance of succession planning but a lack of action. The theory of planned behavior serves as the theoretical framework for

understanding the intentionality of nonprofit organization executive leaders toward succession planning within their organizations. The founding executive leader's attitudes about succession planning and the degree to which they have control over succession planning may influence how they assign meaning to succession planning. Others including staff, the board of directors, and funders, may also influence the founding executive leader's intentionality to engage in succession planning. The theory of planned behavior provides a framework to examine the meaning that nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to succession planning.

It is important to understand the intentions of nonprofit organization executive leaders towards succession planning within their organizations. How founding executive leaders assign meaning to their experience with succession planning may align with the beliefs articulated by Ajzen (1985) that influence an individual to engage in the behavior, which for the purposes of this study is succession planning. Using the theory of planned behavior as the theoretical framework, this study shows how the beliefs of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders influence their intention to engage in succession planning. New learning provides insights into why, for many nonprofit organization founding executive leaders, there is an acknowledgment of the importance of succession planning, but a lack of action by them within their organizations.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this IPA study was to explore the lived experience of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders and the meaning that a small group of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning. The study sought to add new knowledge about how nonprofit organization

founding executive leaders experience succession planning within the organizations that they founded.

Research Question

The research goal was to gain insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experienced succession planning. The study was guided by the following research question: What meaning do nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning?

Potential Significance of the Study

Although leaders within nonprofit organizations acknowledge the importance of succession planning, there is still a lack of organizational readiness for executive succession (Froelich et al., 2011). An additional level of readiness is required in organizations experiencing the first succession of the founding executive leader. Organizations that will experience the transition of the founding executive face additional succession challenges with the founder's separation from the organization, transference of perceived ownership, and often the desire to leave a legacy (Stevens, 2008).

Nonprofit organizations that do not engage in succession planning or place proper importance on this process face challenges with continuity of services provided to the community and for some nonprofit organizations mortality (Allison, 2002). If nonprofit organizations falter or fail during executive leadership transition many communities' most vulnerable citizens will suffer (Adams, 2005).

Although there is a body of research focused on succession planning, it is only over the course of the past two decades that a body of research has developed on succession planning in nonprofit organizations. Within the existing body of research,

only a handful of studies focus on succession planning in founder-led nonprofit organizations. There are no visible studies exploring succession planning in nonprofit organizations led by founding executive leaders that explore the phenomenon from the perspective of only founding executive leaders who are engaging in succession planning. Also, there are no visible studies of the phenomenon using IPA with nonprofit organization founding executive leaders.

The findings from this study contribute to the growing body of knowledge on succession planning in nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders and boards of directors may find the study useful as they consider how to thoughtfully and strategically begin or advance succession planning within the organizations for which they act as stewards. Funders, consultants, and other practitioners may find the study helpful as they consider how to support founder-led nonprofit organizations.

Through exploring the experiences of a small group of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who do engage in succession planning, the new learning obtained from this study provides insights that may help us understand more about why many nonprofit organization founding executive leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning, but have yet to engage in succession planning. It is incumbent upon nonprofit organization founding executive leaders and the boards of directors to take a greater interest in the topic of succession planning and position their organizations for continued sustainability, ensuring the mission of these community-based organizations continues to address societal needs, despite scarce resources and a growing demand for services.

Definitions of Terms

This section provides definitions of the key terms that are relevant to the study.

Attitudes – Attitudes are an individual's positive or negative beliefs about performing a behavior. According to the theory of planned behavior, these behavioral beliefs influence intention to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The more positive an individual feels about performing the behavior, the greater the intention to carry out the behavior. Conversely, the more negatively an individual feels about performing the behavior, the greater the intention to not perform the behavior.

Community-based nonprofit organization – For this dissertation, a community-based nonprofit organization is a nonprofit organization that falls under the Internal Revenue Code as a 501(c)(3) category of public charities. Community-based nonprofit organizations work at the local level to improve the life of residents within a community and provide a variety of human, social, and educational services. Charitable organizations include those that provide relief for the poor or distressed; promote health; lessen the burdens of government; advance education, science, or religion; promote social welfare; and promote youth sports and protection of the environment (Renz, 2010).

Deliberate and systematic succession planning – Systematic succession planning occurs when an organization adopts specific procedures to ensure the identification, development, and long-term retention of talented individuals (Rothwell, 2005).

Founding executive leader – The founding executive leader is defined as the individual recognized as the responsible party in the establishment of a community-based nonprofit organization (Teegarden, 2005) or a person who has been in the executive leader position for over 10 years and has substantially shaped the culture and practices of

the organization, whose name is closely associated with an organization's identity (Adams, 2005).

Intellectual capital – Intellectual capital refers to the intangible economic value of the collective knowledge of individuals within an organization. The effective use of intellectual capital is knowledge management. Through knowledge management, intellectual capital is cultivated and retained (Rothwell, 2005).

Individual advancement – Individual advancement refers to the process of moving an individual within an organization through promotion or lateral transfers by developing the individual's knowledge including the theoretical and practical understanding of a subject and developing the individual's skills that apply the new knowledge (Kumar, 2015).

Leadership – Leadership, as defined by Northouse (2016), "is the process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 6). Leadership is a complex process that has multiple dimensions and requires agility, thoughtfulness, and foresight.

Leadership continuity – Leadership continuity is the consistent existence or operation of leadership within an organization over a period of time.

Perceived behavioral control – Perceived behavioral control is an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a behavior. According to the theory of planned behavior, these control beliefs influence intention to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1985). An individual's perception that they can perform the behavior with ease leads to a greater intention of the individual to perform the behavior. Conversely, an individual's

perception that they are unable to perform the behavior with ease (difficulty) leads to a diminished intention to perform the behavior.

Subjective norms – Subjective norm is an individual's perception of normative social pressures about performing the behavior. According to the theory of planned behavior, these normative beliefs influence intention to perform a behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The greater an individual's perception that significant others place a positive value on performing the behavior, the greater the intention of the individual to perform the behavior. Conversely, the greater an individual's perception that significant others place a negative value on performing the behavior, the greater the intention to not perform the behavior.

Succession planning – Succession planning is "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (Rothwell, 2005, p. 10).

Theory of planned behavior – The theory of planned behavior is a behavioral theory concerned with human intentionality. The theory states that intentions drive behaviors and intentions are influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985).

Chapter Summary

Community-based nonprofit organizations often provide vital support to the most vulnerable individuals within their communities. Planning for the continued existence of these organizations should be paramount. Although the board of directors is ultimately responsible for succession planning, the executive leader plays a significant role in

preparing nonprofit organizations for succession. Although leadership within nonprofit organizations acknowledges the importance of succession planning, there is still a widespread lack of organizational readiness for executive succession (Froelich et al., 2011).

This chapter described background information on succession planning in the nonprofit sector. This chapter explored an existing problem with succession planning in nonprofit organizations and an acknowledged need for succession planning (but a lack of action). The theoretical rationale for exploring succession planning, a description of the study, and the research question were also detailed. Discussed was the potential significance of the study.

The literature review in Chapter 2 will expand on current literature on succession planning in nonprofit organizations, founders, founder succession planning, and succession planning as planned behavior introduced in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 establishes a foundation for the study based on a selective review of the literature germane to the research problem and illuminates the current gap in existing research. Chapter 3 outlines and provides details of an interpretive phenomenological analysis of succession planning within the context of nonprofit organizations led by founding executive leaders. In Chapter 4 the findings of the study are presented, and in Chapter 5 discussion and interpretation of the findings are shared.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The literature review will establish a firm foundation for the proposed study. The following literature presents an overview of empirically researched studies that focus on three broad conceptual areas: (a) succession planning, (b) founders, and (c) founder succession planning. Described in this chapter is the background information on succession planning including history, succession planning in nonprofit organizations, the role of the board of directors and executive leader in succession planning, and succession planning as planned behavior. The literature review was completed to understand the role of founders, a review of the literature on the uniqueness of founders and nonprofit founders. Also completed was in-depth review of the literature on founders and succession planning. The literature provides additional insights into and informs the understanding of the succession planning process in founder-led organizations. Literature included provides evidence of the unique influence a founder has on an organization.

Although there is no single definition of succession planning, for this study, a long-term definition of succession planning is adopted and includes a deliberate and systematic process (Barnett & Davis, 2008; Garman & Glawe, 2004). As defined by Rothwell (2005), succession planning is "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (p. 10).

Most nonprofit organizations face a succession of leadership during the life of the organization. Grusky (1960) argued that succession is a phenomenon that all organizations will experience if the organization is to exist past the founding executive. The first succession within an organization comes with additional challenges. Organizations that will experience the transition of the founding executive face additional succession challenges with the founder's separation from the organization, such as transference of perceived ownership, and often the desire to leave a legacy (Stevens, 2008). Although succession planning is understood to be an essential process for nonprofit organizations, many organizations have not addressed the topic (Carman et al., 2011; Comini & Fisher, 2009; Froelich et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2015).

Review of the Literature

The first section of the literature review provides background on the history of succession planning literature, introduces the current literature available on succession planning in the nonprofit sector, highlights the role of the board of directors and executive leader in succession planning, and explores literature on succession planning as planned behavior. Succession planning continues to be a phenomenon of interest to both researchers and practitioners around the world who are interested in examining the phenomenon in all sectors, sizes of organizations, and geographic locations.

The history of succession and succession planning. As far back as the early 1950s, succession events in organizations including succession antecedents, the succession event, and consequences of succession, were beginning to be critically examined by scholars. Christensen (1953) explored how small businesses maintained continuity of top management and found few organizations interested in thinking about

and planning for the future. Also credited with the first study on succession planning is Alvin W. Gouldner whose 1954 research on leadership succession focused on the effects of executive leadership change on an organization (Carroll, 1984; Poulin, Hackman, & Barbarasa-Mihai, 2007). Soon after, Grusky (1960) argued that succession was important because administrative succession always leads to some degree of organizational instability and succession is a phenomenon that all organizations will experience if the organization is to exist past the founding executive. Although Grusky (1960) mentioned that succession is a process with ramifications beyond the transition of a single person, affecting the "social structure of the organization" (p. 109), it was Trow (1961) who first introduced research examining the role of pre-succession planning in post-succession performance success.

Several reviews of literature on executive succession detail the progression of research and scholarly thinking on the topic. (Giambatista et al., 2005; Kesner & Sebora, 1994; Kohler & Strauss, 1983). Kohler and Strauss (1983) provided an overview of the early literature on succession highlighting that previous research focused on the causes of succession, the stages of succession, the effects of succession on organizational performance, characteristics of successors, and how to plan for succession. All of the literature they reviewed focused on for-profit and private sector organizations. Succession as a phenomenon was explored by the Kesner and Sebora (1994) review of the literature, spanning what they defined as the initial three phases of succession research.

The first phase of succession research covers the emergence in the field of succession in the 1950s and 1960s (Kesner & Sebora, 1994). Early examination of

succession planning in organizations by Christensen (1953) and Trow (1961) provided evidence on 108 small, mostly family-owned manufacturing companies approaching or just past succession. Although the importance of succession planning was acknowledged, under Christensen's definition of succession planning, 50% of the organizations engaged in succession planning (Christensen, 1953). Fewer organizations in which succession planning had occurred, suffered a period of financial difficulty during and immediately following the succession than those that did not engage in succession planning (Christensen, 1953). Reasons identified as inhibitors of succession planning included the small size of the management group, lack of organizational growth, and family ownership with lack of available successor within the family (Christensen, 1953).

The second phase of succession research covered a period of theory building and empirical investigation in the 1970s during which much of the research focused on successor origin and succession frequency (Kesner & Sebora, 1994). During this period, a new area of research examining the role of the corporate board emerged (Kesner & Sebora, 1994). Mace (1971) provided an initial exploration of the board of directors and executive leader relationship. Mace (1971) found that although the board of directors was responsible for determining when CEO succession was appropriate, most boards infrequently exercised their responsibilities. Most directors served as advisors and counselors to the CEO, as some discipline for CEOs and subordinate management, and as a decision-making body in the event of a crisis.

The third phase of literature included a period of continued review and growth of succession literature in the 1980s (Kesner & Sebora, 1994). Succession research increased exponentially in the 1980s. Succession planning and leadership succession

received greater attention from scholars during this period. During this stage of succession research, Gordon and Rosen (1981) examined succession literature and the dynamics of the succession process, with a focus on the antecedents (what happens before a succession event) and consequences (what happens after a succession event) as related to the leadership transition. Gordon and Rosen (1981) proposed a model of leadership succession and encouraged scholars to explore leadership succession research as a substitute for more traditional studies of leadership. During this period, rather than examining the event of succession, Friedman (1986) examined succession planning with a focus on succession systems (rules and procedures that form the context for a succession event) and the succession process (how succession decisions are made). Studying 235 of the listed Fortune Industrial and Service 500 firms that year found that 68% reported having a formal succession plan (Friedman,1986). CEOs reported spending approximately 11% of their time addressing succession issues, although long-term investment in future leaders was not a common practice (Friedman,1986). The study found that the general existence of formal procedures was less valuable than genuine CEO commitment to the effective management of succession systems (Friedman, 1986).

During this same period, Brady, Fulmer, and Helmich (1982) also examined the extent to which succession planning was occurring in a sample of American corporations. The findings indicated that informal succession plans were more prevalent than formal succession plans (Brady et al., 1982). The most frequently utilized succession plan was succession planning on incapacitation (also called emergency succession planning), followed by succession plans on retirement and resignation (also called departure-defined succession planning) (Brady et al., 1982).

During the 1990s, succession planning variables prior to a succession event were examined in greater depth. Giambatista et al. (2005) argued that scholars should select settings and samples that provided context for the complex factors that unfold over a period starting well before a succession event. During this period, several scholars examined succession planning in the context of family businesses in the United States and internationally (Brown & Coverley, 1999; Fiegener, Brown, Prince, & File, 1996; Kirby & Lee, 1996; Kuratko, 1993; Lee, Lim & Lim, 2003). The succession planning research on family businesses found a general lack of formal succession planning, which further contributed to the understanding of succession planning in organizations. Initial succession research focused on corporations and family businesses; it is only over the past two decades have scholars explored the extent to which succession planning occurs in the nonprofit sector. Although succession planning in the for-profit sector has been studied for several decades, succession planning research on nonprofit organizations has been scarce until recently (Froelich et al., 2011).

Succession planning in nonprofit organizations. Over the past 2 decades, a body of research has developed on succession planning in nonprofit organizations. Literature included in this section provides evidence of the acknowledged importance of succession planning, but the lack of tangible planning that exists in nonprofit organizations. This section also provides evidence of the substitutions to succession planning in nonprofit organizations.

Evidence of the lack of succession planning. In anticipation of the predicted surge in an executive leadership transition, Froelich et al. (2011) explored the extent to which 266 nonprofit organizations were engaging in succession planning in two Midwest

states. Based on survey results, there was largely a lack of organizational readiness for executive succession, although there was recognition of the importance of succession planning (Froelich et al., 2011). Organizational readiness includes the process of ensuring continuity of effective leadership for an organization through preparation for planned and unplanned leader transition, as well as the advancement of a culture of talent development (Adams, 2010b).

Relative to other strategic planning areas, 70% of charitable organizations surveyed ranked the importance of succession planning as important or very important (Froelich et al., 2011). However, survey results indicated that the frequency with which organizations developed a formal plan for the executive transition was only 18% (Froelich et al., 2011). Although organizations were not engaging in formal succession planning, some effort was made to cross-train critical employees and provide professional development (Froelich et al., 2011). Minimal effort was put forth to develop an inventory of essential organizational skills, or a formal plan to develop core competencies (Froelich et al., 2011).

The reasons for engaging in succession related activities with the highest frequency included continuity of business activity (91%), to improve or maintain financial performance (51%), and the presence of a current CEO with qualities difficult to replace (47%) (Froelich et al., 2011). Charitable organizations surveyed ranked succession planning as important or very important, however, they indicated that succession planning, specifically the process of identifying potential successors, was not occurring. This further highlights a disconnect between desire and follow-through (Froelich et al., 2011). With regard to successor origin, internal candidates were

preferred by 46% of survey participants, only 11% preferred an external candidate as successor, and 40% did not know or had no preference if all else was equal (Froelich et al., 2011). Over two-thirds of survey participants indicated that they had no viable internal candidate for a successor.

Additional evidence is provided by Carman et al. (2010) who examined issues of nonprofit succession planning and executive turnover within the broader context of developing talent in nonprofit organizations. Similar to Froelich et al. (2011), speculation about the potential effects of retiring baby boomers in the nonprofit sector, and the level of developed leadership, created a need for evidence. One hundred ten surveys were completed by nonprofit organizations in Central North Carolina, and the results indicated that only 23% of the organizations reported having a succession plan (Carman et al., 2010). While 69% of the executive leaders indicated that they planned to leave their position within the next 5 years, only 13% of the organizations had identified a successor to the executive leader (Carman et al., 2010).

Executive leaders indicated that there were few challenges with recruiting young professionals (Carman et al., 2010). However, results from a second survey completed by 48 young professionals indicated that there was room for improvement in the recruitment process (Carman et al., 2010). Only 24% of young professionals indicated that their agency supported their career development, and only 16% felt their organization had adequately supplied them with training (Carman et al., 2010). Executive leaders are planning to retire, however, limited succession planning is occurring. On the other hand, the survey identified a group of young professionals who are interested in staying in the

nonprofit sector but are not satisfied with the support they receive from their organizations, in terms of career development and training (Carman et al., 2010).

In the subsequent focus group of executive leaders, participants described the extent to which they were engaging in succession planning. Three participants described succession planning that included formal succession plans but for an emergency transition. Two additional executive leaders indicated that their organizations did not have formal succession plans, but instead they were focused on "positioning, cross-training, and building strength on the bench" (Carman et al., 2010, p. 100). The study provides evidence of the acknowledged importance of succession planning, but a lack of action by nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit executive leaders have an opportunity to leverage a pool of young professionals who are committed to the nonprofit sector and desire training and development (Carman et al., 2010).

Comini and Fischer (2009) also provided evidence of the acknowledged need for succession planning, but a lack of action by nonprofit organizations. Researchers examined succession planning practices and challenges within the context of Brazilian non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Similar to the results in the Carman et al. (2010) study, Comini and Fischer (2009) found that all eight of the executive leaders surveyed acknowledged the need for succession planning, but only three of the eight organizations had a formal succession process. All eight of the executive leaders indicated that succession planning should be included in strategic planning, although only a few made it a formal part of the organization's strategic planning (Comini & Fischer, 2009). Participants indicated that the primary difficulties with succession planning included resistance from their board of directors, lack of time to prepare a successor,

difficulties preparing the team, and "establishing measures that were capable of aiding change and learning with minimal conflict" (Comini & Fischer, 2009, p. 20). Anxiety among staff members, transparency about succession planning, and the need for greater communication were also key concerns of executive leaders interviewed (Comini & Fischer, 2009). Participants indicated that transparency about the succession planning processes through maintaining frequent communication, preserving cultural values, concern for continuity, and developing the successor, were steps to alleviate concerns. However, executive leaders did not consistently apply these practices (Comini & Fischer, 2009). Three of the organizations discussed difficulties with the succession of the founder, noting the symbiotic relationship between the founder's image and the organization (Comini & Fischer, 2009).

As indicated in the prior study, challenges related to succession planning in nonprofit organizations exist across the globe. Santora et al. (2015) analyzed the results of six recent studies on nonprofit succession planning with a focus on succession throughout multiple countries. Santora et al. (2015) argued that nonprofit organizations that engage in succession planning at the earliest opportunity help augment and perpetuate the culture and character of those organizations into the next generation of executive leaders. The process by which a successor is identified and transitioned into the executive leadership position continues to require forethought and planning. The results revealed that succession planning is not a core activity amongst those surveyed, with participating organizations having a succession plan ranging from 16% in the United States, to 41% in Australia, providing further evidence to support the current succession planning problem in nonprofit organizations (Santora et al., 2015). Of the nonprofit

organizations engaging in succession planning across the six studies, most did not have written succession plans (Santora et al., 2015). The results also revealed two key elements of succession planning: the need to make succession planning a core organizational activity, and the importance of understanding the influence that internal or external successor selection may have on organizational sustainability (Santora et al., 2015).

Like prior studies, Santora, Sarros, Kalugina, and Esposito (2013) also provided evidence of the lack of succession planning in nonprofit organizations internationally. The study examined the nature of succession origins within the context of Russian nonprofit organizations, with a focus on the degree to which organizations were performing succession planning. The data included a convenience sample of 29 Russian nonprofit executives. The findings indicated that 41% of participants intended to leave their current position in the next 1 to 3 years and 24% in the next 4 to 5 years (Santora et al., 2013). Founders served as the executive leaders of 72% of the organizations included, and as with prior studies, results indicated that Russian nonprofit organizations were not planning for succession, with 76% indicating as much (Santora et al., 2013). Santora et al. (2013) also argued that organization size may be a contributing factor when assessing organizational capacity to develop depth in internal talent for potential leadership succession.

Additional evidence for the extent to which succession planning is occurring in nonprofit organizations is provided by Lynn (2001), who examined how public-sector leaders view succession management and the potential utility in identifying, developing, and enabling leadership growth within their organizations. Three focus group discussions

were conducted with 48 public sector managers and human resource professionals. Participants were asked to assess their individual organization's readiness to resolve an acknowledged leadership gap through the establishment of formalized succession planning (Lynn, 2001). Although almost half of the focus group participants indicated that their organizations were prepared to replace essential positions within the organization under unplanned or crisis circumstances, none of the participants indicated that their organizations had a formalized management succession process (Lynn, 2001). Most of the participants revealed that their organization did not rely on a formal process for preparing for future leadership positions, and only 14% indicated that their organization had a formalized leadership development process at all. Leadership development is central to leadership continuity, a foundational component of long-term succession planning. The study highlights the gap between the acknowledged need for leadership continuity and the lack of succession planning.

   Evidence of succession planning. Recent literature has uncovered that succession planning activities may be occurring, although the activities are not part of systematic succession planning. Nonprofit organizations are engaging in succession planning; however, they are not calling it succession planning. McKee and Froelich (2016) found that executive leaders are engaging in select succession planning activities, although not as part of systematic succession planning. With evidence to support that there is an acknowledged need for but lack of succession planning in many nonprofit organizations, McKee and Froelich (2016) examined potential factors that influenced the extent to which organizations are planning. Data was collected from 242 nonprofit and cooperative organizations in two Midwest states (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Questions sought to

identify what factors affected the complexity of succession planning, as measured by the number of succession activities in which the organization engaged. According to 90% of the respondents, the most important motivation to engage in succession planning was continuity of organizational activities because the goal of maintaining organizational stability was paramount (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Although research from other studies is mixed, results in this study provide evidence that organizations are engaging in employee and leadership development, with respondents indicating a strong effort for critical employees (McKee & Froelich, 2016).

Internal leadership development activities are not designated as succession planning activities, although they serve to reinforce planning. Organizational commitment to leadership development in organizations that do not engage in systematic succession planning indirectly engages the organization in succession planning (McKee & Froelich, 2016). The study found that the more activities an organization engaged in, even if the activities were not defined as succession planning, the more respondents indicated they had appropriately planned for succession (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Counter to prior research, the research by McKee and Froelich (2016) suggests that some nonprofit organizations are engaging in activities that support succession planning, although the activities may not be categorized as such. Results indicated that there are barriers to and substitution for succession planning, providing support for action.

Similar to the results of McKee and Froelich (2016), McKee and Driscoll (2008) found support for succession planning in a nonprofit healthcare organization. The case study examined a nonprofit healthcare organization in Canada, whose leadership was in transition and facing challenges of executive succession. The organization had been

actively addressing challenges and planning for over 4 years. Results indicated that senior members of the management team engaged in several activities to prepare for succession (McKee & Driscoll, 2008). The stabilizing and linkage activities included developing an organizational succession plan for the CEO, reorganization into strategic business units, developing a strategic plan, and adopting a more participative leadership style. Activities to create safety nets included planning a timely departure, ensuring values fit with the successor, entrenching the values in future leaders, and the introduction of a common executive coach (McKee & Driscoll, 2008).

Bozer et al. (2015) identified and examined the characteristics of nonprofit organizations that had leadership development initiatives integrated with executive succession planning to ensure continuity of organizational leadership. For this study, 54 Israeli human-service nonprofit executive leaders were surveyed about succession planning and other governance practices. Of the 54 executive leaders that participated in the study, 11 were founders of their organizations. Bozer et al. (2015) found that the organizations engaging in succession planning provided availability and accessibility to organizational leadership development programs and created a path for development of employees' skill sets and competencies. Organizations utilizing succession planning are positively associated with organizational leadership development practices (Bozer et al., 2015). Results also indicated that the board of directors' role in executing organizational leadership development is integral, ultimately making development the board's responsibility given the central role that it plays in succession planning (Bozer et al., 2015).

Leadership of succession planning. Nonprofit organization executive leaders and boards of directors both play crucial roles in the effectiveness and sustainability of the organizations they lead (Herman, 2010). Succession planning in nonprofit organizations is ultimately the responsibility of the board of directors who are the governing body of the organization. The role of the board of directors of nonprofit organizations and the relationship between the board of directors and the executive leader is dynamic and can contribute to the complexity of succession planning (Adams, 2005). Although the executive leader reports to the board of directors, often members of the board of directors act as though the roles are reversed, even while acknowledging the board of directors' responsibility for governing the organization (Allison, 2002).

The board of directors. The first succession research exploring the role of the board of directors emerged in the 1970s with the overarching theme of that "board's role during succession was one of limited power and effectiveness" (Kesner & Sebora, 1994, p. 342). Board-executive relations were found to be a critical element of nonprofit management (Herman & Heimovics, 1989). Unique to the management of nonprofit organizations, board-executive relations have the potential to become problematic and were identified by nonprofit executive leaders as critical to the organization's success or failure (Herman & Heimovics, 1989).

When Froelich et al. (2011) explored the extent to which 266 nonprofit organizations were engaged in succession planning, executive leaders were asked about the role of the board of directors. The study provides evidence from the executive leader's perspective, of the role that the board of directors is taking in engaging in succession planning. Of succession planning activities undertaken, 61% of executive

leaders surveyed indicated that succession planning was discussed as a general topic at the board of directors' meetings highlighting awareness of the importance of succession planning (Froelich et al., 2011). When asked about the performance of the board of directors with succession related activities, planning for executive leader succession and identification of executive director candidates, the board of directors was perceived to be average in their effectiveness with these activities (Froelich et al., 2011).

Carman et al. (2010) found that although executive leaders were planning on retiring, they were not discussing it with the full board of directors. One respondent indicated that although she had set her retirement date 2 years in the future, only a few members of the board of directors were aware of it, as she believed that there would be ramifications for the organization if her plans for retirement were more widely known (Carman et al., 2010). Bozer et al. (2015) also found that having the executive leader advise the board about succession planning was positively associated with internal succession practices of leadership development.

McKee and Froelich (2016) found that 20% of executive leaders surveyed had been in their position for more than 20 years, and another 43% between 10 to 20 years, which suggests that substantial experience would be lost in the succession process if proactive planning did not occur by the board of directors and executive leader. However, findings indicated that from the executive leader's perspective, the board of directors' governance quality was rated poorly for executive succession planning (McKee & Froelich, 2016). The study also suggested that for some nonprofit organizations, the board of directors may be seen as a substitute for extensive succession planning. Findings indicated that higher board performance in succession planning related to a lower

probability of succession planning activities within the organization. The finding suggests that the greater the perception of the board of directors' skill, the lower the perceived need for extensive or advanced succession planning (McKee & Froelich, 2016).

The executive leader. Leadership is a complex process that has multiple dimensions and requires agility, thoughtfulness, and foresight. Leadership, as defined by Northouse (2016), "is the process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 6). The individual influence that an executive leader has on their organization impacts the organization and their role is central to succession planning.

Newman and Wallender (1978) found that the influence of a charismatic leader affected the direction and prioritization of goals within nonprofit organizations, to a greater extent than in the for-profit sector. Newman and Wallender (1978) found that the executive leader's power, influence, and personal convictions guided decision-making within their nonprofit organizations, in contrast to for-profit organizations engaged in institutional planning and rational decision-making. Nonprofit organization executive leaders balance social and financial returns and constraints across multiple internal and external constituencies while delivering on mission-related activities (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Executive leaders are often held responsible for the success or failure of their organizations.

When Carman et al. (2010) examined the issues of nonprofit succession planning, two key findings indicated that executive leaders think about succession planning but are hesitant to communicate their thoughts to others. The study findings provide evidence from the executive leader's perspective, of the disconnect between thoughts and taking

action to engage in succession planning. During the focus group with executive leaders, participants indicated that although they understood that their leaving would have considerable ramifications for the organization, they had nonetheless decided to leave quietly (Carman et al., 2010). Study participants also indicated that they had identified someone with the potential to succeed them, but they had not communicated these thoughts to the potential successors or the board of directors.

Additional evidence from McKee and Driscoll (2008) found that the departing executive leaders created and implemented supports in the organization that was perceived to impact the success of the succession, including planning timely departures, ensuring values fit, entrenching values in future leaders, and introducing a common executive coach. Executive leaders felt that it was part of their responsibility to lead succession planning within their organizations. The departing executive leaders believed that they could directly impact the success of the transition through effective and early supports (McKee & Driscoll, 2008).

The review of the literature on succession planning in the nonprofit organizations above provided insights into and informed the understanding of the extent to which succession planning is occurring in nonprofit organizations. The reviewed literature provided evidence of the acknowledged importance of succession planning but a lack of planning activities that exist in nonprofit organizations, barriers and substitutions to succession planning in nonprofit organizations, and successor selection considerations. Additionally, research on an organization where succession planning occurred provided insights into the operationalization of succession planning in nonprofit organizations. Although evidence of the lack of planning exists, the literature provides limited evidence

of why there is an acknowledged need, but lack of succession planning occurring in nonprofit organizations.

The remaining sections of the literature review will examine what scholars have learned about founding executive leaders and how founding executive leaders engage in succession planning. Inclusive in the examination of founders is the unique role of nonprofit organization founding executive leader.

Founding executive leaders. Organizations that are experiencing the transition of the founding executive face additional succession challenges with the founder's separation from the organization, transference of perceived ownership, and often the desire to leave a legacy (Stevens, 2008). The founding executive leader is the individual recognized as the responsible party in the establishment of a community-based nonprofit organization (Teegarden, 2004). It can also be a person who has been in the executive leadership position for more than 10 years and has substantially shaped the culture and practices of the organization, whose name is closely associated with an organization's identity (Adams, 2005).

Morley and Shocklev-Zalabak (1991) examined the relationships among organizational culture, organizational founders' values, employee values by organizational position, organization communication activities, and perceptions of important organizational outcomes. The study highlighted the seminal role that an organization's founder has on culture and how powerfully their beliefs impact the organization. The study supported the idea that the core mission, goals, means, criteria, and remedial strategies of the organization come from the founders' underlying assumptions formed by the culture from which they came (Morley & Shocklev-Zalabak,

1991). The results revealed that founders bring values and beliefs to the organizations that they create (Morley & Shocklev-Zalabak, 1991). The findings also suggested that the founders bring a "way it should be" and a "way it should not be" to the organizations they create, forming the rules of the organization. (Morley & Shocklev-Zalabak, 1991).

Ogbonna and Harris (2001) examined the factors that influence whether a founder's strategic vision, objectives, or decisions continue to influence the organization after the founder's departure. The case studies include two companies of comparable size, number of employees, history, and single-family ownership. Two key findings emerged from the data collected. The first key finding uncovered that there were several factors influencing whether the legacy of the founders resulted in a negative effect or positive influence (Ogbonna & Harris, 2001). The perception of company success was projected by the founders, and even in less successful years that positive perception still existed after the founders' departures.

The second key finding was that many factors influenced whether current strategic objectives, decisions or actions were a result of initial strategic choices by the founder (Ogbonna & Harris, 2001). In both organizations, evidence indicated that aspects of the vision and objectives of the founders were still present (Ogbonna & Harris, 2001). Many of the founders' cultural beliefs were still evident at the time of the study. The study provided insight into how actions and strategic vision can influence the organization long after the founder departs, leaving a founder legacy. A founder's legacy can live long after the individual has stepped down from their leadership role.

Shirokova and Knatko (2008) examined the founder's impact on organizational development and overall firm performance through a comparative analysis of founder-led

and manager led organizations. The study provided additional evidence of the unique

position of founder-led organizations versus all future states of organizations when led by

non-founding executive leaders. Several hypotheses were tested, and a key finding was

that founder-led organizations have fewer hierarchical levels than manager-led

organizations (Shirokova & Knatko, 2008). Results also indicated that there was no

significant difference in performance between founder-led and manager led organizations

(Shirokova & Knatko, 2008). The proposition that a hired manager increases a

company's performance was not supported by Shirokova and Knatko (2008). Fewer

levels of management in founder-led organizations means that the founder may be the

single member of the leadership team, as opposed to manager-led organizations that often

have executive teams with expertise across functional areas (Shirokova & Knatko, 2008).

However, this study found that fewer levels did not impact performance, which runs

counter to general management perception.

  Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders. Nonprofit organization

founders build and rebuild their communities through the creation of critically needed

organizations to address issues and provide a social benefit (Adams, 2005). Carman and

Nesbit (2012) examined why founders created new nonprofit organizations, the

connection to the founders' communities, and the achievements during their initial years

in existence. The study provided evidence to support the importance of the role that

founders play within their nonprofit organizations. Of the 31 nonprofit organizations in

Charlotte, North Carolina, 42% indicated that they created their nonprofit organization in

response to an unmet need in the community (Carman & Nesbit, 2012). However,

founders defined these conditions through their own personal experience and observation,

versus a formal study or needs assessment to determine the actual community deficiencies (Carman & Nesbit, 2012). Results indicated that there is a very personal nature to founding a nonprofit organization (Carman & Nesbit, 2012). Participants professed a personal calling to create an organization, as well as the desire to create an organization because of their own personal interests and experiences (Carman & Nesbit, 2012).

Andersson (2015) examined the early stages of nonprofit organizations' capacity, providing insight into how founders develop and build capacity in the early stages of organizational existence. Study participants included 91 individuals selected from six different groups partaking in a free program on capacity building (Andersson, 2015). Andersson (2015) found a strong commitment to creating the organization, providing further support of the findings of Carman and Nesbit (2013) that founders are motivated and have passion surrounding the mission of the organization they create. The second area of capacity found to be at a high level of commitment was an articulation of the nonprofit idea (Andersson, 2015). Founders have well-developed ideas and understanding of those they serve. Results also showed that founders have a low commitment to the development of an operational organization, which includes succession planning and leadership development (Andersson, 2015). There is a high commitment to the creation of the nonprofit organization, but less so to the creation of internal systems. Andersson (2015) argued that nonprofit organizations in the early stages of formation may be more profoundly affected during the initial transition of leadership than in later stages of organizational existence.

Block and Rosenberg (2002) examined the unique forms of governance and management dynamics that exist in nonprofit organizations led by their founders. The findings provide insight into how founders and non-founders exercise power and influence in their nonprofit organizations. The results suggest organizational differences in how founders versus non-founders interact with the board of directors, how the organization is structured, and the size and budget of the organization. In founder-led organizations, the board of directors met quarterly; as compared to monthly meetings on non-founder-led nonprofit organizations, and the meetings were most often led by the founder (Block & Rosenberg, 2002). With the movement out of the founding phase of an organization, non-founders bring a more traditional hierarchical organizational structure, more frequent and structured board communication, and increased number of employees and budget (Block & Rosenberg, 2002).

Founding executive leaders and succession planning. Organizations that are experiencing the transition of the founding executive face additional succession challenges related to the founder's separation from the organization, transference of perceived ownership, and the desire to leave a legacy (Stevens, 2008). In organizations facing the transition of a founding executive leader, sustainability of the organization is impacted by the founder. Haveman and Khaire (2004) found that the ideological zeal of an organization's founder is a strong moderator of the relationship between founder succession and organizational failure. The study proposed that the effects of founder succession on organizational failure were contingent upon the extent to which organizations reflected the founders' strong ideologies, the roles played by the founders, and the availability of support from affiliated organizations (Haveman & Khaire, 2004).

Through an analysis of secondary sources and artifacts, Haveman and Khaire (2004) found that organizations with a strong ideological orientation increased the organizations' survival chances. The departure of a founder who played multiple roles harmed the organization more than the departure of a founder who played a single role (Haveman & Khaire, 2004).

Wright (2012) called attention to the need to prepare for succession by planning through the utilization of a formal succession plan and leadership development activities, as well engaging in psychological preparation for the transition. Ten founding or long-term executive leaders from a national organization of human service providers participated (Wright, 2012). Participants provided insights into their intentions regarding retirement. A significant theme emerged; this was the acknowledgment that they had not been as thorough as needed when considering issues that may occur during the transition (Wright, 2012). An additional key finding was that although a succession plan may have been developed, the departing executive leaders still found it challenging to reconcile their internal thought processes about leaving their positions (Wright, 2012). Four respondents who had tangible succession plans were surprised by their need to reconcile the emotional and psychological parts of the transition (Wright, 2012).

English and Peters (2011) examined the impact of "founder's syndrome" in 10 nonprofit organizations with a focus on ways in which founders retain control and set the agenda of these organizations, even beyond their tenure as executive leader. Findings contribute to the understanding of succession planning in founder-led organizations, and how developing leadership can be a challenge. Through narrative inquiry, 10 women founders were asked to address broad issues of organizational development and

sustainability, with a particular focus on the effects of the founders on more junior staff members (English & Peters, 2011). Data from the stories were coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method (English & Peters, 2011). Participants reported that it was difficult for founders to restrain themselves and give newer members of the organization a chance to take on leadership roles (English & Peters, 2011). The issue then became that there were no new leaders because new members were not nurtured, and the leaders (founders) were too busy to bring them along. Several participants indicated that they were aware that something needed to be done to address the founder's syndrome in their organizations, but it was only when founders chose to leave, that roles shifted and new opportunities emerged (English & Peters, 2011). Participants (founders) in the study indicated that they were always aware of the ramifications of their choices and working styles (English & Peters, 2011).

Elkin et al. (2012) provided further study of considerations in founder-led nonprofit succession planning. Researchers examined the views of leadership from nonprofit organizations in New Zealand concerning succession planning. A case study was conducted with the objective to examine the phenomenon from the perspective of individuals within the organizations engaging in succession planning (Elkin et al., 2012). Data was collected from artifacts and interviews with 10 key personnel within the organization close to the succession planning process, including the founder (Elkin et al., 2012). Key themes emerged from the results, including the need for a change of structure and delegation before the founder leaves. Elkin et al. (2012) also found common desired characteristics for the successor and successor origin considerations. The benefits of

transitional mentoring by the founder, acknowledgment of the founder's legacy, and the need to transfer relationships and contacts were also key themes (Elkin et al., 2012).

Balser and Carmin (2009) examined the dynamics of a founder transition from the organization's inception until the founder separated completely from the organization. The study provided additional evidence supporting the importance of the role that founders play within their nonprofit organizations and the impact they have on succession. A single organization was selected for the study by Balser and Carmin (2009). They focused on the founder who had created the organization with a distinct identity. The founder's departure presented several challenges. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 board members, administrators, and office personnel who were affiliated with the organization during the transition. Findings from the case included the need for new leaders to understand their own values and views and how these related to those that characterize the organization that had been established by the founder (Balser & Carmin, 2009). Even after the transition of the founder, the identity of the organization is influenced by the founder.

In a founder-led organization, change must include awareness of power (Balser & Carmin, 2009). The founder holds inherent power and influence that cannot be minimized, especially with succession planning. Another key finding was that new leadership might inadvertently make changes to key elements that employees feel are central to the organization's identity, resulting in opposition, conflict, and factions (Balser & Carmin, 2009). The organization identity interpreted by employees may be different than what appears on the surface (Balser & Carmin, 2009). Leadership

succession, especially when the transition is that of the founder, is affected by organizational identity that is interpreted differently by different stakeholders.

Succession planning as planned behavior. Founders of nonprofit organizations are social entrepreneurs who create organizations with the mission as their primary motivation. The theory of planned behavior has been utilized in entrepreneurship literature for more than 20 years to account for entrepreneur intentions and behaviors (Lortie & Castogiovanni, 2015). Lortie and Castogiovanni (2015) argued that entrepreneurship is an intentional process in which individuals plan to carry out the behaviors of idea generation, organizational creation, innovation, and exit from the originating organization.

For this study, the theory of planned behavior provided a framework to examine the meaning that nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to succession planning. Understanding more about the attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders provide insight into why there is an acknowledgment of the importance of succession planning but a lack of actionable engagement in succession planning. The following literature highlights the use of the theory of planned behavior to examine succession planning with entrepreneurs and founders.

Wright (2012) provided insights into human service organization leaders' intentions to implement succession activities and transition out of their leadership positions with the theory of planned behavior as the theoretical framework. Using the theory of planned behavior to frame the interview process, participants' beliefs and intentions about succession planning were explored (Wright, 2012). Participants had a

positive attitude toward the creation and implementation of a succession plan for their organizations (Wright, 2012). The impact of outside influences was noted by participants who engaged in succession planning after they announced retirement at the request of the board of directors (Wright, 2012). All 10 participants had or were putting into place, an executive team that included potential candidates for the executive leader position (Wright, 2012). On the subject of retirement, participants acknowledged that they had not been as thorough as needed when considering issues that may occur during the transition (Wright, 2012).

Sharma et al. (2003) also used the theory of planned behavior to examine succession planning in the context of family firms. A conceptual model of how family firm characteristics influence engagement in succession planning activities was created. The model contained four succession planning activities as dependent variables and three family firm attributes as independent variables (Sharma et al., 2003). Several hypotheses were tested, and only hypothesis three showed that the propensity of a trusted successor to take over significantly affected the undertaking of succession activities (Sharma et al., 2003). When a successor existed and was thought of favorably by the incumbent, the incumbents were more likely to undertake succession activities. Sharma et al. (2003) argued that results illustrated that the motivating intention to engage in succession planning was the presence of a qualified successor, rather than the need for the succession to preserve the organizations.

Forster-Holt (2013) also used the theory of planned behavior to examine the retirement intentions of entrepreneurs. The study provided additional evidence supporting the theory of planned behavior as a theoretical framework to examine influences driving

the intention of entrepreneurs regarding retirement transition. Retirement intentions and exit behaviors of entrepreneurs were studied from a sample of 753 small companies (Forster-Holt, 2013). Results indicated that subjective factors positively influenced the intention to retire (Forster-Holt, 2013). Key findings included that the intention to retire was not informed by an objective path; entrepreneurs think about their exit but lack a real understanding of how to undertake an exit. There is a psychological attachment to the organization that may block the ability to assess the intention to exit objectively; and the decision to exit may not be grounded in strategic or financial connections to the intention to retire (Forest-Holt, 2013).

DeTienne and Cardon (2012) also used the theory of planned behavior to examine the retirement intentions of entrepreneurs and their perceived behavioral control. Results indicated that entrepreneurs have different motivations and intentions for creating organizations and for exiting them (DeTienne & Cardon, 2012). Entrepreneurs intended to pursue different exit paths based on their prior professional and entrepreneurial experience, age, education level, and industry (DeTienne & Cardon, 2012). Also, the size of the organization influences the entrepreneurs' exit strategy (DeTienne & Cardon, 2012).

Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed establishes a firm foundation for the completed study. The literature presented an overview of empirically researched studies that focused on three broad conceptual areas: (a) succession planning, (b) founders, and (c) founder succession planning. Described in this chapter is the background information on succession planning including history, succession planning in nonprofit organizations, the role of the board of

directors and executive leader in succession planning, and succession planning as planned behavior. A review of the literature on the uniqueness of founders and nonprofit founders was completed to understand the role of founders. The literature provides additional insights into and informs the understanding of the succession planning process in founder-led organizations.

There is a need in the literature for an understanding of what impediments to succession planning cause the disconnect between understanding and execution. Included studies provide some evidence of what activities are occurring. However, why there is an acknowledged need, but lack of systematic succession planning occurring in nonprofit organizations is still unknown. The studies discussed provide additional evidence supporting the theory of planned behavior as a theoretical framework to examine influences driving the intention of executive leaders regarding succession activities and transition. However, there is a lack of literature on what influences nonprofit organization founding executive leaders to commit to and engage in succession planning.

There is an acknowledged need for succession planning, but many organizations do not undergo long-term succession planning (Carman et al., 2010; Comini & Fisher, 2010; Froelich et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2015). Nonprofit organizations led by the founding executive leader face additional challenges in addressing this problem (Stevens, 2008). To advance our understanding of succession planning and to consider the central role of the executive leader in nonprofit organizations, this research sought to understand the meaning nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning.

The next chapter provides details of the methodological approach for the study completed, an interpretive phenomenological analysis of succession planning within the context of nonprofit organizations led by founding executive leaders. In Chapter 4 the findings of the study are presented, and in Chapter 5 a discussion and interpretation of the findings are shared.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Described in this chapter is the rationale for an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders' experience with succession planning. The methodology is outlined in detail and aligns with the research context, participants, instruments used in data collection, and data analysis method. The research problem and the research question are presented and positioned within the overall context of the study.

Problem statement. Most nonprofit organizations face the succession of leadership during the life of the organization. Grusky (1960) argued that succession is a phenomenon that all organizations will experience if the organization is to exist past the tenure of the founding executive leader. Succession planning is theoretically understood to be essential in nonprofit organizations and vital to organizational sustainability (Wolfred, 2008). Organizations that will experience the transition of the founding executive face additional succession challenges with the founder's separation from the organization, such as transference of perceived ownership and the desire to leave a legacy (Stevens, 2008). Nonprofit organization leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning; yet, succession planning in most nonprofit organizations is nonexistent (Carman et al., 2010; Comini & Fisher, 2009; Froelich et al., 2011; Santora et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who do engage in succession planning. These insights may help nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who do not engage in succession planning move from acknowledging the need for succession planning to engaging in succession planning within their organizations.

Research question. The research goal was to gain insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experienced succession planning. The study was guided by the following research question: What meaning do nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning?

Rationale for study methodology. A qualitative inquiry using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used after various methodological approaches were explored and based on the research question noted above. Qualitative inquiry seeks to describe and clarify human experience as it appears in an individual's life (Polkinghorne, 2005). The study's primary goal was to explore the meaning that nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning.

Qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand a phenomenon through the experiences of participants in their natural setting within the context it resides and through the lens of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Holliday (2007) stated that "qualitative research invites the unexpected and the social setting being investigated influences the process of qualitative inquiry as its nature is revealed" (p. 8). Throughout the qualitative research process, the central focus is on learning the meaning that the study participants hold about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenon of interest in this study was succession planning. Understanding

how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders described their experience with succession planning through their particular lens provided new learning about the phenomenon of interest.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The method for this study was an IPA of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders' experience with succession planning. The primary goal of IPA is to investigate and uncover how individuals make sense of their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). IPA research seeks to understand how an individual makes sense of their experiences including major transitions in their life or significant decisions (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). An IPA approach provided detailed descriptions of how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experienced succession planning in their organizations. Nonprofit founding executive leaders who engage in succession planning within the organizations that they have founded have made a conscious decision to take steps that may ultimately lead to a transition in the founding executive leader's position. Examining in detail how nonprofit founding executive leaders make sense of this inevitable major transition in their life is well suited for an IPA study. IPA studies are often about identity and sense of self, and analysis is an in-depth individual account of meaningful experiences that touch on self and identity (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

IPA is a common research paradigm in psychology that was introduced in the mid-1990s and has expanded to other fields including social, human, and health sciences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is informed by concepts from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge (Smith & Osborne, 2003). The theoretical foundations of IPA are phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

Phenomenology. The first major influence on IPA is derived from phenomenology, an approach to the study of experience (Smith et al., 2009). Phenomenological qualitative inquiry examines participants who have experienced the phenomenon and provides an understanding of the human experience (Creswell, 2007; Manen, 1990). According to Moustakas (1994), the phenomenological approach provides a basis for a reflective analysis that portrays the essences of the lived experience. A phenomenological study must include participants who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). IPA is influenced by Husserlian phenomenology in its aim to understand an individual's experience, but IPA is also grounded in Heidegger's hermeneutical phenomenology that emphasizes interpretation (Clarke, 2009). In IPA, researchers focus centrally on the process of reflection. The intention is not to bracket the researcher's values and beliefs, instead, it is a key piece to understanding the participant's experience (Clarke, 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), "IPA research attempts to understand other people's relationship to the world are necessarily *interpretive* and will focus on their attempts to make *meaning* out of their activities and to the things happening to them" (p. 21).

Hermeneutics. The second major influence on IPA is derived from hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutic interpretation involves the study of text with an emphasis on the multiple meanings within a text and the researcher's knowledge of the text's subject matter (Flick, 2014). IPA is an interpretive phenomenological approach, and in IPA research the interpretation of the text is iterative and adds additional value. The added value may come from the systematic and detailed

analysis of the text itself or from connections which emerge through oversight of a large data set that allows for the development of the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, known as the "hermeneutical circle" (Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), "IPA is concerned with examining how a phenomenon appears, and the analyst (researcher) is implicated in facilitating and making sense of this appearance" (p. 28). In IPA, it is acknowledged that the researcher's own experiences, values, and prior understandings influence the process and are necessary for interpreting and making sense of the participant's experience (Clarke, 2009).

Idiography. The third major influence on IPA is derived from idiography, a focus on the particular (Smith et al., 2009). In IPA, there is a commitment to including the depth of analysis, and a commitment to understanding how the particular phenomenon is understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The focus is a detailed examination of participants' lived experience expressed in their terms, in their context, with personal perspectives. Data analysis is strongly idiographic, starting with a detailed review of a single participant until reaching some degree of closure, then moving to a detailed review of the next participant, followed by a cross-participant analysis that explores convergence and divergence (Smith, 2004).

IPA is an inductive process with a focus on the interpretation of meaning that is concerned with generating rich and detailed descriptions of how individuals experience a phenomenon and how they make sense of those experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The inductive process is concerned with exploring, investigating, examining, and eliciting rich descriptions from these individuals who have experienced a phenomenon. In IPA research, the researcher plays an active role in the process (Smith &

Eatough, 2006). Through understanding and interpreting the lived experience, the researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of their experience, and this inductive interpretation approach describes the double hermeneutic process, or dual interpretation process involving both participant and researcher (Gee, 2011).

IPA was employing to understand the particular instances of the lived experience of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders. The method allowed for insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders make sense of (i.e., thoughts, feelings, and experiences) succession planning within their organizations, addressing the primary goal of the study.

Research Context

The context of this study focused on nonprofit organizations located throughout New York State although the proposed context was throughout the United States. The nonprofit organizations included public charities, specifically community-based organizations. Community-based nonprofit organizations work at the local level to improve the lives of residents within a community and provide a variety of human, social, and educational services. The study included nonprofit organizations identified as community-based organizations that meet local human community needs within the community that the organizations reside. With the purpose of identifying nonprofit organizations that have the capacity to engage in succession planning, only nonprofit organizations with greater than five employees were selected.

Determining the context for this IPA study was based on a purposeful sampling process consistent with IPA. IPA aims to find a closely defined group of participants for whom the research question will have relevance and personal significance (Smith &

Osborn, 2003). The study included a homogenous sample. Nonprofit organizations were identified based on the existence of a founding executive leader who was at the time of the study in the executive leadership position within the organization.

Research Participants

The foundation of IPA includes a homogenous sample of individuals with shared experiences of the phenomenon of interest who can inform the study (Clarke, 2009). The population for this study was seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identified as engaging in the phenomenon of interest – succession planning. Sampling in IPA requires a relatively small sample size that gives full appreciation to each participant's account of their experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Sampling must be theoretically consistent with the qualitative paradigm and participants are selected on the basis that they can provide a perspective on the phenomena under study (Smith & Eatough, 2006).

Participant recruitment. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. John Fisher College, identification of potential research participants commenced. A purposeful sample of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders from nonprofit organizations in New York State was selected. Identification of participants originated from the researcher's professional network of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders from across the United States. However, no participants were selected from outside of New York State. Participant recruitment occurred in four phases and is summarized in the Participant Recruitment Matrix (Table 3.1). Phase 1 included contacting nonprofit organization founding executive leaders via an e-mail message in the researcher's close professional network. Phase 2 included

connecting with professional contacts from local New York State and national

foundations and requesting the professional contacts send the request for research

participants to nonprofit organization founding executive leaders in their professional

networks. Phase 3 included contacting community foundations and United Way

organizations in New York State. Phase 4 included contacting community foundations

and United Way organizations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Washington, DC,

Massachusetts, Virginia, and Maryland.

Table 3.1

Participant Recruitment Matrix

Phase	Description of Phase	Contact	Response
Phase 1.0	Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders in the researcher's close professional network.	5	4
Phase 2.1	The researcher's existing professional contacts from local New York State and national foundations (community experts).	23	9
Phase 2.2	Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders suggested by Phase 2.1 participants.	8	5
Phase 3.1	Community foundations and United Way organizations in New York State.	30	12
Phase 3.2	Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders suggested by Phase 3.1 participants.	15	10
Phase 4.1	Select community foundations and United Way organizations in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Washington, DC, Massachusetts, Virginia, and Maryland.	25	8
Phase 4.2	Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders suggested by Phase 4.1 participants.	10	2

A letter of introduction (Appendix A) to the community foundations and United Way organizations (who were considered community experts) was sent via e-mail. A letter of introduction (Appendix B) was also sent via e-mail to potential study participants. Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who indicated an interest in the study received a letter of participant selection (Appendix C) via e-mail. Consistent with IPA research, the study sought to provide a general account of a small homogeneous sample, concentrating more on the depth, rather than the breadth of eligible participants who have experienced the phenomenon and could make sense of that experience (Smith et al., 2009).

Participant selection. Consistent with IPA research, purposeful sampling was utilized (Smith et al., 2009). Several participant selection criteria guided participant selection. Participants were individuals who had founded a nonprofit organization that at the time of participant selection had at least five employees. Participants were in the position of executive leader on the date of participant selection. Participants were individuals who had direct experience of the phenomenon of interest. Participants self-identified as having engaged in (or who currently engage in) succession planning.

Succession planning is a deliberate and systematic effort to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, develop and retain intellectual capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement (Rothwell, 2005). Participants were also individuals with an intense interest in understanding the nature and meaning of the phenomenon of interest. Individuals selected had a willingness to participate in an in-person interview and follow-up e-mail or phone communication. Participants were also selected upon

confirmation of their agreement to have the interview recorded and allow for publishing of data in a dissertation and other publications.

Participant overview. Sample size should be sufficient to provide meaningful observation of similarities and differences, but not so many that the amount of data generated is overwhelming (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) suggest a sample size of between three and six participants, Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest a sample size of five or six participants, while Smith and Eatough (2006) propose a sample size of six to eight for doctorate candidates. The study included a series of interviews with seven participants who were selected based on their potential to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and the research problem.

Participants selected received a letter of participant selection (Appendix D) via e-mail with attachments that included an informational form (Appendix E), a letter of participation (Appendix F) outlining the study with details of the interview, an informed consent form (Appendix G), and the demographic profile questionnaire (Appendix H). The demographic profile questionnaire provided an understanding of the nonprofit organization founding executive leaders' organizational context and confirmed participant selection criteria were met. All study participants completed the demographic questionnaire via e-mail.

Participant rights. In accordance with the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board and appropriate ethical guidelines for ensuring the confidentiality of participants (Mertens & Wilson, 2012), participants all have fictitious names to respect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants involved. The participants and the names of the nonprofit organizations in which the study takes place were assigned

pseudonyms by the participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants could have withdrawn their participation in the study at any point by simply informing the researcher that they no longer wished to participate. There were no repercussions for withdrawing from the study.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA is best suited for data collection methods that allow for rich, detailed, first-person accounts of experiences, such as interviews and diaries. Several instruments were used for gathering data, including a demographic questionnaire, interviews, and a research notebook was used for methodological insights, field notes, research memos and as a codebook. The researcher is also a key instrument in data collection (Flick, 2014), and with the interpretive nature of IPA, the researcher's role is central (Smith & Osborn, 2003). According to Clarke (2009),

> It is this emphasis on the interpretation that moves the IPA researcher away from simply describing the individual's (participant's) experience towards an understanding of the phenomenon that is context specific and inclusive of both the individual (participant) and the researcher. (p. 38)

The participant and the researcher both play essential roles in understanding the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest examined.

Demographic questionnaire. Before the face-to-face interviews, the demographic questionnaire was used to capture demographic information about study participants and their organizations. Information collected via an e-mailed document provided additional contextual insights about the participants and their organizations.

Interviews. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from study participants. The interviews included a set of prepared, open-ended questions (Appendix I) that guided the interview process. Per Flick (2014), the interview guide should be flexible and leave room for the interviewee's perspective and topics in addition to the questions. In-depth interviews provide an opportunity for a first-person account of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Polkinghorne (1989) stated that the face-to-face interaction of an in-person interview allows the researcher to help the subject move toward non-theoretical descriptions that accurately reflect the experience. Participants were asked to participate in a follow-up interview via phone or e-mail if clarification and further understanding was required of the data collected. One in-person and one e-mail follow-up communication occurred.

As recommended by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), the interview questions were pilot tested to determine if there were flaws or weaknesses in the instrument design and to allow for necessary revisions before the implementation of the study. The initial interview questions were revised through pilot testing of the interview questions with one volunteer participant who met the participant selection criteria.

Research notebook. A research notebook was used to capture field notes, reflective memos, and as a data analysis "audit trail." The researcher used Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software tool, to store information created by the researcher during the data collection, data analysis, and writing process. The memos are a way of capturing the researcher's thinking throughout the entire research process including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing. Field notes were completed directly following each interview to capture any thoughts or questions that surfaced. Consistent

with IPA research, the researcher took field notes immediately following the interview to help contextualize the interview material and as a means of reflecting upon the researcher's impressions of the interaction with participants (Smith et al., 2009).

Shinebourne (2011) states that a researcher's understanding of a participant's experience is through the researcher's own "fore-conception" and pre-understandings of the context and phenomenon. Reflexivity is an essential and central part of IPA in ensuring that the researcher remains aware of their own experience and prior understandings and the influence these factors have on data analysis (Clarke, 2009).

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

There is not a single prescribed method for analysis in IPA research, but rather an analytical focus on understanding how the participants make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA researchers must approach their data by concentrating on understanding participants' world and experiences, and the development of an interpretive analysis which positions the participants' description in a broader social, cultural, or theoretical context (Larkin et al., 2006). Data analysis involved several common processes outlined below using a heuristic framework for analysis, derived from many of the processes, principles, and strategies typically employed by IPA researchers. According to Smith et al. (2009),

> Although the primary concern of IPA is the lived experience of the participants and the meaning which the participant makes of that lived experience, the end result is always an account of how the analyst (researcher) thinks the participant is thinking – this is the double hermeneutic. (p. 80)

For the novice researcher new to hermeneutic phenomenology, Smith et al. (2009) provide the following guide to conducting IPA analysis.

Transcription. IPA requires a verbatim record of audio data collected during the interview process including pauses and emotional expressions (Smith et al., 2009). All interviews were transcribed word-by-word by a professional transcriptionist. Transcripts were subjected to a systematic process of reflection, identification, description, clarification, interpretation, and contextualization consistent with IPA data analysis and within the hermeneutic framework (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011). The researcher used Atlas.ti and a research notebook to organize the transcript data.

Data analysis involved several common processes consistent with an IPA study. Table 3.2 specifies the different stages of analysis completed on the seven transcribed interviews and the IPA data analysis worksheet (Appendix K) details the process taken for the first four stages of data analysis.

Reading and rereading. The initial stage of an IPA analysis involves selecting a single participant transcript and "immersing oneself in the original data" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). Several close, detailed reads and rereads of the transcribed data occurred. Smith et al. (2009) recommend that the researcher record the initial and most striking observations about the transcript in the research notebook in order to suspend the researcher's first impressions, in a process called bracketing.

Initial noting. The second level of analysis involves examining the semantic content and language on a very exploratory level (Smith et al., 2009). Stage two of IPA analysis is the initial note-taking and free textual analysis, during which there are "no rules about what is commented upon and there is no requirement" (Smith et al., 2009, p.

83). Initial noting does not require text be broken into meaning units; the purpose is to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data.

Smith et al. (2009) stated that initial noting includes descriptive comments, linguistic comments, conceptual comments, and deconstruction. Descriptive comments focus on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the discussion within the transcript including keywords, phrases, or explanations which the participant has used (Smith et al., 2009). The transcripts were read closely for key objects, events, and experiences in the participant's world. Linguistic comments focus on exploring the specific use of language by the participant (Smith et al., 2009). The transcripts were read closely for how they reflected the content and meaning including metaphors and repetition. Conceptual comments focus on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (Smith et al., 2009). The transcripts were read closely for interesting features of a participant's account of their experience as well as a focus on the participant's understanding of their experience. Deconstruction, strategies to de-contextualize the words and meanings, was not used.

Developing emergent themes. The third stage of IPA analysis includes looking at the data and developing emergent themes (codes). Themes are expressed as phrases that speak to the essence of the related data and represent not only the participant's original words and thoughts but also the researcher's interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Data analysis during this stage of IPA involved two levels of coding. Data analysis began with in vivo coding, followed by initial coding, and finally concept coding during the first level of coding. Data analysis then included axial coding and focused coding. It is

important to reiterate that the data analysis process was not intended to be linear, but rather emergent and fluid.

In vivo coding is verbatim coding from transcript text. In vivo coding is appropriate for most qualitative studies, particularly for beginning researchers and studies that seek to prioritize and honor the participant's voice (Saldana, 2016). Initial coding breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts and allowing for the researcher to reflect deeply on the content and nuances fo the data (Saldana, 2016). Concept coding assigns a macro-level meaning to data (Saldana, 2016). Concept codes are words or short phrases that symbolically represent a suggested meaning broader than a single item or action (Saldana, 2016). All codes during the first level of coding are tentative and provisional (Saldana, 2016).

Axial coding was used during second level coding. Axial coding aims to link subcategories and specifies the properties and dimensions of the category (Saldana, 2016). The process includes the identification of dominant codes and less dominant codes. Focused coding searches for the most frequent or significant codes to develop categories in the data (Saldana, 2016). All codes during the second level of coding reorganize and condense the initial analytic details.

Identification of connections. Next, the emergent themes (codes) are reviewed for patterns (abstraction), superordinate status (subsumption), oppositional relationships (polarization), contextualization, the frequency (numeration), and specific interplay (function) (Smith et al., 2009). Abstraction is a basic form of identifying patterns between emergent themes (codes) (Smith et al., 2009). Subsumption is the analytical process of

bringing together a series of themes (codes) leading to the development of a superordinate theme.

Polarization, examination of the transcript for oppositional relationships, was also completed. Contextualization, looking at the connections between emergent themes to identify the narrative elements was not undertaken. Also completed was numeration, the examination of the frequency with which a theme (code). Function, the interplay of meanings illustrated by their positive and negative presentation involved interpretation beyond what the participant presented regarding their meaning.

Clusters were given a descriptive label which conveys the conceptual nature of the themes therein. Some themes may be dropped because either they do not fit well with the emerging structure, or have a weak evidential base (Smith et al., 2009). Subthemes were nested within a single superordinate theme. Superordinate themes are defined by the interactive process of moving back and forth between various analytic stages, ensuring the integrity of participant words are preserved (Smith et al., 2009).

Analysis sequencing. Once the transcript from a single participant was analyzed the transcripts from each of the subsequent participants were analyzed sequentially. During this phase of data analysis, the researcher repeats the initial four steps and is cognizant of treating the transcripts from each new participant as separate from the prior analysis (Smith et al., 2009). A reflective memo was produced at the end of each participant's analysis to provide closure before moving on to the next participant.

Identification of patterns. The last stage of analysis included looking for patterns across all participant data. The goal during this stage of IPA analysis was to

provide a close textual reading of the participant's account, moving between description and different levels of interpretation, across participant transcripts (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 3.2

Stages of Data Analysis

Stage	Level of Analysis	Description of Analysis
Stage One	Reading and rereading the transcript	Three close detailed reads and rereads of the transcribed data occurred. Initial and most striking observations about the transcript were noted in the research notebook.
Stage Two	Initial noting	Descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments were noted in the research notebook.
Stage Three	Developing emergent themes (codes)	Level one coding included In vivo coding, initial coding, and concept coding. Level two coding included axial coding and focused coding.
Stage Four	Identification of connections	Abstraction, subsumption, polarization, numeration, and function were undertaken.
Stage Five	Analysis sequencing	Once the transcript from a single participant was analyzed the transcripts from each of the subsequent participants were analyzed sequentially.
Stage Six	Identification of patterns	Looking for patterns across all participant data including emerging themes and superordinate themes. Moving from the part to the whole and then back to the particular.

Hermeneutical circle. A fundamental tenet of IPA data analysis is the hermeneutical circle. The method involves an iterative process during which the researcher moves through different ways of thinking about the data that includes "the

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part" and "the whole" and often involves a shift in thinking and meaning (Smith et al., 2009, p. 9). The inductive process involves working with the themes and the data set until a final set of themes are established, while the deductive stage of data analysis includes looking back at the data and considering the themes to determine if more evidence can support each theme (Creswell, 2014). Although the primary concern of IPA is the lived experience of the participants and the meaning which the participant assigns to that lived experience, the result is always an account of how the researcher thinks the participant is thinking, referred to as double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2009).

Analytic memos. Analytical memo writing was utilized to capture thoughts, questions, and initial ideas that surfaced throughout the data analysis process. According to Saldana (2016) researcher reflexivity on the data, thinking critically about the process, and what the researcher sees, provides valuable content for analytic memos. Recording details of the nature and origin of any emerging interpretations through memo writing provides a clear pathway for interpretation due to the researcher's central role of interpretation in IPA (Vicary, Young, & Hicks, 2017). Reflexivity is an essential and central part of IPA in ensuring that the researcher remains aware of their own experience and pre-understandings and their influence on data analysis (Clarke, 2009).

Triangulation. Triangulation can be completed by data source, method, researcher, theory, and by data type (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 1994). For this study, triangulation of data was completed from the demographic questionnaire, interviews, and documents provided by participants.

Member checks. Member checks are a strategy to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings and provide an opportunity to share data collected with participants in

order to obtain feedback on the accuracy of the data collected (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

Two research participants were asked during a follow-up interview via phone or e-mail to

provide feedback to ensure that the researcher had an accurate understanding of what the

participant had shared. Member checks also occurred during the interview process as the

researcher asked for clarification and confirmation of accuracy of statements provided by

participants.

Peer debriefing. The study utilized a peer debriefing strategy with two

professionals with whom the researcher discussed the study throughout the process

including at the beginning, during the middle, and at the end of the data collection and

analysis process. The peers were knowledgeable about the phenomenon but were not

directly involved in the study.

Trustworthiness. Essential to the standard of quality of quantitative research

conducted within the naturalistic inquiry paradigm is the establishment of trustworthiness

(Guba, 1981; Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). According to Guba (1981), naturalistic

treatment of trustworthiness can be affected by factor patterning, situational uniqueness,

instrumental changes and investigator predilections. To address these factors, qualitative

researchers have a responsibility to take actions that seek to provide credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability in their work (Guba, 1981; Morrow,

2005; Shenton, 2004).

Credibility. Credibility consists of internal consistency through rigor in the

research process and can be achieved through several methods, in ways that are

"congruent with reality" (Shenton, 2004). An attempt is made to ensure a rigorous

process is articulated at the onset and followed throughout the research process (Morrow,

2005). This study adhered to the principle of credibility by the researcher developing a familiarity with the culture of the participating individuals and organizations. This study also included triangulation of data, use of iterative questioning, use of peer review, and capturing the researcher's reflective commentary. Use of member checking, providing thick descriptions of the phenomenon of interest, and examining previous research findings were also completed.

  Transferability. Transferability is achieved if the reader can relate the findings to their context through the researcher providing sufficient contextual information about the study site and participants and other contextual factors (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004). The inclusion of the participant criterion, sample size, data collection method, and analysis process provide the reader with the context of the study and contribute to the transferability (Shenton, 2004). It is also important that the researcher provide sufficient information about the self (researcher as an instrument) and the researcher-participant relationship (Morrow, 2005). This study adhered to the principle of transferability through the inclusion of background data to establish the context for this study, and providing a detailed description of the phenomenon of interest to allow for comparison.

  Dependability. To achieve dependability, processes within a study should be reported in detail, allowing for future researchers to replicate the study (Shenton, 2004). Specifically, the research design and implementation, the operational details of data gathering, and the reflective evaluation of the effectiveness of the process of inquiry (Shenton, 2004). This study adhered to the principle of dependability by providing an in-depth methodological description, allowing for the study to be repeated.

Confirmability. The researcher must take steps to ensure that the study's findings are the result of the study participants' experiences and not the preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). The integrity of the findings lies in the reader's ability to tie the findings back to the data and analytical process (Morrow, 2005). A key component of the process to ensure confirmability is a clear audit trail including both (a) diagramming how the data was gathered, processed, and leads to the recommendations, and (b) diagramming how the concepts in the research questions give rise to the activities that are followed throughout the duration of the study (Shenton, 2004). This study adhered to the principle of conformability through triangulation of data, acknowledgment of the researcher's beliefs and assumptions, recognition of shortcomings in the study method, and an audit trail of decisions on data.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the qualitative method of inquiry that was used to study succession planning, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study of how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign meaning to their experience with succession planning. An overview of IPA design was presented, as well as research context, participants, instruments, and the data analysis process.

In the next chapter, the study findings of the study are presented. In the final chapter, implications of the findings and recommendations are shared. The final chapter will also summarize the study, reiterate the significance of the study, discuss limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Most nonprofit organizations face a succession of leadership during the life of the organization. Grusky (1960) argued that succession is a phenomenon that all organizations will experience if the organization is to exist past the founding executive. Succession planning is understood to be an essential process in nonprofit organizations and vital to organizational sustainability; however, succession planning is absent in many nonprofit organizations (Rothwell, 2005).

The literature supports that there is an acknowledged need for succession planning, but planning in most nonprofit organizations is still nonexistent. While there is growing research on succession planning in the nonprofit sector, there is no existing literature on the specific experiences of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who are engaging in succession planning within their organizations.

This chapter presents an analysis of the qualitative data gathered through interviews with seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to explore the lived experience of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders and the meaning that they assigned to their experience with succession planning.

Research Question

The research goal was to gain insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experience succession planning. The following research question

guided the study: What meaning do nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning? A qualitative inquiry using IPA was used after various methodological approaches were explored and based on the research question noted above.

The primary goal of IPA is to investigate and uncover how an individual makes sense of their experiences including major transitions in their life or significant decisions (Larkin et al., 2006). An IPA approach provided detailed descriptions of how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experienced succession planning in the organizations they created.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section provides an overview of the research context and participant selection. The data collection process followed, and the data analysis method used are also discussed. The results of the data analysis, including the identification of themes that emerged, are described and supported.

Research context. The context for this study included nonprofit organizations located throughout New York State. The nonprofit organizations included public charities, specifically community-based organizations. Table 4.1 provides an overview of organizational characteristics of study participants. Determining the context for this IPA study was based on a purposeful sampling process consistent with IPA. IPA aims to find a closely defined group of participants for whom the research question will have relevance and personal significance (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Table 4.1

Organizational Characteristics

Name (Pseudonym)	Budget	Staff Size	Board of Directors Size	Population Served
P1: Seeds of Plenty	$500K	11	11	Urban
P2: Rural Services	$150K	8	8	Rural
P3: Butterfly Inc.	$100K	9	14	Urban, Rural, Suburban
P4: Empower Community Resources	$9M	40	20	Urban
P5: Urban Resilience	$350K	10	6	Urban
P6: Community of Warriors	$500K	15	10	National
P7: ROC Solid	$13M	500+	4	National

Participant selection. The foundation of IPA includes a homogenous sample of individuals with shared experiences of the phenomenon of interest who can inform the study (Clarke, 2009). The participants for this study were seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identified as engaging in the phenomenon of interest, succession planning. Table 4.2 provides an overview of study participants demographic information. In-person interviews were conducted with the founding executive leaders at the leaders' places of business (n=6) or home (n=1).

Table 4.2

Participants Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Years at Organization	Highest Degree Earned
P1: Christine	F	67	24	High School
P2: Roger	M	71	5	PhD
P3: Mary	F	84	40	Bachelor
P4: Paul	M	61	20	Juris Doctor
P5: Minerva	F	50	15	Bachelor
P6: Athena	F	56	15	High School
P7: Spike	M	73	50	Master

Data analysis. Consistent with IPA research, data analysis included reading and rereading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, identification of connections, analysis sequencing, and identification of patterns of transcribed data. The data analysis process was iterative and involved a focus on both the details of each participants' experience of the phenomenon and the shared experiences of the phenomenon by study participants.

Findings. Table 4.4 outlines the six superordinate themes identified during the identification of patterns. The themes were: (a) the creation and sustainability of the organization was driven by things greater than them, (b) there was an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the organizational identity, (c) there was a desire and belief that the organization should and will continue to exist past their tenure

as executive leader, (d) there was a focus on the future, (e) there was an importance to institutionalize the culture of their organizations, and (f) there was an internal reconciliation between the connection to the organization founded and the work of establishing separation from the organization. Also, a varied definition of succession planning emerged from study participants that provided a foundation for how each participant understood the research question: What meaning do nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning?

Defining succession planning. The population for this study were seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identified as engaging in the phenomenon of interest, succession planning, based on a definition provided by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, including participant selection, succession planning was defined by the researcher as, "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (Rothwell, 2005, p. 10).

The examination of findings begins with each participant's definition of succession planning. Because it can be defined in many ways, it was essential to understand how each participant defined succession planning. During the interview, participants shared their particular definition of succession planning. The meaning that participants assigned to their experience is influenced by their particular definition of succession planning.

Christine stated that "succession planning to me means somebody to be the executive director, and me not to be. Me to be the director of mission and vision.

Basically, it's just somebody else to be the executive director." For Christine, succession planning was the plan for her to transition out of the role of executive leader. Christine intended to stay involved with Seeds of Plenty as the person who was responsible for keeping the mission and the common purpose of the organization central to how the organization operated.

When Mary was asked what succession planning meant to her, she stated she had prepared for the question.

> I went right to my little succession file [when I knew I was going to participate in this study]. I was so proud of myself – now we're in the process of updating it [written succession plan from 2014]. We do have a succession plan, especially if all of a sudden, I drop dead, or was in an accident or something. We have that. But that's only a piece, that's, kind of the practical, what happens so things keep going. No [we do not have a succession plan] for finding somebody [for the executive director role] . . . and it's not added to the board description. (Mary)

Mary sought validation for having a written succession plan. Butterfly Inc. had a succession plan consistent with an emergency succession plan although it was 3 years old. Mary acknowledged that there was no succession plan for her transition. Mary made a point of stating that she had brought up succession planning for her transition with the board of directors, however, the topic was not added to the description of board responsibilities. Mary implied that succession planning for her transition should be a board responsibility, but throughout the interview, she indicated her intention to be a decision maker in the selection of her successor.

Roger defined succession planning as a long-term planning process that took time to execute. The definition of succession planning provided by Roger was consistent with the definition of succession planning used by the researcher.

> Succession planning means that the pieces have to be in place. I see it as a long-term process. In other words, you're not going to decide . . . give two weeks' notice. So, the pieces have to be in place, and people's thinking has to be in place. The board has talked about succession planning. I've made it clear, and others have brought it up, so the board's been really good about it. They [the board] has said "Roger's not going to be here forever. We need to keep that in mind, and we need to, as we move forward, plan for it." So, for what it means to me, is an intentional planning process. (Roger)

For Roger, succession planning was a logical, intentional process that took time and involved planning for the future with appropriate operational systems and behaviors. There was an importance stressed to having "pieces in place" as well as "thinking in place," and there was an acknowledgment that this type of work takes time.

The definition of succession planning provided by Paul was also consistent with the definition of succession planning used by the researcher. For Paul, succession planning was both operational and behavioral at Empower Community Resources.

> You need both of them [operational and behavioral]. At Empower Community Resources we have a [written] succession plan in place, but given the type of organization that we are, we should have a succession plan that would be a model for other organizations. (Paul)

Paul also shared that funders and community partners of Empower Community Resources had an expectation that the organization had a successor or potential successors currently on the organization's staff. However, Paul did not feel that a successor was on staff although he had a strong vision for how the identification of a successor might occur.

> Given how complex our organization has become there is an expectation that the next [executive director is here] . . . there is kind of two ways we need to go with this…I guess that the next leader would come from outside the organization or if we have it in the budget, that under my leadership we sort of select who the next leader is, get them in here and then begin grooming them over a 4 or 5 year period (Paul).

Paul proposed two scenarios for selection of an outside successor. For Paul, the desired intention was to secure funding for hiring a successor and under Paul's leadership, "grooming" the individual over the next several years.

> When Minerva was asked what succession planning meant to her, she began by noting the broader context of the work. "If you're not thinking about succession planning you've lost sight of the original reason why you're doing what you're doing. It's too much about you. Which could be why it started to begin with" (Minerva). For Minerva, the founder was central to defining what succession planning was and when it occurred. Minerva implied that the creation of a nonprofit organization is because of the founder's personal needs and a community need. If succession planning was not happening, her perception was that the founder may be too focused on themselves and may have lost sight of the community need for the work of the organization.

Minerva then stated that the essence of succession planning "is about sustainability, and getting it out of myself and getting other people around it – transferring institutional knowledge" (Minerva). Her statement further reinforces her belief that the founder was central to succession planning at Urban Resilience. For Minerva, succession planning was about sustainability and the transfer of organizational knowledge from her to others. The definition of succession planning provided by Minerva was consistent with the definition of succession planning used by the researcher.

Athena shared her definition of succession planning that encompassed may pieces and periods of time.

> From a founder's perspective, I think succession planning means your strategy around the founder, moving on. Whether it is to serve as a consultant for a period of time or to completely separate themselves from the organization. It is also a written plan that has guidelines for a planned transition, an emergency transition. A focus from the human resources side on job descriptions and risk management. When we think about making decisions integrating that thinking about the future into everyday business decisions. So, there may not be the use of a more structured plan, but it's part of the culture that sort of trickles down. We want people to honor the philosophy, the culture, and the mission, but we don't want to box them in, by any means. (Athena)

For Athena, succession planning was both operational through the existence of written succession plans and human resource processes, as well as behavioral through the culture of Community of Warriors. The definition of succession planning provided by Athena was also consistent with the definition of succession planning used by the researcher.

When Spike spoke about his definition of succession planning, he acknowledged that there could be different definitions and interpretations of the definition of succession planning.

> Succession planning in my mind doesn't equate with me having to say, "I want to be out of here by x amount of days." But, it does mean that to a lot of other people. Succession planning isn't waiting for somebody to tell you that it's time to go. I think you have to listen to messages that are both internal and external about that [transitioning]. It means setting a timetable for a transition; you have to have a beginning, you have to have an end to it [succession planning]. So, the sign of succession has to be clarity, and it has to be transparency. The "glide path" that we put in place is a definition of succession planning for me, and I think I'm learning it has to be finite. (Spike)

For Spike, succession planning was a time-limited process with a timeline and activities stated, however, he expressed resistance to declaring the start and end dates in his own experience. The definition of succession planning provided by Spike is consistent with the definition of succession planning as departure-defined succession planning and includes a clear timeline and activities that lead to the transition of the current executive leader.

Understanding each participants' definition of succession planning sets the foundation for understanding the meaning that each participant assigned to their experience with succession planning. All seven participants self-identified as engaging in succession planning, however, each participants' definition of succession planning was very different as summarized in Table 4.3. There are some similarities in the definitions

provided by participants, but no singular definition of succession planning emerged from the study.

Table 4.3

Summary of Participant Definitions of Succession Planning

Name (Pseudonym)	Participant definition of succession planning by type
P1: Christine	Engaged in departure-defined succession planning.
P2: Roger	Existence of emergency succession plan and long-term succession planning. Thinking about departure-defined succession planning.
P3: Mary	Existence of emergency succession plan. Desire for departure-defined succession plan.
P4: Paul	Existence of emergency succession plan and long-term succession planning. Thinking about departure-defined succession planning.
P5: Minerva	Existence of long-term succession planning. Engaged in departure-defined succession planning.
P6: Athena	Existence of emergency succession plan and long-term succession planning.
P7: Spike	Existence of emergency succession plan and departure-defined succession planning.

Understanding each participants' definition of succession planning provided context for examining the six superordinate themes that emerged from the study. The six themes, outlined in Table 4.4 and discussed in detail in the next section, represent the unique meaning that participants assign to succession planning as well as the shared experiences across participants.

Table 4.4

Summary of Superordinate Themes

Superordinate Themes	Description
Theme 1: Greater than yourself	There was a purpose greater than the founder. The creation and existence of the organization are not about them.
Theme 2: Interdependent identities	There was an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the organizational identity.
Theme 3: Organization living on	There was the realization by the founder that the organization could and should live on beyond their tenure as executive leader. The work of the organization was too critical to let die with the founder.
Theme 4: Focus on the future	There was a focus on the future of the organization in both thoughts and actions.
Theme 5: Institutionalize the culture	There was an importance for participants to institutionalize the culture of their organizations. There was a desire to see evidence of demonstrated passion for the mission.
Theme 6: Internal reconciliation	There was an internal reconciliation between the connection to the organization founded and the work of establishing separation from the organization.

Theme 1: greater than yourself. This section examines theme 1: Greater than yourself. All the study participants indicated in some way that the existence of the organization was "not about them" as they explored their experience with succession planning. Participants expressed that there was a purpose greater than themselves influencing their thinking and actions. Two prominent beliefs emerged from the interviews and influenced their thinking about their organizations and their work, as

being greater than themselves as individuals. Within this context, five participants spoke about the influence of faith on the creation and continuation of their organizations, while three participants expressed a lack of ego.

Belief in faith. Five of the seven participants attributed the influence of faith on the creation and work of the organization. The meaning that they assigned to succession planning was influenced by something greater, guided by faith. For Christine, the work of Seeds of Plenty was heavily influenced by faith.

> There were a lot of signs, miracles, that kept telling us that this is what we were to do. From the beginning, there was just miracle after miracle. It is definitely God led. We went through strategic planning and then things just sort of came out of that, and then we were invited to be part of the Strive Program, and that's focusing on succession planning. So, it just seems like the parts were coming together and that it's meant to be. (Christine)

Christine provided examples of how Seeds of Plenty received affirmations of the work and direction the organization was going in through signs and miracles. Faith played an important role in how the organization moved forward.

Roger was also acutely aware of a greater influence on Rural Services, and he was intentional about keeping these experiences present in his thinking and actions.

> It's not all for me; there's something bigger going on here than just me. I could hardly ignore that. I keep coming back to the idea that what has happened here is far bigger than any one of us. And as long as we keep that in mind, I think we'll be okay. If it starts to become focused on us, or our agenda, that's not good. (Roger)

Roger detailed his recollection of the signs he experienced and continued to keep present in the work of Rural Services.

For Spike, the work of ROC Solid was a calling, and the circumstances that created the awareness of the need for ROC Solid was led by something more profound than chance.

> One word to describe it is following a calling and filling that calling. And it was a calling when I describe how I ended up in South Carolina where this work began. I was with people that I had absolutely no affiliation with. A liberal Jewish New York City intellectual who had been down [at college] in 1964 and convinced me to go down [to South Carolina] in 1965. The likelihood of that happening logically is just not possible. That's where following the calling is. So that we've tried to watch . . . that you're hearing messages or you're feeling some sense of presence that is suggesting you might want to think about this or that. (Spike)

The importance of following a calling and filling that calling had been present throughout Spike's tenure at ROC Solid.

Athena shared two specific examples of the influence that her faith had on the creation and continuation of Community of Warriors. The first story highlighted how faith brought a special person to Athena and Community of Warriors.

> I also feel like faith has been the common thread through all of this. I had let all of the staff go because I had no money to pay them. A woman named Lisa sent me an email, "I run a support group at my church, I'd love to be involved, I've struggled." She ends up coming to volunteer part-time, and she's so great at what she does as far as the administrative piece. I'm like, "Lisa, I can't do this without,

can you just like quit your job?" And she said, "Well, I could, but my husband is saying I need to make X amount of money." Just weeks later she calls me and she said, "You're never going to believe this." Her husband, John, was going through an old family photo album. Inside the pages of the photo album was $25,000. So, she quit her job and came to work for me. So, I always think that things were starting to unfold. (Athena)

Athena's second story highlighted how faith also brought a special person to Athena and Community of Warriors, as well as financial support for the organization.

Then I receive a phone call and the woman said, "An actor has an honorarium for you, and I just need to get some information." And she's like, "Uh, I can't believe I didn't lead with that, it's $20,000." So, I start sobbing on the phone. And so, part of that is so critical to the story. Because of all of these blessings, I kept thinking, I can't not do this. Faith is guiding this. (Athena)

In the early years of Community of Warriors, Athena felt compelled to continue the work of Community of Warriors as these "blessings" happened even though she felt unsure at times of how the organization would sustain itself.

For Mary, the influence of faith on the organization and succession planning was different from other participants. She stated, "do you know who I'm giving this whole problem [succession planning] to? God. I'll do my best, but he's gotten us this far. You don't have to put this in your report, but it's up to God."

For five participants, there was a belief that the work and the continuation of their organizations were influenced by their belief in faith. Their work was greater than

themselves, and they continued to receive affirmation of the direction and decisions they made regarding their organizations.

Lack of ego. Three of the seven participants explicitly spoke about their personal identity and stated that the organization was not created, nor existed for, their ego. Roger shared that his thinking about his experience with succession planning was influenced by prior experiences, reading, and being uncomfortable with the attention.

> I'd seen examples of poor succession planning, so someplace in the back of my mind, I remembered that. Also, I received a leadership book and it talked about leadership and what a good leader was, and I was really impressed when they talked about allowing people to succeed. From this book, I was aware that good leaders were the ones that delegated and because of that, businesses, in that case, didn't collapse when the founder or, this bigwig, died, left or retired. I really took that to heart. I thought, why would you jeopardize something that you've created, or helped create by not doing the kind of planning that's needed? I think a lot of it is ego. I don't think I have a huge ego. It's not about me, you know? I try not to draw attention to myself, unfortunately, God has given me some gifts that put me in a position where there is attention, and I'm really uncomfortable with that. I think that helps with this whole process [succession planning] you know . . . there are other people that are probably more capable, and have different skills that the organization is going to need in 3 years, or 2 years, or whatever, and I'm fine with that. (Roger)

Paul also shared his discomfort with attention and his preference to work behind the scenes to support the work of Empower Community Resources and the community.

I'm not a person who ever enjoys the spotlight. I was much more comfortable in

the situation where I was sort of the number two person. I was behind the scenes.

I think what this position has done, slowly, because it took us a while to grow, is

helped me confront my demons, personally along those lines. I still don't like it,

but I'm okay with it, but, I really would prefer to be in the background and just do

the work that needs to be done to have the organization and the community

survive and thrive. (Paul)

For Minerva, there was resistance to taking credit for the creation and success of

Urban Resilience. Instead of thinking about herself as innovative, a problem solver, or a

trailblazer, she did not want to own the success of Urban Resilience and her role in that

success.

I'll say to myself, I just kind of make it up as I go. And then, instead of seeing that

as skill, I see that as almost fraudulent, which is kind of sad. That kind of makes

me a fraud that I'm making it up as I go. Shouldn't that make me a maverick? . . .

but see, those are all male words. And even if that's what I'm doing and it keeps

working out well for 25 years, I still don't take credit for it. I still see it as, "Well, I

guess that turned out okay. Thank God." Wow. (Minerva)

Minerva goes on to state that the work of Urban Resilience is not about her and she

compared her approach to another local organization working with youth that she

believed had an agenda that was self-serving.

Here's the challenge, if you're not thinking about succession planning you've lost

sight of the original reason why you're doing what you're doing. It's too much

about you. Which could be why it started to begin with. There is another

organization that's not far from us, and it was a couple who started it. And without

a doubt, we're polar opposites. Their organization is about them and their agenda,

for these children. (Minerva)

Participants' experiences with succession planning were shaped by their beliefs

about the work of the organization being greater than them. Whether lack of ego or a

belief in faith, participants expressed influences that placed them as individuals

secondary to the work of the organizations they created. Participants expressed a calling

to do the work, but ultimately the work was about serving others, not about achievements

of the founder.

As participants shared their experiences with succession planning, the meaning

they assigned was influenced by their belief in their role as creator of the organization.

Although some participants spoke about the work not being about them, two participants

did share their thoughts about the dynamic relationship they had with the organization

and the work. The next section examines these interdependent identities in-depth.

Theme 2: interdependent identities. This section examines theme 2:

interdependent identities. There is an interdependent relationship between the founder's

identity and the organizational identity. At times, there is a clear separation between the

founder's identity and the organization's identity, however, interdependent identities and

codependency can exist. The founder may need the organization as much as the

organization needs the founder. Two of the seven participants spoke in-depth about their

dynamic relationship with the organizations they founded.

Minerva reflected on the profound relationship she had with Urban Resilience.

There was a community need for the services provided by Urban Resilience, however,

Minerva shared that one of the reasons for creating Urban Resilience was her own desire to "stay present" in her own pain and be a part of a community that loved and supported her.

> It's complicated. No one was going to judge me here [at Urban Resilience]. So, it was about me, profoundly about me, but I also truly, truly cared about these kids. And even that, somewhat was about me, because it was all that backed up energy of trying to help myself. Pushed into them. So, there's been this up and down, staying present to their pain and suffering has forced me to stay present to my own as I grow here. People can't figure why I'm still in this, where the stamina comes from and that's because it's been the mutuality of it. And the deeper work of that is, it's the why. (Minerva)

Throughout the interview, Minerva reflected on the relationship she had with Urban Resilience. As previously noted, when discussing the origin of Urban Resilience, Minerva shared the dynamic relationship between herself and the organization. However, when Minerva shared her thoughts on succession planning, she spoke passionately about the work of Urban Resilience being greater than herself. Although the statements may appear contradictory, the differentiating factor is the state of the relationship between Minerva and Urban Resilience. The creation and present states of the relationship include reflections about the interdependent identities, however, Minerva stated that succession planning is about sustainability and the future, an organizational identity greater than herself.

Minerva went on to share the depth of her relationship with Urban Resilience and the layers of their interdependent identities that existed when asked what Urban Resilience meant to her.

At first, it's kind of sad, but it's actually beautiful. Where it's just the power of relationship, the power of faith, hope, and love, the power of the stuff that we all know is the real power. And it's been a love affair ever since I fully come into my own truth and so forth. But I hate any type of accolades because, to me, it's utter bullshit. I'm the one who benefits on all kinds of levels. And, it didn't take me long to understand my profound attraction to the poor was they'll love me no matter what. At the risk of sounding melodramatic, Urban Resilience has saved my life more than once. So, they gave me opportunity. By staying present to their suffering, they helped me stay present to my own. And only when you stay present to your own can you actually heal it. So, I would say, that Urban Resilience has meant opportunity, healing, and I feel like we've grown together. You know, where Urban Resilience is forcing growth in me as a leader and where I'm at in my personal healing is pushing the authenticity and the integrity of Urban Resilience. We are intimately involved. Which is always there. As a leader, your personal journey is your professional impact. (Minerva)

Minerva acknowledged that she and Urban Resilience were "intimately involved" and that the relationship significantly influenced by her own personal journey was reflected in the impact Urban Resilience had in the community.

For Athena as well, the interdependence began at creation. She shared her struggles and identity conflict in the following way.

I think for me, in the beginning, I absolutely needed to do this. I needed

something good to come from something that was so horrific. There was just so

much suffering and all of that. So, it was like I needed to do this. I felt very

selfish. So, whenever anybody would honor me for this work, I'd be like, "I can't

receive this. I can't receive this because I did this out of selfish reasons. I did this

because I needed Joseph to have a support group to go to . . . I did this for my

family." And so, I really struggled with that whole, if anybody really knew why I

did this, it wasn't about serving all of you. It was because this is what I needed. I

really struggled with that. And they honored me with the cover of that magazine.

It was mortifying. I kept trying to talk them out of it at the time. I kept trying to

talk her into doing somebody else. Even in the interview, I kept saying, "You

know, I think this person would be really good for this." Because I felt like I was

not being genuine. And so, I really struggled with all of that. There is a huge cost

to your own identity. And I often say to people, if I knew then what I know now,

would I have done it. We don't have that gift to be able to do that. And if we did,

social change would never occur. I'm grateful that as hard and as challenging as

this is, I'm so unbelievably grateful. (Athena)

Athena expressed a sense of guilt for the accolades and for creating Community of

Warriors to meet a profound need in her family. She believed that the identity of

Community of Warriors was a reflection of the desire she had to work through her

personal struggles. However, at inception a community needs assessment was completed

and there was overwhelming support from families affected by similar experiences.

Athena was not alone in her desire to find an outlet and find community support for the struggles that her family faced because so many families were going through similar experiences. It was Athena who had the courage and entrepreneurial drive to take action and create Community of Warriors. Community of Warriors was a reflection of Athena's strength and resilience as much as it was of her personal desires.

Athena went on to share her experience with separating her identity from the identity of Community of Warriors.

I made a choice, I was really intentional, probably, 7 or 8 years ago, that this wasn't my story. That we needed, it needed, in order for this to sustain itself, in order for this to grow, it could no longer be Athena and her son's story. It had to shift from that. Now, people have no idea who I am, which is great, right? Because before, it was all roads led to me. And we all know that that definitely can't be sustained. But that is a hard thing to do, right? Because you do want to honor the birth of it, under the same hand, I don't want it to be about me. It's time [to no longer be Athena's story]. (Athena)

Athena and Minerva candidly shared their relationship with the organizations they created. Their reflections illustrated how dynamic the relationship with the organizations they founded could be. There is an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the organizational identity. At times, there is a clear separation between the founder's identity and the organization's identity, however, interdependent identities and codependency can exist. The founder may need the organization as much as the organization needs the founder.

Even in circumstances when the founder had self-awareness of the interdependent

identities, there was still a desire for the organization to continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader. There was a belief that the work of the organization was greater than the founder and that the organization had become a community asset. The next section examines how participants reflected on the organizations they created "living on" past their tenure as executive leader.

Theme 3: organization living on. This section examines theme 3: organization living on. There was a desire and a belief by the founders that the organizations they created could and should live on beyond their tenure as executive leaders. Six of the seven participants shared in varying detail their desires and beliefs that their organizations should continue to exist after their tenure as executive leader. Participants shared that the size and breadth of the organizations they founded were more significant than they could have imagined. Participants also shared that the work must continue because of its impact and need in the communities served. Participants believed that mission and purpose of the organization were too important and critically needed by the community to let the organization fail or "die with the founder."

Roger shared that Rural Services is larger in size and community reach than he could have ever anticipated.

Ten years ago, I realized that succession planning was going to have to be more important than I had assumed. If it was a small ministry of a church [I would not have to plan], but this is a regional asset. When we started, honestly, I was naïve. Fix rural poverty, be done with it and move on. I thought [we will help] 50 people, we'll get it done in 6 months and we'll move on to something else. (Roger)

Realizing that Rural Services was a community asset, Roger shared what he believed was most significant about the work of Rural Services. His belief that Rural Services should live on is based on the importance of elevating the human spirit.

> There's something bigger going on here than just me. And that excites me too, you know? Just think of the possibilities that we're incapable of imagining [to empower the community]. For me, the most important thing is life transformation. We are changing people's lives. And we're doing it in a way that empowers them. For me, what it comes down to is what I call the human spirit. We can do a whole bunch of things to people. We can give them things but if we're destroying the human spirit that's wrong. Everything we do is an attempt to elevate the human spirit, and all of these other things, of course, come along with that. It's powerful, and it should live on – this is a community asset. (Roger)

For Roger, his experience with succession planning at Rural Services was influenced by his belief that the organization had become a community asset and their work was impacting more individuals in the community than he ever anticipated. Roger believed that the work of Rural Services was too important not to continue to exist after he was no longer the executive leader.

Athena also realized that Community of Warriors was a community asset and should continue to exist past her tenure as the executive leader because there was still a need for their services in the community.

> We never anticipated for it to be what it is, obviously. I don't think we had any idea what it could be because you don't start out thinking that, right? The vision, literally, the vision was to provide a safe haven. That's what we wanted to do. So,

we started, we really started to harness all of this energy. But I kept thinking, I would, if there was no need for what we did, if there was no need for us, I would close the doors. I would love that. I'd love that. It's not going to happen [if there were no longer a need for services because the problem no longer existed]. (Athena)

Paul also shared that Empower Community Resources was larger in size and community reach than he could have ever anticipated.

I could never possibly have predicted what was going to happen to this organization. We just exploded, and that was just simply a function of being in the right place at the right time and having a good track record. It's been certainly a gratifying experience to see how this organization has grown and what we've been able to achieve in this community, but I could never have predicted it. I'd be lying to you if I told you this was part of a master plan. Never, not at all. I began to think – wow we really have something special here and it could be something even better or bigger. (Paul)

Paul was very humble when reflecting on the success and impact that Empower Community Resources had on the community. During the period of time he spoke about it, he realized that Empower Community Resources was in a unique position in the community and he should take steps to ensure sustainability of the organization.

I think in some respects although financially we've not been able to achieve that level of financial support [like we had] it's simply not sustainable in this environment, we have grown a sustainable business model with sustainable lines of business. We're pretty well diversified. And I would say it was after that, and

we had to go through a, a strategic plan to figure out what Empower Community

Resources should become, and I think personally I had to go through my own

strategic plan. (Paul)

For Minerva, it took years for her to believe that Urban Resilience could have

broader and sustained impact locally and potentially across the nation. It was not until the

last few years that Minerva started believing that Urban Resilience could live past her

tenure as executive leader.

A lot of what's driven it [thinking about the organization living on] for us, over

the years, it's been so many comments, from people, and we just got a ton in the

last couple of months, where people basically say there isn't anything quite like

Urban Resilience out there. And I kind of listen to that going, "Oh, someone is

having a meaningful moment, and that's very nice," because something I learned a

long time ago is, how hungry most of America is for meaning. And this is what I

say to them, "I got meaning coming out of my ears." So, when you have these

hungry-for-meaning people, they find me, and I just figure they're saying all that

nice stuff because they want meaning. And all of a sudden, I've had enough

people say, "You know what, Minerva? You're not really hearing what we're

saying here. It needs to be replicated." If not, it needs to continue [into the future].

(Minerva)

Minerva had not been attributing the feedback she received from individuals about Urban

Resilience as encouragement to replicate or sustain their model. It was not until she

started listening to what individuals expressed about the organization, did she start to

believe that the work of Urban Resilience should be replicated and sustained past her

tenure as executive leader. Minerva shared that over the last 2 years there had been an increase in her focus on the future of Urban Resilience and her belief that it was time to take action and plan for the future of the organization.

> And then there was a huge sign. At our fundraiser [last year] I was speaking with a psychiatrist and she says to me, quote, "If there was an Urban Resilience in every neighborhood, I would be out of a job." And guess what I did with that, I sat on it for probably 18 months, because it, it's too big. I shared that quote with the board for the first time in July [2017]. Where they're looking at me going, we do need to figure things out [about the future of the organization] because that statement is the next 10 years. If a child psychiatrist is saying, you would put me out of a job. I am a believer in timing big time. I'm going, "Minerva, these people have been saying this stuff for a long time that what you have here is remarkable." And I'm letting myself believe that more and more and I am not afraid of it.
> (Minerva)

For over a year Minerva did not share the feedback that she received from the child psychiatrist. The idea that Urban Resilience could be more than what it was terrified Minerva. If she did not tell anyone what she had heard, it would not require her to take action. Minerva had only recently begun to acknowledge the feedback from individuals about how remarkable Urban Resilience was, and she now believed that the evidence was undeniable.

> It's like we got married and we've been doing the dance. And now, the union is strong. What does it mean? The evidence has become undeniable. All of a sudden, I'm looking at this going, I had doubled Urban Resilience's capacity in 18 months.

And then, I'd be like, "Well, it was the team. It was this." I would find all these little exit doors. From simply facing the fact that I'm really good at this. Well, what else? Why else would there be a doubled Urban Resilience 25 years in? I knew it wasn't luck, but I would pretty much just say, "Well, I guess hard work." It's what I would say. It was just hard work. And I said, "I didn't know how to leave." (laughs) It doesn't make sense. As I'm learning and growing, then Urban Resilience does. And then, as that puts more pressure on me, it forces me to do this work – succession planning. (Minerva)

Over the past 2 years, Minerva had experienced significant personal triumphs. As she overcame challenges in her personal life, Urban Resilience provided a release for her energy and focus. The results were significant for Urban Resilience, and Minerva had begun the work of succession planning with a focus on sustainability and replication.

Mary also shared that the growth of Butterfly Inc. was not intentional planning but rather a gradual increase in services based on the needs of program participants and community members. Similar to other participants, she believed that the organization would continue on past her tenure as executive leader.

I would love to say that all of this was my idea in the beginning. No, it wasn't. You know, as we saw a need, though, we would address it. And, add another support group. And then, as we saw a need, we addressed it. I think it was, it just kind of grew. The organization will live on. Absolutely. It's a good mission. And it's needed. And people will say how helpful it was, and some will even say life-saving. Now what I think, sometimes that they are in such pain, that it can seem

life-saving. I definitely want it to live on. I do. And, everybody here does. And

I'm confident that it will. (Mary)

For Christine, the responsibility for ensuring that Seeds of Plenty continued to

exist past her tenure as executive director lied with the board of directors. Christine

stated, "I don't think I have an internal struggle about it [the organization continuing]. I

think it's going to go on. I think that there are good people here, I think the board believes

in it and that they will work on making sure it continues."

Six of the seven participants expressed a belief that mission and the purpose of the

organizations they founded were too important and critically needed by the community to

let the organization fail or "die with the founder." There was desire and a belief by the

founders that the organizations they created could and should live on beyond their tenure

as executive leaders. The next section examines how participants assigned meaning to

their experience with succession planning as they described an intentional focus on the

future.

Theme 4: focus on the future. This section examines theme 4: focus on the

future. All seven participants indicated that there was a focus on the future of the

organization as they shared what succession planning meant to them. Participants were

thinking about the future in different ways. Some participants were taking proactive

steps to plan for the future, other participants were planning for the future as a result of

their age and life circumstances, and others were influenced by external stakeholders

including the board of directors and funders.

Proactive planning. Five of the seven participants shared that they were

proactively thinking about the future of the organization and that they were taking steps

to plan into the future. Implicit in planning for the future, is the continued belief that the organizations that they founded will live on.

At Rural Services, proactive planning for the future involved always evolving. Roger shared his belief that Rural Services should always have forward momentum.

> I think once a year it is a necessary process to do that [strategic discussions about the future] so that there is forward movement, and we have to be an organism. Like an amoeba, moving out here, moving out there, but sometimes we're going to hit a roadblock, and we're going to have to pull back in and try a different direction. But heaven forbid we should think we have it all figured out at any point. (Roger)

Paul expressed an importance on financial planning, producing an impact, and not being stagnant as he spoke about planning for the future of Empower Community Resources.

> I've been pretty prescriptive about trying to tuck reserves away. Not so much for my tenure, but the tenure after. Because I know how difficult those lean periods are to get through so whoever is going to be next [executive leader], you know hopefully they would have more reserves to fall back on and that type of thing than I did. I don't think I'd ever want to see it torn apart, fail, so to the greatest extent possible, I want to make sure that when I'm not involved with this organization that it cannot just carry on but continue to be effective, producing impact and not be stagnant. Because as a not for profit as you well know, you've got to reinvent yourself probably 3, 4 years, and I think we've been able to do that really well and it's dynamic. So again, that's not just a question of survival but if

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yes, if the organization survived financially but wasn't as dynamic as we are and to my way of thinking it would be a failure. (Paul)

For Paul, thinking about the future was difficult, he stated "things are incredibly busy, there are not enough hours in the day, but at those times when I have a chance to think at the 40,000 foot level I do think about things like that [the future]. You know it's, it's difficult [thinking about the future]" (Paul). He stated that being intentional about hiring and retention decisions were essential to plan for the future because of the central role that people play in sustaining the culture of the organization.

We have phenomenal people. We have a phenomenal management team. I have always hired to this culture. I want to be surrounded by smart people who are workaholics and pretty much that's the whole management team that we have here. I think it's very much ingrained in what I think we've built [which is] something special. I try to do things to make sure that, to the greatest extent possible, that culture if you will, continues. (Paul)

For Spike, thinking about the future began to really crystallize when there was a strategic hire (potential successor) made at ROC Solid.

We started thinking about the future and the organization living past my tenure – probably when we had the opportunity to bring Marc into the organization. I think I recognize that this could happen when we identified Marc as a way of making a transition. I think I was having trouble conceptualizing how to transition without an actual body. It became more real when we went through what we did. We've been talking about it [succession planning] since I was 60 or 65 when we first started on it [planning for the future]. It [succession planning] has to be filtered,

with somebody facing the conversation of, what's the best way to guarantee the

success of the organization. (Spike)

Succession planning at ROC Solid gained greater importance and became more real for

Spike when the organization hired an individual who may be Spike's successor.

Minerva shared that planning for the future of Urban Resilience had originated

with her personal transformation over the past 2 years.

I would say my self-transformation is at this point, not even guiding the future of

Urban Resilience – it's driving it. Because as a woman, coming into my own truth,

coming into my own value, it has impacted what I've really done here [at Urban

Resilience]. (Minerva)

She proceeded to state how she would be taking proactive steps to plan for the future of

Urban Resilience and also develop a succession plan for her transition out of the role of

executive leader.

One of the things I'm actually doing this year is pulling together not only our

board but some local advisers and then some national advisors. For a 2-day

conference - of kind of how, where, how, when do we take Urban Resilience to

the next level. And a core component of that is what to do with me. In looking at

[succession] models that have worked. How do you pass on the secret sauce? And

that's why pulling together some people who really have seen how to do this is

critical. I've also realized it isn't black or white. It isn't, July 10 of 2018 is my last

day. Now, we'll probably go more with a model that I've seen when the founder

transitions into the role as the president of the organization. (Minerva)

As Athena discussed her beliefs about planning for the future of Community of Warriors, she stressed the importance of staying relevant to the needs of the community but not "reinventing the wheel" for the sake of change.

> I feel like if it's not broken, we don't need to fix it. And so, one of the things that I really want us to always be intentional about is to be relevant to the need. And be relevant to the situation and to the culture. So, I said, "We need to change our mission, to encompass disordered eating and body image issues. Because not everybody can connect with an eating disorder – but everybody can connect with body image issues and disordered eating." So, we did. So, when I look at the future of us, we always want to meet that need for support and treatment services. So, that's what I see for the future. Is continuing to be relevant to the issues. We always want to see ourselves in those places. Always meeting people where they're at, certainly. But I feel like we don't need to reinvent the wheel – and just always be relevant. And I think what's so important is that early on, I learned, I can't be everything to everyone. (Athena)

For Athena, change at Community of Warriors was intentional. Proactive planning for the future came with an awareness of relevant issues and needs from clients. However, Athena was very thoughtful about not adding or changing services that she felt would shift their focus away from a mission that was still relevant recognizing that she and Community of Warriors could not meet all of the needs of clients.

Reality of life. For five of the seven participants, the reality of life, mortality, and age emerged as an influence on their thinking about the future and succession planning. Roger shared, "pretty early on, I started thinking about succession planning and the

future. I know I'm not going to live forever" (Roger). When asked about the future of Seeds of Plenty, Christine shared her thoughts and how they had shifted.

> A family illness has led us to think about the future maybe sooner than we had thought. We hoped it [the organization] would live past us. Reasons I am open to succession planning could be, one of the things could be my age. Also, recognizing what's good for the organization. Also knowing I can't do it all alone. I'm the only one doing everything right now, in some respects. Knowing that somebody maybe can do it better. Can move the organization into the next era. Knowing I can't do it all. (Christine)

As Seeds of Plenty continued to grow and Christine was no longer supported in the day-to-day operations of the organization by her co-founder, the weight of the current work and the energy necessary to move the organization into the future brought to the forefront the realization that she could not do it all anymore. The focus on the future at Seeds of Plenty was, in part, a result of Christine's present life circumstances.

For Mary, succession planning was necessary because she would not live forever. She stated, "it [succession planning] is definitely important. I won't live forever. I mean, I'm open to it [succession planning] because I know it needs to happen" (Mary). When asked what influenced her decision to engage in succession planning, Mary stated, "I guess the first word that comes to my mind is life. And also, the reality, you know. I mean, I'm very grateful when I wake up in the morning. So, it's the reality of it [my age]."

The reality of Minerva's personal life influenced her thinking about succession planning and the future of Urban Resilience.

I'm just taking steps. You know, I have been thinking about it [the future] for 10

years. I think about it [within the context of my personal life]. I go, "Well, was I

pregnant then? Did I have my second baby?" You know what I mean? Everything

is around what really runs a woman's life, which is her children. But I think about

it because I think women feel pulled in so many different directions. So, I

understand the sense of, "Hey, if one of my children got catastrophically ill, you

know, I just don't think men think that way as much because they don't have to." I

started seeing it. (Minerva)

Because of the personal responsibilities that Minerva had, planning for the future of

Urban Resilience was often based on potential emergency scenarios in her personal life

that could impact the sustainability of Urban Resilience. Planning for the future of Urban

Resilience was also influenced by Minerva's own mortality. She shared that she reached

an age at which individuals she knew of similar age were dying.

I also hit an age where I started having a couple of younger women that I knew

passed away. So, all of a sudden, you're going, "Oh, there it is." Two women in

their late 40s were gone, and both of them did nonprofit work. So, all of these

things. I have no illusion of my immortality, none. I know that I could be finished

any moment. I would say on a very practical level in the last 10 years, I've seen

five people that I had known anywhere from a close relative to other women in

nonprofits die young of cancer. It's a healthy sense of my mortality, without a

doubt. (Minerva)

When talking about the future of ROC Solid and succession planning, Spike noted

that "my own biological clock is another piece that I'd pay attention to. My wife is now

retired, and we both have lots of energy left. Neither one of us are ready just to sit around" (Spike). Spike also spoke about the generational difference and the reality of a better work-life balance that may emerge with his successor as ROC Solid moves forward.

> I think one of the things that I'm assuming will probably change is this idea that the work-life balance is going to get more in line with what it should look like. We're not going to be all things to all people. We're not going to take on every entrepreneurial opportunity that comes to us, and we're not going to take the kind of risk that I have taken. They want their weekends. I get that. But, taking on any number of community projects helps this organization. There's a lot of nights and weekends, [I am] either doing this work or the community projects. It's not necessarily the way that my successor may want to live. So, there will be an attrition of fanaticism, maybe. They won't necessarily be as aggressive on individual projects that I tend to get in the middle of. So, I think that could turn out to be a really good thing for the organization. It could be a maturing. [My successor] will definitely continue to promote the inequality and the issues that drive us, but they'll have a balance on all that. (Spike)

For Spike, similar to Athena, there is an importance on being intentional about the focus of the mission as the organizations move into the future. Spike believed that his successor might not have the same risk tolerance for entrepreneurial opportunities. The "fanaticism" of Spike as the founder of ROC Solid, may be tempered under the leadership of his successor as the organization moves forward after Spike transitions out of the role of executive leader.

External influence. The influence of the board of directors and funders emerged as an influence on the thinking of five of the seven participants as they shared their thoughts about the future and succession planning. Roger shared that,

> We've actually put quite a bit of thought into that [thinking about the future of the organization]. And we've been encouraged to do so by some of the foundations that have supported us. The board has been really good for us in terms of guiding us in organizational planning and so on. They have brought it [succession planning] up on a regular basis. So, people have been responsive.

Athena also shared that the board of directors at Community of Warriors had a positive influence on her focus on the future and succession planning.

> I think I have such a great board right now, and they get where I'm at, they support that. They support me, my transition. Even though I don't know what my transition necessarily looks like, they're supportive of all of that. And so, I feel like that's given me some freedom. What we've figured out is it's the board of director's responsibility [to plan for the future]. Although I always feel like when you're dealing with the founder, it's almost like the board works for the founder. Whether that's really how the flowchart goes or not- I always feel that way. But when it's an executive director that's been hired by the board, the executive director absolutely works for the board of directors. (Athena)

For Spike, the external influences on his thinking about the future and succession planning had not been as favorable as Athena and Roger.

> We have had a lot of issues [with succession planning]. We've been talking about my succession since I was probably 65 or maybe earlier. And we have had very

long conversations about succession planning. And we're driven by that, by

funding sources who worry about it, how the organization is going to survive the

transition. We're driven by it by board members who worry about that. (Spike)

Christine also shared that her focus on the future was influenced by

encouragement from the board of directors. Christine's comments also indicated that the

responsibility for succession planning and planning for the future at Seeds of Plenty was

the board of directors' responsibility.

I think the board is the one that brought it [planning for the future] up first. I think

the board is the one that recognized that, that there needed to be a succession

planning and they needed a plan for the future. I saw that as a step into growing

into the future. I used to be afraid of the future, of someone else taking over, but

right now I'm almost looking forward to it if we can get the right person. I still

wonder how they would find the money to pay somebody, but, that's the board's

problem. They think they can do it. (Christine)

Similar to Christine, Mary indicated that the board of directors of Butterfly Inc.,

was responsible for succession planning and planning for the future. She stated that,

It's [the future of the organization] on the board's mind. I think the board . . .

they're not panicking, you know. I think, they should be thinking about it, you

know. But I don't think they're panicking. I think they know I'm open to it. But we

really, we do have to have more money [to pay the next executive director's

salary].

All seven participants indicated that there was a focus on the future of the

organization as they shared what succession planning meant to them. Some participants

were taking proactive steps to plan for the future, other participants were planning for the future as a result of their age and life circumstances, and others were influenced to plan for the future by external stakeholders including the board of directors and funders. With a focus on the future, the next section examines how participants assigned meaning to their experience with succession planning as they described their desire and intention to institutionalize the culture of the organizations they created.

Theme 5: institutionalize the culture. This section examines theme 5: Institutionalizing the culture. Founders are the living breathing exemplar of the culture, and the founder's vision and beliefs dominate their organization's culture. For six of the seven participants, institutionalizing the culture of their organizations through building a shared experience and articulating common learnings was part of their experience with succession planning.

As participants planned for the future, there was a strong desire to see evidence of demonstrated passion for the mission of the organization by others including staff, board of directors, and community members. There was also the desire to ensure that the essence and the spirit of the organization live on through others.

Mission-driven culture. Five of the seven participants communicated that it was important to create and work on a mission-driven culture that personified passion for the mission. Christine talked about her thoughts on the importance of the staff having the heart for the work, "I think that the staff just like their job. They like working here for the organization. They like working for the ministry they're working for, they believe in it. Everybody here [staff] has a connection to it [the mission of the organization]"

(Christine). When talking about the importance of being mission centric, Paul stated, "if you want something to grow you have to nurture it a little bit" (Paul).

For Athena, "there's been this team of people [who are passionate about the mission], and I truly believe that's been the key to the success of the organizations. There is a real heart and a real passion for this work. We have several staff members that are really connected to the mission."

When talking about a focus on the mission outside of the organization, Athena stated that "I just feel like collaborating is the only way to go. That creates community, that creates this passion and drive for people that want to come and visit" (Community of Warriors) (Athena). Athena went on to share how Community of Warriors created space for its employees to exemplify the mission in their work.

> We talk about the philosophy of the organization, the culture of the organization, obviously, being mission-centric. These are your parameters here, I don't want to micromanage, and I want you to feel like you can be creative in your position. I feel like, oftentimes, they need to figure out their space here. (Athena)

Athena also disclosed how creating a mission-driven culture is evidenced in actions at Community of Warriors as part of their succession planning.

> You need to be systemic – thinking about the future should be in everyday business decisions. So, there may not be the use of a more structured [written] plan, but it's part of the culture. Part of that is that creative piece. And we want people to honor the philosophy, the culture, and the mission, but we don't want to box them in, by any means. (Athena)

At Community of Warriors, there is a clear mission, vision, and culture and Athena encourages individuals who join their team to "bring themselves" to their work and the organization. Individuals are encouraged to "leave an imprint" on Community of Warriors.

> Everybody that has come through the doors here has left an imprint. That has been the success of the organization. No one leads alone. We have a manifesto that's on the wall out there. We want to do that statement of purpose. That's separate from the mission that really speaks to the philosophy and the culture. I believe, that there is a feel here, there is this essence that we can't really identify . . . It's like the essential oils. A new staff member recently said, "I feel like walking through the doors was coming home." And so, that's the essence. We want everybody here to feel that way. How do we continue that? How do we carry that through? I think the board plays a big role in that culture. With the people that we hire, there needs to be that depth of understanding around all of that [the culture]. (Athena)

Paul talked about the importance of having a mission-driven culture for him as he reflected on the elements of Empower Community Resources that he desired to live on past his tenure as executive leader.

> At the end of the day, it really is all about the culture and more than anything I think that's something that you hope survives yourself in an organization. You have to come in, you have to set the stage, you have to set the example, you have got to put everything into the organization if you are going to expect people out there to care about it and be passionate about it. (Paul)

A key piece of institutionalizing the culture of Empower Community Resources was an intentional hiring process that placed passion for the mission of the organization as a central requirement for individuals.

I've always kind of hired for that [culture], I feel there is a culture here, a culture of – we have to be able to turn on a dime, we have to work really hard. I have people that surround me that are from all different backgrounds but do share that passion for this work. I think the folks that we have up and down the aisles here really share that passion which you can teach all kinds of things, but you can't teach passion. So more than anything else that's something that I have tried to promote. None of this work is easy, so if you are not passionate about it, there are going to be all kinds of reasons and excuses why you can't get things done. (Paul)

Paul stated that you "cannot teach passion" and given the importance he had placed on this character trait, it required Empower Community Resources to be very thoughtful when hiring candidates. You cannot teach passion, but you can hire for passion by establishing an interview process that seeks to identify passion for the mission of Empower Community Resources. For Paul, an essential element to succession planning was institutionalizing the culture, and Empower Community Resources works on this element in an intentional way through their hiring process.

Roger also spoke about identifying passion for the mission in others as he reflected on the importance of the mission and culture of Rural Services existing through the passion of other individuals.

I think I started to think about it pretty early on. When the vision started to develop, and I thought to myself, "Number one, it can't be about me. And number

two, that means that there's going to have to be other people who are going to have to catch this vision and carry it on." That's what scares me because right now I tend to be that entity. And that's not healthy. I mean, it's healthy now. But it's not healthy further into the future. And that's why I'm really excited, because our staff right now, for the most part, has the vision, they have the passion, they understand, they get it [mission driven culture]. (Roger)

For Roger, it was imperative that other individuals including the staff, the board of directors and community members, besides himself, "get it" and carry on the vision of Rural Services into the future.

Our board gets it. You know, not just intellectually, but they get it. Many people in the community get it, that's why they're supporting us. So, I'm less nervous about that now than I would've been maybe 3 or 4 years ago. Why would you not want other people to buy into the vision, and generate the same kind of passion that you have? If they can't, then maybe what you're doing isn't what you think you're doing. You know, our board chair a couple years ago was at a fundraiser, and she was the one that got up in front [of the audience] and explained our work. And I have to tell you, I sat there and thought, "Oh, thank God." Because she got it, she expressed it, she was passionate about it, that means that it's not me. Because now you've empowered other people to take it and carry it on, and that takes a lot of pressure off, or perceived pressure, off people like me. (Roger)

When individuals other than the founder are passionate about the mission, create and perpetuate a mission-driven culture, and feel empowered to "leave an imprint" on the

organizations they are a part of, the founder has successfully taken steps forward toward institutionalizing the culture of the organization that they created.

Transferring the spirit. Three of the seven participants disclosed that one of the most critical activities in succession planning was transferring the spirit of the organization to staff and future executive leadership. When talking about the essence of Rural Services and what was vital to transfer to others, Roger reiterated the importance of elevating the human spirit.

> If I can transfer anything, it should be that [the essence of the organization – elevating the human spirit]. The rest of it are just nuts and bolts. But the concept of what we're trying to do here in terms of humanity and the human spirit. That needs to live on. I think that's important because I think it's the context within which everything we do here. I try to emphasize that the human spirit element is a basic human need. I think we've done that pretty good [transferring the essence of the organization]. And maybe it's easier because some people have been here from the beginning. (Roger)

When talking about transferring the spirit of the organization at Empower Community Resources, Paul shared the following:

> Knowledge is an odd word. I don't know that I know anything that anybody else couldn't figure out by reading a book or reading regulations. But what I'm referring to is sort of the spirit of the organization. This is an almost impossible thing to do, but it's worthwhile . . . the spirit of the organization. For us, the spirit of the organization is a willingness to try what others may not have the tolerance for. What I mean is – to move the community forward you have to do this thing

[project/activity], and you might strike out. You have to try it and if you are not

trying then how will you ever push the envelope. How will you ever improve the

neighborhoods that we've been trying to improve for 20 years if you are not

willing to try something [new]? If you are not willing to try it then what the hell

are we doing. I think that captures the spirit of this organization while I've been

leading it and that is what I hope continues. You can't achieve great things by just

kind of doing everything the same way you do it, and the same way is

comfortable.

The spirit of the organization was a driving force in Paul's vision of Empower

Community Resources. Similar to Roger, this was the "essence" of the organization that

these founders desired to have continued after they transition from their roles as

executive leaders. Paul acknowledged that transferring the spirit of the organization takes

time and intentionality.

I've tried to think of ways to share this [spirit of the organization], so every new

employee I sit down with them, and I just do a sort of one-hour one-on-one

orientation that talks about the history of the organization. Nothing to do with the

actual work that they're going to be doing just a sense of the history. Because we

are the byproduct of that history. So, people need to understand that. (Paul)

When Minerva talked about how she thought about transferring the spirit of

Urban Resilience and what that looks like in practice, she shared the following example.

So, I purposely have a desk at Urban Resilience in the community room, like I'm

in the busiest room in there. Which is completely asinine, but I wouldn't have it

any other way, because I will not be in a room with a closed door. I know

everything that's going on. Which some people would say is micromanaging. I don't care. It's how I've, it's how Urban Resilience has created the secret sauce, maintained it, and it's how I passed it on to my staff. Because I have four other staff with desks, and they watch me. It's all by osmosis. And then, volunteers get it, older teens get it, kids who come back to visit who are college students get it. We're all kind of on top of each other. It's like a good old-fashioned Italian home. (Minerva)

There are also processes at Urban Resilience in which Minerva transfers the spirit of the organization. Many of these processes are not documented but instead transferred to others like an oral tradition.

Then one of the ways we do it is, we meet as a full staff 90 minutes to two hours a week. And I didn't think that was a big deal until, years ago someone said to me, "That's a big deal Minerva." And I go, "Well, how so?" He goes, "Most organizations don't come close to that." He goes, "If they're even meeting at all." I go, "What? How do they function?" He said, "Well, they don't." . . . Again, it was pure instinct on my part, but that's how I've been doing this all along. The spirit of the organization. Because I started every program, I ran every program. And who's ever running those programs now, I want them run with the same love and integrity that I ran them with. We'll sit back and spend two-thirds of the meeting talking about kids. I also model how I talk to children. Because that's why we exist. That [this approach] is not documented. It's passed on like oral tradition. (Minerva)

Minerva acknowledged that transferring the spirit of the organization was currently

happening very organically and she expressed a desire to document these "oral traditions"

and be intentional about the ways that Urban Resilience moves forward, especially as she

thinks about the organization continuing past her tenure as executive leader.

Mary's experience with transferring the spirit of the organization to other

stakeholders was different than other study participants. Mary expressed her experience

with what she considered, others not understanding the mission or essence of the

organization.

I would say all of us staff here have it [connection to the mission]. It's not just me,

you know. But the board is a different story. They're into statistics and metrics

and, you know (laughs), I'm not, and we aren't. We are here for the mission. So,

that's what I'm trying to get across [to the board of directors]. And we do heavy-

duty stuff. We're not interested in your [board of directors] business way of doing

things. [Because of this] it is important that I be involved in the transition – I feel

I want to be a part of that. I don't want this business-minded board to hire

somebody that doesn't understand the spirit of the organization and live with

passion. (Mary)

For six of the seven participants, institutionalizing the culture of their

organizations through building a shared experience and articulating common learnings

was part of their experience with succession planning. As participants planned for the

future, there was a strong desire to see evidence of demonstrated passion for the mission

of the organization by others including staff, board of directors, and community

members. There was also the desire by participants to ensure that the essence and the spirit of the organization must live on through others.

In the next section, how participants assigned meaning to their experience with succession planning as they reflected on what planning for their transition out of the executive leader role was examined. Participants struggled with thinking about and preparing for the separation from the organization. They communicated thoughts about successors and shared their ideas about life after the transition from executive leader.

Theme 6: internal reconciliation. This section examines theme 6: internal reconciliation. For six of the seven participants, there was a need for reconciliation between the connection to the organization they founded and the work to establish separation from the organization. Participants spoke of the challenges with thinking about and taking steps to plan for succession and the future. Participants also expressed feelings of bearing the sole responsibility for succession planning. There was also a desire by participants to stay connected to the organization during and after their succession out of the executive leadership role.

Struggle with separation. Three of the seven participants shared that there was an internal struggle with the reality of a changing relationship between them and the organizations that they founded. As participants separate from the organizations they created, some have expressed how difficult that process has been. Spike shared that he had felt an ongoing focus on the timing of succession planning by others and as he wrestled with his eventual separation from ROC Solid.

> You have to have a beginning [to succession planning]. You have to have an end
> to it [succession planning]. And I usually think whether it's a founder, or someone

who is getting older, like your director, I mean if he's 60 and he wants to work

until he's 70, does he want to talk about this [succession planning] for the next 10

years? I mean, is that a conversation that he wants to have. I mean, after a while it

gets kind of old if you're the person that they're talking about. (Spike)

Although Spike is speaking about someone else, it is evident that Spike himself was tired

of speaking about succession planning for the past several years. He gave the impression

that succession planning had been a topic of discussion and focus for several years and

that experience was tiring.

Spike also spoke about how he had previously reflected on the position in which

he placed the board of directors.

I had this thought and that idea that [I would say], "I'll give you a year's notice." I

said to the board, "If you think I'm underperforming, then I need to hear that." I

think I didn't appreciate how hard that would be for, I mean I appreciate it, but I

don't think that was a realistic idea that the board or even the board chair could

say [to me]. That idea that they [the board of directors] could pull the trigger

instead of me is unrealistic and a cop out, basically. I don't think I've appreciated

the role that I have played and the way in which people view me, in the position

[as founder]. (Spike)

He acknowledged the need to listen to the internal and external messages that were

communicated to him. He may be "hearing" the messages, however, he was still candid

about the struggle he experienced as he moved forward with steps to separate from ROC

Solid.

So, I don't think [that] I could get fired in the traditional sense of being fired

unless I did something really off the rails. So, succession planning isn't waiting

for somebody to tell you that it's time to go. I think you got to listen to messages

that are both internal and external about that. And, that's where I think I'm, I'm

probably . . . I'm hoping that in 3 years, I'll, feel like this was really the right time.

But today I wouldn't say it was the right thing. Because I don't feel like I'm ready

to give up – I have the energy it takes to do this work. (Spike)

Spike also acknowledged the potential impact to ROC Solid if he did not support the

organization moving forward to identify a successor. He acknowledged that maybe

someone with new ideas could lead ROC Solid into the future.

I think for an incumbent who is doing a good job, who continues to create and

move and change the organization or grow the organization is a factor in

determining what succession means. But if you're the board, or you're the

leadership staff, and you are dependent and locked into the whim of that person,

in this case me, to make that decision, then you're putting yourself at risk. You

could be putting yourself at risk. You could be putting the organization at risk.

You could be missing opportunity. And I think that's an important factor. You

could be living with a structure and an organizational way of doing business that

isn't the most effective way to do it, but it's been the way we've done it for all

these years so why change it? So, I try to hear that, and, and I think I've gotten my

arms around it a little bit more. (Spike)

Spike acknowledged that change could be good and at times necessary for an

organization to be sustainable, but separation was still painful and was not occurring

easily. He went on to share a profound symbol of what the process of moving forward with separation from ROC Solid was for him.

> I think I've been very honest about the ambiguity of it [struggle] for me. The ambiguity, I think the "grim reaper" idea is more real than it's not, I mean it's a good way to describe it [the role of the HR director] because I think it puts a language around the work [of separation]. I don't think this person means it that way. But they are able to do this [encourage Spike]. In that context [HR], you need the sensitivity, and yet the need to have somebody pull the trigger. They have helped put this structure [succession plan] together that I probably would continue to resist in some passive aggressive kind of way. I think the "grim reaper" represents the person who must confront me, you know? Has to help me get someplace with this [succession planning]. (Spike)

The use of grim reaper as a representation of the individual at ROC Solid who has responsibility for moving the succession plan forward with Spike was a powerful symbol. The grim reaper symbolizes a very profound meaning – death. The pressure that Spike expressed from the grim reaper to move forward with the succession plan at ROC Solid is metaphorically symbolic of death knocking at Spike's door.

Although the process of succession planning was not fast nor easy, Spike was candid about his struggle to prepare, through thoughts and actions, for an eventual separation from ROC Solid. He acknowledged his role in the successes and the challenges that this process has had on the impact of ROC Solid. Spike provided rich insights into the internal struggle that founders have as they think about and prepare for separation from the organizations they create.

Minerva spoke about initially approaching succession planning and her separation from Urban Resilience from a "balanced" place that provided her the freedom to honor the work of Urban Resilience over the past 25 years.

I did have somebody whose opinion I really trust, about 10 years ago said to me, "It is no failure when you leave Urban Resilience if Urban Resilience shuts down." So, his opinion was from the perspective of, "I'd rather see you do that than keeping beating it into the ground or keep beating yourself into the ground." He completely flipped it [my thinking on the future of Urban Resilience] for me, and it actually created a lot of freedom for me, which I think is necessary to make good decisions for the future. If I'm making them from a place of anxiety my gosh, oh my gosh, you're going to get, I think a very different approach. And when he said that, I was like, "Of course, that doesn't mean that, that however many years it had been running was worthless." So, even though it may not be what I choose and it's not what we're choosing [to shut down], he created the right, soil for me to come back to that thinking from a really balanced place. (Minerva)

The conversation 10 years ago influenced the timing of her thinking and actions to explore what separation from Urban Resilience might look like. Minerva acknowledged that at that time she began to believe that she and Urban Resilience were still successes if the organization "died with her." However, it was never her intention to have Urban Resilience shut down after she was no longer executive leader.

Minerva continued by sharing that after thinking about her separation from Urban Resilience for a few years she had the courage to talk about it openly.

As funny as it sounds, I've realized was a significant step. First of all was the

courage to talk about it [succession planning] openly. So, I'm thinking about it for

a couple of years. Then there's the courage to talk about it maybe with a few key

staff people, a few key board members. Then I would bring it up to the board and

just say, "Hey guys, we, we need to think about this. We're coming into 25 years

here." (Minerva)

Minerva moved from thinking about succession planning and her separation from Urban

Resilience, to taking action through talking about it with key stakeholders. Minerva went

through an internal reconciliation of the separation from Urban Resilience, then moved

into action. Minerva was at a point that conversations about the future of Urban

Resilience compelled her to further action.

It's beyond time. We need a plan. I said to our consultant, "We don't have all of

the nutrients [inside of Urban Resilience]. We need outside thinkers. We weren't

watching – While we were watching all these medium-size ships, we missed a big

mother, and she's right here. She's already docked. So, what are we going to do

with her?" And again, founders are the ones; we see it before anyone else does.

That's why we're founders. So, being deliberate with succession planning for me

is getting it out of myself and getting other people around it. (Minerva)

Minerva shared this conversation that she had with a long-time consultant who

works with her to illustrate the sense of urgency that she felt about succession planning.

She indicated that business opportunities, the "big ships" are approaching and Urban

Resilience must be prepared to take advantage of these opportunities because the

sustainability of the organization depends on it. Urban Resilience needed to be thinking

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about the future of the organization including what was on the horizon, and what could potentially be opportunities several years into the future. Minerva also acknowledged that there was value in bringing in outside thinkers to work with her, the board of directors, and key staff member as they design and implement a formal succession plan.

For Athena, the struggle with separation from Community of Warriors had already occurred once. Athena reflected on a prior attempt at transitioning out of the executive leadership role and the internal reconciliation between staying connected and moving forward.

> At the time, I was going to step down as director. I was going to transition out, and I had no real plan for transitioning out. I don't know what the hell I was thinking. What the hell was wrong with me? And then I come back here. At the time, they literally had a cake with my picture on it. I'm thinking, "I have a flipping party for my retirement." I don't have any idea how to even transition, and here I am now 7 years later, and I'm [back and] still [here at Community of Warriors] (laughs). And this is what I believe; I believe that [back then] I was nowhere, the organization was nowhere near, nowhere near ready to have me transition. And so [now], I have mentors that I work with, and I'm constantly checking myself, "This cannot be about me, this has to be about the sustainability, the long-term sustainability of the organization." (Athena)

Upon returning to Community of Warriors, Athena realized that it would be necessary to commit the time and resources to strengthening the foundation of the organization so Community of Warriors would sustain itself after she was no longer executive leader.

Weight of the world. Two of the seven participants expressed feelings of bearing

the sole responsibility for initiating and sustaining succession planning. Athena and Minerva felt initially responsible for thinking about and initiating action toward planning for the future after their tenure as executive leaders of the organizations they created. Minerva shared how she came to her realization that she must be the one to start succession planning.

> I guess the first thing would be is me acknowledging that I've been bringing this [succession planning] up for 5 years and no one's going to get traction on it except for me. So, on one level it becomes one more thing I have to do, which is what founding EDs do all day long. And that really hit me in the last year. I thought, no one's going to make this [succession] plan. Urban Resilience isn't anywhere near able to replace me on multiple levels. Then comes the realization of, nobody is going to do this either, except for me. And then realizing, like with everything else, at least for me, I'm in a situation where I'm going to have to figure this out as I go. (Minerva)

Minerva indicated that she had a desire for other stakeholders to initiate the steps necessary to engage in succession planning, however, she felt that the responsibility fell on her shoulders.

> I still live in a little bit of a la-la land that by me putting it out there to other people who are highly committed, either a board volunteer or paid Urban Resilience staff, that they might pick up the ball and run with it. They don't. And that's why succession plans, I don't think happen because nobody does them. Nobody, because only the founder's going to do them and the founder is too busy founding things. (Minerva)

Minerva's statement about how succession planning is initiated perpetuates the belief that only the founding executive leader can initiate succession planning.

As Athena reflected on her first attempt at leaving Community of Warriors, the experience made her realize that she needed to strengthen the foundation of the organization.

> And if I had left 7 years ago, the organization wouldn't have made it. Not because I'm all that, but because it wouldn't have made it. I did not have a strong enough foundation to have me transition. But it also was such a valuable lesson to me, that I realized that the organization couldn't live without me. So, what do I need to strengthen that foundation? Having a consultant come in provided the next level of support in foundational work that I needed to do. I needed to get my by-laws in order, I needed to get the logistics of that in order. (Athena)

Both Athena and Minerva expressed sole responsibility for preparing the organizations they created for their transition from the role of executive leader. Succession planning cannot be engaged in by only a single person, but rather the board of directors, funders, staff, and trusted advisors are often essential to succession planning. Others who are passionate about the mission of the organization share responsibility for preparing the organization for separation from the founding executive leader.

Successor transition. Four of the seven participants spoke passionately about their desire and expectation to participate in the selection and transition process of their successor. Participants must reconcile their own desire to be involved with the selection process and what may be the best situation or set of steps that provides the greatest

opportunity for the organization to survive their transition as the founding executive

leader. Mary expressed her desire to participate in the selection process for her successor.

> I feel I want to be a part of that [successor selection], while I can still be helpful. I
>
> would hope it would be someone that would understand our mission. I don't know
>
> how you'd understand our mission without [relevant life] experiencing . . . I also
>
> think that they would appreciate the volunteers. And be so grateful for them [the
>
> volunteers]. And then I think, the other thing they have to be comfortable raising
>
> money. They don't have to like it. I don't like it. Most important is passion for
>
> what we do and compassion. I know there's people out there who are like this.
>
> (Mary)

Paul had spent a considerable amount of time thinking about and talking to others

about succession planning with regard to the selection of the next executive leader at

Empower Community Resources.

> I've kind of heard both tales that it's really important for the existing executive
>
> director to participate and be prescriptive about who is succeeding. And then I've
>
> also heard the other theory that it may not be the best thing to be involved in that
>
> process. I have to tell you from where I sit there is no way I could not be involved
>
> in that process. (Paul)

Although Paul had spent time thinking about the process for selecting his successor, he

made it very clear that he had no intention to retire soon. He had a desire to stay

connected with the organization.

> First of all not ready to retire. I'm not even close, I never really want to retire. I
>
> will always want to consult or do something. So, if that's the way this is going to

go unless I get hit by a bus, I really want to find the funding to be able to say in the next year or two hire a deputy. Then everybody would know that that deputy is someday going to be the new CEO. And you know I'll be in the background, you know somebody that can assist if they need it, but if they don't need it, that's fine too. That's the way I'd really like to carry this thing forward so that I can have a few years to work with this person and make sure they understand the history of where we came from. Then also help them have that sense of, in order to be relevant, you can't be afraid to "steal a home base" and go for it [live the spirit of the organization]. (Paul)

Paul expressed a strong desire to work with his successor for a few years so that he could spend a considerable amount of time teaching his successor the ways of Empower Community Resources.

So, I'd really like for that to be the way we go forward. To the extent that you can regulate these things, I think that's the way I really like it to be. And then have some time where you could work through some problems and then eventually they'd understand pretty generically the approach of how you deal with issues when they come up. So that would be my preference about how this organization lives on. (Paul)

Paul provided clear logic for staying involved as a teacher and mentor to his successor to ensure that the spirit of the organization continued to exist, but he also expressed an emotional response when he shared that any leader in a role for decades would have something to say.

I can't imagine not being involved, and I can't imagine any founder not wanting

to be involved. I mean whether you are the founder or not, when you have been in

an organization for 30 years how do you not have something to say about

(laughs). (Paul)

Spike shared his plan for transitioning out of the role of executive leader at ROC Solid

and how his successor would transition into the role.

I think about fading into the sunset, gradually, or making a clean break and going

home and doing something else. Right now, the way we're structuring it is I'm

going to be in this CEO position from now until next July [2018]. And I'm going

to be in this position as it is now, then we're going to bring in a COO position.

When that process is done, then I will, I'll fade out. And right now, I will fade into

the president of our fundraising, of our foundation and work as hard as I want or

as light as I want, I guess. And we don't have a lot meat around what that looks

like, but, that's an idea that I can live with. It's an idea that the board likes. It's an

idea that has worked for the COO person that we're grooming. Most importantly

is that it will work for the leadership staff. (Spike)

Although Spike expressed a logical plan for the selection of his successor and his

transition out of the executive leader role, he was candid about the discomfort and

pressure he felt to move forward with the plan.

I have this, I don't know if it's knee-jerk reaction. I have this reaction that I have

to make a decision before I'm really ready to make a decision. And so, I have had

to face that. And I haven't liked that . . . I haven't liked having to do that. I think

our compromise, if that's what it was, is this spacing process [that I mentioned with adding a COO]. (Spike)

Spike had been encouraged and guided into establishing a departure-defined succession plan for his transition from the role of executive leader. The board of directors and senior leadership staff had been pushing for a timeline for the founder succession. He had not liked feeling this pressure to move forward and select a date. The compromise was that a potential successor was hired, there was a COO role created, and there were discussions about Spike's role post-transition as executive leader. Although Spike did not like the pressure, he acknowledged the importance of creating a plan and addressing the board of director's concerns.

> The board rightly worries about the transfer of knowledge that I've accumulated over, nearly whatever number of years, 50 years. How does that get transitioned to somebody who's been here a couple of years? And what do you transfer and all those kinds of things? And how do I let go of stuff and make sure that the new person is getting real experience and real training? So I think, so I'm now ready for that to happen. And it is happening, and so that wasn't true from the time I was at 65, and I don't know if that's exactly when it started, but I think we've probably been talking about succession for 10 years. (Spike)

Athena acknowledged that founders might impede the successor selection process and she had been intentional about her role in the process.

> I don't want to impede the process, and I'm more worried about, being perceived as that, "Oh, founder, we have to get her out of here." Right? I don't want that. I want this organization to flourish. And I actually think it can flourish as much

without me. Really, I think it can. I don't think I'm the reason that it's flourishing,

right? I think we have such phenomenal people in place. I think that I'm never

going to be able to figure out what's next unless I'm able to relinquish this.

(Athena)

When Mary spoke about participating in the selection process for her successor,

she expressed her belief that she knew better than the board of directors at Butterfly Inc.,

the type of successor that the organization needed.

I don't want this business-minded board to hire somebody. I really don't. Their

input – absolutely. But I want to have input, too. Next year will be our 40th

anniversary. And I think I know better with everybody that is here . . . We, not

me, we know better who we need than the board. The business-y board. That

wants reports. But it has to be, has to be somebody with passion for our mission.

The person has to be qualified. (Mary)

Mary's comments indicated a lack of trust in the board of directors to select an

appropriate successor. She did not believe that the board of directors was capable of

selecting a successor who is passionate for the mission, instead her belief was that the

board of directors would select someone who is focused on leading Butterfly Inc., like a

business.

Post succession. Six of the seven participants spoke explicitly about their desired

and anticipated roles within their organizations after their transition from executive

leader. The reconciliation between staying connected and disconnecting is present in

these experiences as well. Minerva shared her desire to stay connected to the work of

Urban Resilience through consulting and sharing their stories across the nation.

I still love what I do. I am profoundly connected to this [work]. If people only

really knew the remarkable people in America that make life work every stinking

day, if people only knew. I realize I'm like, "Oh, I'm at a point where people

might want to listen." And I just love the fact that I could be a voice for our youth.

You wouldn't believe based on how the news tells you what's going on in our

inner cities. You wouldn't believe what's really going on. It would blow your

mind, the resilience, the resourcefulness, the community, the heart. (Minerva)

Roger stated that "once the building is built [I will transition out of the executive

leader role]" (Roger). He went on to acknowledge that he still had a strong desire to stay

involved with Rural Services.

I mean, will I stay involved? Probably, okay, I'll give you that. I like the vision

part. I like creating things and bringing things together. Do I want to run it? No,

you know, I'll turn the mess over to someone else. So, will I stay involved in a

creation way, yes. That energized me. Will I be able to step back completely?

That remains to be seen. (Roger)

Roger spoke candidly about his desire to transition Rural Services to an executive leader

that had a desire to manage and enjoyed the administrative and managerial work. He saw

himself as an individual who created the vision of Rural Services, not as the individual to

run the organization as they entered the next phase of the organization's life cycle.

Athena also spoke about her desire to transition the day-to-day operations but find a way

to stay involved at a strategic level that focused on the vision of the organization.

In moving forward with that [succession plan], I think this is the part where I feel

like I get stuck. And that stuck is, I feel like I can bring energy to the organization

still. I feel like I don't need to be involved in any of the day-to-day operational

stuff. They've got this, they don't need me for that. There's a transition period with

a new director, but we have an operations manual. We have those systems in

place, that can support her, and I'm always a phone call away. I see myself as the

bigger vision, the bigger picture person. Everything I go to is always

sustainability. So, that's where my head is at, with this systematic transition. I

think, to build on that, I think I thought at the beginning, I think I was thinking all

or nothing, right? Like I don't want to impede the [transition] process, and I don't

have a place [in the new organization after I am no longer executive leader]. I

don't want to get in the way, and I don't want people to be like, "Oh, here we go."

So, it was almost like I had to remove myself from that completely. And the

conversations that I've had since then is that there is a place here for me [here at

Community of Warriors]. And it's not about me, not about from a control

perspective, but it doesn't have to be all or nothing. (Athena)

Spike shared his thoughts about the internal reconciliation that he was faced with

as he moved forward with ROC Solid.

I think back to another question, being honest, the platform of this position is,

very, defining for me. And losing that platform is a loss for me. And to think

about what my life looks like when I'm not the CEO, and I'm trying to get my

arms around that. But I'm also, you know, I'm 73 and I'm trying to get my arms

around, doing other things, you know. I know people who have made the

transition and you know, continually tell me I should be doing this a lot quicker

than I am, because it's just, it's really nice on the other side. And so, it's all that, so

I'm hoping, and I believe it will be true that this path that we're on that, I'll be

ready for that to happen . . . especially if I can stay on the fundraising side, in

some form. And if the board still wants me, that should work. But yeah, what

does that mean? Doesn't mean much. (Spike)

Spike acknowledged that there is a plan in place for his transition at ROC Solid, but until

the time comes for his transition, the ideas about his role after he is no longer executive

leader are only ideas. There is still an unknown element to what his role may be when a

new executive leader steps in.

Paul shared his thoughts about separating from Empower Community Resources

and how he is reconciling what his role might be after he was no longer executive leader.

I've worked here 21 years probably did 80 hours a week for 21 years and it's such

a part of my DNA. Like I don't ever see myself just moving to California or

something and not having anything to do with Empower Community Resources. I

guess what I would see is that as you get older, you are going to slow down a little

bit. That unless I get hit by a bus or something that I'd somehow always be

engaged and be a voice if folks needed me. And somehow carry on a little bit of

that tradition even though it was very clear that somebody else was the one

running the show. (Paul)

Mary shared a literal vision of life as a new executive leader joined the team and

Mary continued to support the organization.

It would be wonderful. It would be wonderful to find the right person that could

be here. And they could have my office. I could stay, you know, I could still work

in Reagan's office. But it would be nice to be able to help them. You know, get

their feet on the ground. (Mary)

Many of the participants were thinking about their separation from the

organizations they created in similar ways. For six of the seven participants, there was a

need for reconciliation between the connection to the organization they founded and the

work to establish separation from the organization. There was also a desire by

participants to stay connected to the organization during and after their succession out of

the executive leadership role. Participants were thinking, talking, and taking steps

towards a future of their organizations after their tenure as executive leader.

Summary of Results

The IPA study explored the lived experience of nonprofit organization founding

executive leaders – specifically, the meaning that seven nonprofit organization founding

executive leaders assigned to their experience with succession planning. This chapter

presents the results of data analysis from study participants.

The research question investigated how nonprofit organization founding executive

leaders experience succession planning. The following research question guided the

study: What meaning do nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their

experience with succession planning?

A varied definition of succession planning emerged from study participants that

provided a foundation for how each participant understood the research question. The

results of data analysis yielded six superordinate themes. The themes were: (a) the

creation and sustainability of the organization was driven by things greater than them, (b)

there was an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the

organizational identity, (c) there was a desire and belief that the organization should and will continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader, (d) there was a focus on the future, (e) there was an importance to institutionalize the culture of their organizations, and (f) there was an internal reconciliation between the connection to the organization founded and the work of establishing separation from the organization. Table 4.5 presents a summary of the findings by the unique themes and shared experiences across participants.

Table 4.5

Summary of Findings by Theme and Participant

	P1: Christine	P2: Roger	P3: Mary	P4: Paul	P5: Minerva	P6: Athena	P7: Spike
Theme 1: Greater than yourself							
Belief in faith	x	x	x			x	x
Lack of ego		x		x	x		
Theme 2: Interdependent identities					x	x	
Theme 3: Organization living on	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Theme 4: Focus on the future							
Proactive planning		x		x	x	x	x
Reality of life	x	x	x		x		x
External influences	x	x	x			x	x
Theme 5: Institutionalize the culture							
Mission driven culture	x	x		x		x	
Transferring the spirit		x	x	x	x		
Theme 6: Internal reconciliation							
Struggle with separation					x	x	x
Weight of the world					x	x	
Successor transition			x	x		x	x
Post succession		x	x	x	x	x	x

The final chapter will provide implications of the findings and make recommendations. The chapter will also summarize the study, reiterate the significance of

the study, discuss limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for future

research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Most nonprofit organizations face a succession of leadership during the life of the organization. Grusky (1960) argued that succession is a phenomenon that all organizations will experience if the organization is to exist past the founding executive. Succession planning is understood to be an essential process in nonprofit organizations and vital to organizational sustainability; however, succession planning is absent in many nonprofit organizations (Rothwell, 2005). For this study, succession planning was defined as "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (Rothwell, 2005, p. 10).

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis study was to explore the lived experience of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who are engaging in succession planning. The following research question guided the study: What meaning do nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning?

The first phase of the research process involved identifying a small group of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identified as having engaged in (or currently engaging in) succession planning as defined by the researcher. The second phase of the research process included a series of in-person semi-structured interviews with seven participants who were selected based on their potential to

contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and the research problem. Data analysis included transcription, reading and rereading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, identification of connections, analysis sequencing, and identification of patterns. The following themes emerged: (a) the creation and sustainability of the organization were driven by things greater than them, (b) there was an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the organizational identity, (c) there was a desire and a belief that the organization should and will continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader, (d) there was a focus on the future, (e) there was an importance on institutionalizing the culture of the organization, and (f) there was an internal reconciliation between the connection to the organization founded and the work of establishing separation from the organization.

The final chapter of this study will connect the themes identified to the literature on succession planning in nonprofit organizations and the literature on founders. Also, the chapter will propose implications of this study's findings to professional practice and the expansion of knowledge on succession planning in founder-led nonprofit organizations. The chapter provides recommendations to nonprofit organization founding executive leaders, boards of directors, and community stakeholders for improved practice. The chapter also details limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Implications of Findings

In this study, seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders were asked to share the meaning that they assigned to their experience with succession planning. During the identification of patterns, six themes emerged from the data. A varied

definition of succession planning also emerged from study participants that provided a foundation for how each participant understood the research question.

Defining succession planning. In this study, an unanticipated finding emerged. Although all participants self-identified as engaging in succession planning based on the definition provided by the researcher, when asked how they defined succession planning, several definitions emerged. Succession planning has most often been described in three forms including: (a) as inclusive of a formal planning process for executive transition (Adams, 2010a; La Piana, 2016), (b) emergency leadership transition planning (Greater Milwaukee Foundation, 2008; La Piana, 2016), and (c) long-term leadership planning involving leader and talent development (Adams, 2017; Conger & Fulmer, 2003; La Piana, 2016).

Study participants indicated that they are engaging in succession planning at varying degrees and the range in definitions of succession planning was significant. Five of the seven study participants have emergency leadership plans for their unexpected transition due to death, illness, or termination. Four of the study participants are engaging in departure-defined succession planning, however, none of the founding executive leaders have committed to a defined timeline that would result in the scheduled transition of the founder. Four of the study participants are engaging in long-term succession planning, including talent development and leadership planning, although in varying degrees.

Study participants self-identified as engaging in succession planning, however, their experiences varied significantly. The finding indicates a need to establish common language within an organization with all key stakeholders so that there is a shared

understanding of what succession planning is for that particular organization. Establishing common language also sets a foundation and provides clarity about what succession planning is and is not. It also provides a framework for discussing the scope and specific activities that the organization will undertake.

This study confirms the findings of McKee and Froelich (2016) that executive leaders are engaging in select succession planning activities. Study participants are engaging in activities that are consistent with definitions of succession planning, however, they are not categorizing these activities as succession planning. McKee and Froelich (2016) argued that the more activities an organization engages in, even if the activities are not defined as succession planning, the greater the indication that the executive leader had appropriately planned for succession.

This study found that founding executive leaders who are engaging in more succession planning activities and specifically, activities that are consistent with the definition of long-term succession planning, were more self-aware of the importance succession planning had on their organizations. These founding executive leaders have a belief that succession planning is important and their actions are consistent with supporting that belief.

Understanding how study participants defined succession planning provided the context for exploring what succession planning meant to them as founding executive leaders. As founding executive leaders assigned meaning to their experience with succession planning, that experience was shaped by their definition of it.

Theory of planned behavior. In this study, the theory of planned behavior served as the theoretical framework for understanding the intentionality of nonprofit

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organization executive leaders toward succession planning within their organizations. The theory helps conceptualize the research findings. When applying the theory of planned behavior to succession planning, Sharma et al. (2003) stated that in order for succession to be considered as planned behavior the initiator must: (a) have the "desirability of the anticipated outcomes to the initiator" – a positive attitude about succession planning; (b) believe "acceptability of the outcomes by a reference group" – a positive belief from outside influencers about succession planning; and (c) "the initiator's perception that the behavior will lead to the desired outcomes" – an expectation that engaging in succession planning will lead to positive results and the behavior is under the initiator's control (p. 2).

The study participants' attitudes about succession planning are consistent with the theory of planned behavior and may be influencing how they assign meaning to their experience with succession planning. Participants who expressed a positive attitude about succession planning and who believed that there were positive benefits to engaging in succession planning may have greater intention to engage in succession planning. Conversely, participants who expressed a negative attitude about succession planning may be more resistance and have less intention to engage in succession planning.

The degree to which study participants have control over succession planning is consistent with the theory of planned behavior. The participants who believed that succession planning was under their control may have greater intention to engage in succession planning. Conversely, participants who believed that succession planning was not under their control may have more resistance and have less intention to engage in succession planning.

Others, including staff, the board of directors, and funders are also influencing the founding executive leader's intentionality to engage in succession planning. Four study participants expressed a positive belief from outside influencers about succession planning. Two participants expressed negative influences by their boards of directors, funders, and other stakeholders may have more resistance and have less intention to engage in succession planning.

Study participants who expressed positive behavior beliefs about succession planning, experienced positive social pressure to engage in succession planning, and indicated that they were able to take action (control belief) with succession planning demonstrated an intention to engage in succession planning. These beliefs are supported by evidence of study participants' actions, specifically the succession planning activities in which they are engaged. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the interpretation of study participant's beliefs about succession planning.

The findings present an opportunity for founding executive leaders to focus on how their beliefs impact the extent to which they are thinking about, talking about, and engaging in succession planning in the organizations they created. The conscious knowledge of their own character, feelings, motives, and desires about the organizations they created and the continued existence of these organizations is central to the founding executive leaders' self-awareness and intention to engage in succession planning.

Table 5.1

The Theory of Planned Behavior: Lens of Interpretation

Name (Pseudonym)	Behavioral Beliefs	Normative Beliefs	Control Beliefs
P1: Christine	Neither positive nor negative attitude about succession planning.	Very positive influence by others including the board of directors.	Neither positive nor negative perception that succession planning is under their control.
P2: Roger	Very positive attitude about succession planning.	Very positive influence by others including the board of directors, and funders.	Very positive perception that succession planning is under their control.
P3: Mary	Neither positive nor negative attitude about succession planning.	Very negative influence by others including the board of directors.	Very negative perception that succession planning is under their control.
P4: Paul	Somewhat positive attitude about succession planning.	Neither positive nor negative influence by others.	Very positive perception that succession planning is under their control.
P5: Minerva	Very positive attitude about succession planning.	Very positive influence by others including the board of directors.	Very positive perception that succession planning is under their control.
P6: Athena	Very positive attitude about succession planning.	Somewhat positive influence by others including board of directors and funders.	Very positive perception that succession planning is under their control.
P7: Spike	Somewhat negative attitude about succession planning.	Very negative influence by others including the board of directors.	Very negative perception that succession planning is under their control.

Because the findings align with the theory of planned behavior, an opportunity exists to approach shifting acknowledgment for the importance of succession planning to action through exploring each of the tenets of the theory. If through positive support, sharing, and guidance, a founding executive leader could have a positive shift of their attitude about succession planning (behavioral beliefs) and of the important role they play in planning for the future (control beliefs), a shift may occur for these leaders from acknowledgment of the importance of succession planning to action. Study participants are perceived to have positive beliefs about the behavior that many founding executive leaders are not engaging in. One of the differentiating factors may be their beliefs about this behavior – succession planning.

Because succession planning is not occurring in many nonprofit organizations, examining the shared experiences of a group of founding executive leaders who are engaging in succession planning through the lens of the theory of planned behavior, provided an additional layer of understanding. Nonprofit organization founding executive leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning, however, many are not taking action. Study participants are engaging in the desired behavior. Understanding what influenced the participants to engage in the behavior, through the framework of the theory of planned behavior, provided new insights into the beliefs influencing intention to engage in succession planning.

Superordinate themes. In addition to a varied definition of succession planning, six superordinate themes emerged from the meaning that participants assigned to their experience with succession planning. The themes provide a foundation for how each participant understood the research question of: What meaning do nonprofit organization

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founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning(a) the

creation and sustainability of the organization were driven by things greater than them,

(b) there was an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the

organizational identity, (c) there was a desire and a belief that the organization should

and will continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader, (d) there was a focus on

the future, (e) there was an importance on institutionalizing the culture of the

organization, and (f) there was an internal reconciliation between the connection to the

organization founded and the work of establishing separation from the organization.

Greater than yourself. The belief that the purpose of the organization was greater

than them was the first finding that emerged as a shared experience of founding executive

leaders experience with succession planning. All of the participants shared that a purpose

greater than the founder drove the creation and sustainability of the organization. All of

the study participants indicated in some way that the existence of the organization was

"not about them" as they explored their experience with succession planning. Five

participants spoke about the influence of faith on the creation and continuation of their

organizations, while four participants spoke about their personal identity (lack of ego).

For study participants, the role of founder is secondary to the work of the

organization. Founding executive leaders who have a personal identity that minimizes

self-importance and places this secondary to the organization demonstrate a lack of ego.

There is a calling to do the work, however, ultimately the work is about service to others,

not about the ego of the founder. If the founder believes that the work of the organization

is greater than them – the life of the organization can live on separate from the founder.

Having this belief that the organization is greater than them can be a foundational

component of succession planning and it can strengthen the separation of the founder's identity from the organization's identity.

Study participants stated that the organization was about something greater than them, however, research indicates that the nature of creation is very personal. Jeavons (1992) stated that community-based nonprofit organizations are created to give expression to the social, philosophical, moral, or religious values of their founders. Carman and Nesbit (2012) also argued that founders have a personal calling to create an organization, as well as the desire to create an organization based on their own personal interests and experiences. If founding executive leaders can acknowledge that the nature of creation is very personal, but also believe that the purpose of the organization is greater than themselves, there may be greater intention to engage in succession planning.

Interdependent identities. The concept of interdependent identities was the second finding that emerged as a shared experience of founding executive leaders' experience with succession planning. There is often an interdependent relationship between the founder's identity and the identity of the organization. As the nonprofit organization matures, there is often an increased separation between the founder's identity and the organization's identity. In the beginning, the founder may need the organization as much as the organization needs the founder. As the founder moves closer to transitioning from the role of executive leader, there should become a clear separation between the founder's identity and the organization's identity; however, for some founders, interdependent identities may continue to exist forever.

The interdependent identities are often spoken about in the literature. Wright (2012) called attention to the need to prepare for succession with both planning through

the existence of a succession plan, as well as a need to prepare psychologically for the transition. Kets de Vries (1988) stated that planning for succession triggers psychological forces that the executive leader and board of directors are obliged to cope with; these include interdependencies and dynamic relationships.

In this study, Minerva and Athena were candid about the dynamic relationships they have with the organizations they founded. Minerva shared that she and Urban Resilience were "intimately involved" and the relationship has been "a love affair." For Minerva, she believed that the personal journey she was on was inextricably linked to her professional impact. Athena shared that in the beginning, she needed Community of Warriors as much as the organization needed her. Athena has since intentionally shifted the narrative of Community of Warriors from "her story" to the organization's story.

If the identities do not separate, there may be significant consequences on the sustainability of the organization after the founder is no longer executive leader. The psychological impact on the founder can also be significant. If codependency exists, the relationship is not healthy or sustainable in the long term. As with Minerva and Athena, it is understandable during the creation phase to have interdependent identities. However, as the organization matures and there is a focus on succession planning and sustainability, a separation of identities needs to occur.

Stevens (1999) argued that as time progresses there are three stages of separation for a founding executive leader, and the second stage is individuation, when the founder begins to think of the organization as separate from themselves. According to Stevens (1999), founders have a calling, a mission, an internal mandate fueled by classic entrepreneurial characteristics: energy, drive, intensity, self-determination, and urgency

and they are inextricably linked to their organizations. When the organization is created, this connection is virtually synonymous with who they are (Stevens, 1999). As the separation of identities occurs, changes may need to be framed from multiple perspectives. The organizational identity interpreted by employees may be different than what appears on the surface as there is often an imbalance of power in founder-led organizations (Balser & Carmin, 2009).

Athena and Minerva expressed a high degree of self-awareness as they spoke about the interdependent identities while sharing what the organizations they created had meant to them. If a founding executive leader is able to acknowledge that the nature of creation is very personal and often includes the existence of interdependent identities, but has the self-awareness to recognize that a separation of identities is required over time, there may be greater intention to engage in succession planning.

Organization living on. The desire for the organization to live on was the third finding that emerged as a shared experience of founding executive leaders experience with succession planning. Study participants had a desire and a belief that the organizations they founded should and will continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader. Participants shared that the work must continue because of its impact and need in the communities served. Participants believe that mission and purpose of the organization are too important to let the organization fail or die with the founder.

By expressing a desire to have the organization continue to exist after their tenure as executive leader, study participants have already faced a difficult question about sustainability. Stevens (1999) argued that a focus on sustainability forces nonprofit organization founding executive leaders to face the difficult question of whether they

want the organization to survive past their tenure as executive leader. Study participants have already taken this difficult first step of proclaiming that the organizations should continue to exist; this often does not occur, according to Stevens (1999).

This study's finding is consistent with Adams' (2005) position that nonprofit organization founders build and rebuild their communities, creating extraordinary social benefit and creating critically needed organizations. Study participants had humble expectations of what their organizations could become. Study participants acknowledged that their organizations were community assets and they recognized that the work of the organizations was greater than ever expected. Participants did not create their organizations with the expectation of significant impact or seeking success; rather the organizations were created to help "a few people." Study participants came to realize the significant impact that their organizations had in their communities, and as a result, believe that the organizations should continue to exist after their tenure as executive leaders.

Creation of a nonprofit organization often comes from an expression of the founder. For study participants to acknowledge their desire and intention to have their organizations live on beyond their tenure as executive leaders is a significant step in acknowledging that they will separate from the organizations they created. If the common purpose of these organizations is needed by the community, and if the founding executive leader believes that the organization must live on, then the intention to engage in succession planning exists.

Focus on the future. A focus on the future was the fourth finding that emerged as a shared experience of founding executive leaders experience with succession planning.

All seven participants indicated that there was a focus on the future of their organizations. However, participants were thinking about the future in different ways. Some participants were taking proactive steps to plan for the future, some participants were planning for the future as a result of their age and life circumstances, while others were influenced by external stakeholders including the board of directors and funders.

If the founding executive leader believes that the organization should continue to exist, the natural next step is to focus on the future. Study participants shared a desire for their organizations to live on and their actions provided evidence of their planning for the future. To focus on the future means stepping back from the day-to-day operations of the organization to look at the big picture – a foundational piece of succession planning. Acknowledgment to action with succession planning involved a focus on the future for study participants. This finding supports the position by La Piana (2016) who encouraged nonprofit organizations to focus on ongoing succession planning, involving regular assessment of the organization and planning for the future. A focus on the future is not easy and takes time and resources, but having this focus is important to the long-term sustainability of the organization.

For some participants, the realization that they are not going to live forever influenced their intention to engage in succession planning. Their own self-awareness of their mortality created a sense of urgency. Mortality, not organizational sustainability, influenced the founder to engage in succession planning.

The three study participants who felt the board of directors was responsible for succession planning or who felt pressured by the board of directors all acknowledged that age was a factor in planning for the future. This study supports Adams's (2005) insights

that the role of the board of directors of nonprofit organizations and the relationship between the board of directors and the executive leader is dynamic and can contribute to the complexity of succession planning. If the intentions of the study participants align with the board of directors' focus on the future, succession planning was consistent with a long-term approach. The three study participants who were focused on the future because of pressure from the board of directors due to their age are not organizations that are engaging in long-term succession planning based on the evidence from this study.

If a founding executive leader is focused on the future and is proactively planning, rather than reacting to their reality of life or external influences, there may be greater intention to engage in long-term succession planning rather than only emergency succession planning. A focus on sustainability is consistent with the belief that the organization should live on and is "greater than them." When the focus on the future is driven by the founder's own mortality or board of directors' pressure, the focus is diverted from the organization back to the founder, which may be counteractive to effective succession planning.

Institutionalize the culture. Institutionalizing the culture was the fifth finding that emerged as a shared experience of founding executive leaders experience with succession planning. Founders are the living breathing exemplar of the culture, and the founder's vision and beliefs dominate their organization's culture. For six of the seven participants, institutionalizing the culture of their organizations through building a shared experience and articulating common learnings was part of their experience with succession planning. Results are consistent with Adams (2017) and Lynn (2001) who

argued that succession planning should involve an intentional approach to developing and retaining institutional knowledge and memory.

As study participants planned for the future, there was a strong desire on their part to see evidence of demonstrated passion for the mission of the organization by others including staff, board of directors, and community members through creating a shared experience. There was also the desire to ensure that the essence and the spirit of the organization live on through others. For Stevens (1999), the third stage of founder separation from their organization is institutionalization. This study's findings indicate that participants are thinking about or are working through this third stage of founder separation.

Succession planning in founder-led nonprofit organizations often involves the transferring of the founder's values and aspirations (Stevens, 2005). Study participants expressed a strong desire for others to exhibit a passion for the mission of the organization and they took steps to influence the process of institutionalizing the culture through intentional activities, modeling the way, and documenting a "way of doing things" in the organization. If others "get it" it may make the weight of having the organization live on lighter for the founding executive leader.

This study is consistent with McKee and Driscoll (2008) who found that the departing executive leaders create and implement supports in the organization including planning timely departures, ensuring values fit, and entrenching values in future leaders who are perceived to impact the success of the succession. The departing executive leaders believed that they could directly impact the success of the transition through effective and early supports (McKee & Driscoll, 2008). Study findings are consistent

with this belief as evidenced by their desire to institutionalize the culture of the organizations they created.

Because of the role as creator, founding executive leaders have a significant level of influence over the culture and the habits of the organizations that they established (Adams, 2017). Study participants expressed the importance of shaping the culture of the organizations they created, with the desire of ensuring that the culture is maintained after they are no longer executive leaders. The desire by study participants is consistent with the idea of invisible leadership expressed by Hickman and Sorenson (2014) in which "dedication to a compelling and deeply held common purpose provides inspiration for leaders and followers and cultivates a strong shared bond that connects participants to each other in pursuit of their purpose" (p. 3). If the founding executive leader is able to institutionalize the culture, the continued expression of this invisible leader can represent the founding executive leader's legacy. A founder's legacy can live on long after the individual has stepped down from their leadership role. Study participants have a desire to institutionalize the culture and influence the establishment of their legacy.

If a founding executive leader is focused on institutionalizing the culture of their organization by fostering a mission-driven culture and by being intentional about transferring the spirit of the organization, there is demonstrated evidence of succession planning. For these founding executive leaders, succession planning involves a long-term approach that may influence the sustainability of the organization long after the transition of the founding executive leader.

Internal reconciliation. The final finding that emerged as a shared experience of founding executive leaders experience with succession planning was internal

reconciliation. For six of the seven participants, there was a reconciliation between their connection to the organization they founded and the work to establish separation from the organization. Participants spoke of the challenges with thinking about and taking steps to plan for succession and the future. There was also a desire by participants to stay connected to the organization during and after their succession out of the executive leadership role. Spike was candid about his struggle with succession planning and separating from ROC Solid, stating that "succession planning isn't waiting for somebody to tell you that it's time to go. I think you got to listen to messages that are both internal and external about that."

Study findings are consistent with Santora et al. (2014) who found that most nonprofit organization founding executive leaders are faced with considerable inner struggle as they contemplate relinquishing their positions at some point in the future. For a founder, the realization that they will give up power at some future point may trigger fear and thoughts about immortality (Kets de Vries, 1988). Throughout this study's findings, there is evidence of these thoughts as participants shared their experience with succession planning.

This study aligns with Wright's (2012) findings, that although a succession plan may have been developed, the departing executive leaders still may find it challenging to reconcile their internal thought processes about leaving their positions. Even with the existence of tangible succession plans, there was still a need to reconcile the emotional and psychological part of the transition (Wright, 2012).

Study findings are also consistent with a founder's desire for a "graceful exit" transition identified by Leach (2009). The graceful exit transition acknowledges that the

founder's expertise, connections, and message of continuity is of value to the organization even after they are no longer the executive leader. Irrespective of the founding executive leader's desire, the transition process is multifaceted. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the best type of transition and post-transition relationship between the founder and the organization they create.

If a founding executive leader can work through the internal reconciliation between the connection to the organization they founded and the work to establish separation from the organization, there may be greater success with succession planning as the founding executive leader plans for the transition out of the role of executive leader. If the founding executive leader has laid the foundation through long-term succession planning and has a high level of self-awareness about their position as founder, the separation from their organization may come with fewer challenges.

Summary of implications. Study participants are engaging in succession planning and are focused on the future. These individuals are doing work that they believe is greater than themselves and a strong belief exists that the organization should continue to exist after the transition of the founding executive leader. Study participants acknowledged the internal struggle, exploring the separation of their own identity and the identity of the organization. Study participants place a high value on evidence of demonstrated passion for the mission by others. Study participants also grapple with creating a plan for transition and clarity around what their relationship should be with the organization after they are no longer the executive leader.

The findings presented are not mutually exclusive, and they may occur at different stages of a nonprofit organization's life cycle. There may be a general sequence

of these experiences, however, several of the findings influence some of the other findings. What is central to the findings is the shared experience of self-awareness by all study participants. The greater the level of self-awareness, the more candid and expressive study participants were as they shared their experience with succession planning.

Throughout the meaning assigned by study participants are elements of control, outside influences, and their own attitude about succession planning – the three beliefs of the theory of planned behavior that influence an individual's intention to engage in a behavior, in this case, succession planning. Insights gained from study participants regarding their shared experiences with succession planning may be useful to founding executive leaders who acknowledge the importance of succession planning but have yet to engage in the behavior.

Recommendations

This study explored the meaning that a group of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assigned to their experience with succession planning. Provided below are recommendations for improved practice and future research.

Recommendations for improved practice. The findings of this study suggest that founders, boards of directors, and key stakeholders develop a shared understanding of succession planning. Succession planning requires that the founder and the board of directors decide if the organization should continue into perpetuity, or if the organization should cease to exist when the founder transitions. If it is determined that the organization is a community asset and it should continue to exist, purposeful work must begin to prepare for the future.

Stakeholders should also acknowledge and appreciate the substantial work required to engage in succession planning within their organizations. Effective succession planning is not easy, nor is it a single activity. The study suggests that the experience of succession planning by a founding executive leader is profoundly personal and is in no way easy. Founding executive leaders face internal struggles about their own identity and mortality. By acknowledging the amount of time and resources necessary to engage in succession planning, stakeholders can plan their resources and focus more intentionally. Appreciating the work of succession planning in founder-led organizations also involves a substantial amount of care for the founder and their legacy.

The study also suggests the need for shared understanding and consensus of the definition of succession planning by a founding executive leader and key stakeholders. There is no single definition of succession planning. Creating a shared definition of what succession planning is and what is not for the organization will provide common language and transparency around the work of succession planning. As an organization, agreeing to a definition of succession planning lays the foundation for understanding and action.

The study suggests that founding executive leaders have a desire and an expectation to be involved in their transition and with the organization in some way after they are no longer in the role of executive leader. An opportunity exists to explore different founder transition models and articulate a plan that is agreeable to both the founder and the board of directors.

Executive leadership is central to succession planning in founder-led nonprofit organizations. As the founder thinks about succession planning, their focus and

leadership must shift to "the leadership of preparing the way and the leadership of letting go" (Redington & Vickers, 2001, p. 6). The process of separating the founding executive leader's identity from the identity of the organization requires patience. The spirit of the organization, the common purpose or "invisible leader," should remain central to the pursuit of organizational life after the founding executive leader leaves. The founding executive leader has a responsibility to set the tone and thoughtfully allocate resources that create a path to sustainability.

Succession planning should include several activities, and an opportunity exists to frame the work of succession planning in the broader context of organizational sustainability that can be operationalized in day-to-day work of nonprofit organizations. This idea is supported by La Piana (2016) that involves shifting to a succession lens, to "integrate into the day-to-day workings of the organization an ongoing process of assessing where an organization is now, where they want to be in the future, and how they will develop the leadership from here to there" (p. 2). The study findings provide an opportunity for founding executive leaders and boards of directors to explore a guided approach to preparing for succession planning.

Recommendations for future research. The research methodology employed in this study could easily be replicated by other researchers, achieving dependability. Dependability is one of the standards of quality of qualitative research conducted and is necessary to establish trustworthiness. Additional studies could be conducted with nonprofit organization founding executive leaders of similar size, years in existence, or similar stages in the nonprofit organization life-cycle. Also, similar studies could be conducted with organizations outside of New York State.

A longitudinal study could examine how study participants execute activities in their succession plans that have not come to fruition – for example, how the founding executive leader works through the separation of their identity and the identity of the organization. Additional research could explore the experience of transitioning out of the executive leadership role as compared to the desired or anticipated experience by these founding executive leaders.

Additional research could also include the exploration of founder profiles based on the shared meaning of succession planning. The exploration of the "spirit of the organization" from the board of director and key staff may be of value. Also, an exploration of succession planning from the perspective of other key stakeholders including the board of directors and key staff should be undertaken. Testing the theory of planned behavior with succession planning could strengthen the alignment of the current study's findings with the theory.

Finally, additional research could lead to the further refinement of the shared experiences found in this study by nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who are engaging in succession planning. Understanding these experiences in greater depth may be beneficial to other nonprofit organization executive founders who have yet to engage in succession planning.

Limitations

An interpretive phenomenological analysis study provides the opportunity to investigate and uncover how individuals make sense of their experiences including transitions in their life or significant decisions. The primary goal of this research was to explore the meaning that nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assigned to

their experience with succession planning. Research participants provided rich descriptions of their experiences with succession planning. However, this research had limitations.

First, the population for this study included a homogenous sample of individuals with shared experiences of the phenomenon of interest. A purposeful sample of seven nonprofit organization founding executive leaders from nonprofit organizations in New York State was selected. This narrow geographic context potentially limits transferability of the study. Ultimately, the findings can be understood within their context through the researcher providing sufficient contextual information about the study site and participants and other contextual factors (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2004).

Second, consistent with IPA research, the sample was identified as homogenous based on the shared experience. The sample was not as homogeneous as desired. Study participants self-identified as having engaged in (or currently engaging in) succession planning as defined by the researcher, however, their interpretation of the definition varied. The definition of succession planning used was consistent with a long-term definition of succession planning. As noted in the findings, succession planning was defined significantly differently by participants, creating different foundations of understanding for exploring their experience with succession planning.

Third, the theory of planned behavior served as the theoretical framework for understanding the intentionality of nonprofit organization executive leaders toward succession planning within their organizations. The application of the theory of planned behavior was used to help conceptualize the research findings. The purpose of the study was not to test the theory of planned behavior, and implications noted by the researcher

provides subjective evidence of the beliefs consistent with the theory as identified by the researcher. Although consistent with the purpose, the application of the theory and the interpretation of the findings was subjective.

Finally, the researcher is employed at a community-based nonprofit organization that underwent the succession of the founding executive leader in 2016. Although this founding executive leader was not a study participant, this individual was a participant in the pilot interview. The experience of the researcher could lead to bias in the study of succession planning. The researcher, however, took steps to ensure that bias was mitigated by carefully following the interview protocol and asking clarifying questions when necessary.

Conclusion

Community-based nonprofit organizations are of economic and social significance to the communities in which they reside. In the United States, community-based nonprofit organizations continue to have increased responsibility for the delivery of what used to be public services, including social services, healthcare, and essential municipal services (Linscott, 2011). These nonprofit organizations are tasked with effectively addressing critical societal needs, often with scarce resources and a growing demand for services.

Nonprofit organizations depend on two critical resources including funding and leadership to fulfill the mission of their organizations (Tierney, 2006). The role of the executive leader in nonprofit organizations is central to sustainability. Many agree that the executive leader is the most significant contributing factor to the success of an organization (Herman & Heimovics, 1994). Executive leaders have a direct and

significant impact on the organizations they lead (Allison, 2002; Day, 1988; Kets de Vries, 1994). Executive leaders have the most in-depth understanding of how culture, mission, strategy, and goals connect in nonprofit organizations (Norton & Linnell, 2015).

Executive leaders who are also the founding directors play a central role as the nonprofit organization's originator (Stevens, 1999). The founder's relationship with his or her nonprofit organization is unique. Nonprofit organizations are created to give expression to the social, philosophical, moral, or religious values of their founders (Jeavons, 1992). Because of this role of creator, founding executive leaders have a significant level of influence over the culture and the habits of the organizations that they establish (Adams, 2017).

Founding executive leaders play a critical role in building and sustaining the nonprofit organizations that they create, and their legacy can be impacted by how succession planning occurs within their organizations (Adams, 2005; Gilmore & Brown, 1985). Effective succession planning can help sustain the organizational health and productivity before, during, and after an eventual executive leadership transition, reducing the potential pain and trauma associated with the transition (Adams, 2017; Carroll, 1984; Haveman, 1993). The transition can also provide valuable opportunities for growth and renewal (Allison, 2002).

Most nonprofit organizations face a succession of leadership during the life of the organization if the organization is going to exist past the founding executive leader. Nonprofit organization leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning; yet, succession planning in most nonprofit organizations is nonexistent. Although research supports that succession planning is not occurring in many nonprofit organizations,

succession planning is taking place in some nonprofit organizations (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Understanding the lived experiences of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who do engage in succession planning provides insights into how nonprofit organization founding directors who do not engage in succession planning may move from simply acknowledging the need for succession planning, to actively engaging in succession planning within their organizations.

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis study was to explore the lived experience of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders and the meaning they assign to their experience with succession planning. The following research question guided the study: What meaning do nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning?

The theory of planned behavior served as the theoretical framework for understanding the intentionality of nonprofit organization executive leaders toward succession planning within their organizations. The participants' attitudes about succession planning and the degree to which they have control over succession planning are consistent with the theory of planned behavior and may be influencing how they assign meaning to their experience with succession planning. Others, including staff, the board of directors, and funders are also influencing the founding executive leader's intentionality to engage in succession planning. Participants spoke at length about the influence of others on their commitment to engage in succession planning. The theory of planned behavior provided a lens for interpretation of the study findings.

The literature review established a firm foundation for the completed study. The literature presented an overview of empirically researched studies that focused on three

broad conceptual areas: (a) succession planning, (b) founders, and (c) founder succession planning. Described was the background information on succession planning including history, succession planning in nonprofit organizations, the role of the board of directors and executive leader in succession planning, and succession planning as planned behavior. A review of the literature on the uniqueness of founders and nonprofit founders was also completed to understand the role of founders. The literature provided additional insights into and informed the understanding of succession planning in founder-led organizations.

The first phase of the research process involved identifying a small group of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identified as having engaged in (or currently engaging in) succession planning as defined by the researcher. The second phase of the research process included a series of in-person semi-structured interviews with seven participants who were selected based on their potential to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon and the research problem. Data analysis included transcription, reading and rereading, initial noting, developing emergent themes, identification of connections, analysis sequencing, and identification of patterns. During the development of emergent themes in IPA (codes), data analysis involved two levels of coding. Data analysis began with open coding and in vivo coding, followed by concept coding during the first level of coding. Second level data analysis included focused coding, followed by axial coding.

The results of data analysis yielded six superordinate themes. Also, a varied definition of succession planning emerged from study participants that provided a

foundation for how each participant understood the research question. The results of analysis found that the following themes emerged:

1. As nonprofit organization founding executive leaders shared their experience with succession planning, many shared that the creation and sustainability of the organization was driven by factors greater than themselves.

2. The existence of interdependent identities, the founder's identity and the identity of the organization, were central to the participant's meaning of their experience with succession planning.

3. Participants had a desire and a belief that the organizations they founded should and will continue to exist past their tenure as executive leader.

4. There was a focus on the future in both thoughts and actions by the founders, including taking proactive steps to plan for the future. Some participants are planning for the future as a result of their age and life circumstances, while others are influenced by the board of directors or funders.

5. Many of the participants spoke about the role of institutionalizing the culture in their thinking and actions to engage in succession planning.

6. All of the participants shared their experience and desires about staying involved with the organizations they founded. Some of these individuals also delved into the internal struggle they have between staying connected and moving forward.

The meaning that participants assigned to their experience with succession planning was personal. The identity of the founder and the identity of the organization are intertwined. There is a real struggle with thinking about and taking action toward an

executive leadership transition of the founder. Succession planning with a founding executive leader is not easy, and it is important to acknowledge that it involves rational decision making and emotions.

There is a belief that the work and the existence of the organization are profound. The organization and the work are greater than the founder, and the organization should continue to exist after the transition of the founding executive leader. The work transcends the founder. It is critically important that others, besides the founder, are focused on living the mission, have profound passion for the work, and embody the spirit of the organization. For some nonprofit organizations, there is a shift from being a founder-led organization to being a board of directors led organization and institutionalized the spirit of the organization can be part of that process.

Foundational to succession planning is a focus on the future. How a founding executive leader is influenced to think about the future may have an impact on the extent to which succession planning is occurring, and the eventual success of the transition of the founding executive leader. Founding executive leaders are influenced by their own attitude about the future and the desire to plan for the future, by the reality of life and their own mortality, and by external influences such as the board of directors and funders.

Succession planning can have a multiplier effect. Nonprofit organizations do not operate in isolation; instead, they are part of a network of community resources that provide vital supports. Planning for succession in one nonprofit organization may also benefit the broader network of nonprofit organizations in a community (La Piana, 2016; Wolfred, 2008). The success or failure of one nonprofit organization impacts other nonprofit organizations that provide reinforcing services. Also, as nonprofit professionals

enter the sector and progress in their careers, the support and development provided by one nonprofit organization has residual effects on the local network of nonprofit organizations. With a focus on developing knowledge and skills, staff will migrate between organizations, creating a stronger network of talent (Wolfred, 2008). As succession planning becomes standard practice in the nonprofit sector, the entire nonprofit community will become stronger and more efficient in achieving the missions of their organizations (Wolfred, 2008).

The commitment and pursuit of sustainability through succession planning of founder-led nonprofit organizations, is at its essence, a commitment promoting social justice because of the work of these organizations. Community-based nonprofit organizations promote social justice through the clients they serve and the communities they impact. Founding executive leaders have created community assets, and there is a social responsibility to continue this work and continue to serve often the most vulnerable populations. Understanding the meaning that nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning provides context for supporting the commitment to and the execution of succession planning in organizations on the ground floor in their communities. The work of these organizations is greater than any one individual.

Finally, nonprofit organization founding executive leaders have passion, drive, and entrepreneurial spirit to create vital organizations, often serving the most vulnerable communities. Founders are visionaries who begin and sustain these organizations who have become community assets, by giving their time, energy, resources, and often their

lives and identities. To think intentionally about the spirit of the founder, becoming the spirit of the organization speaks to the founder's legacy, and in some ways, immortality.

As a community, there is a responsibility – founders, leadership staff, boards of directors, funders, and consultants – to make the time and energy required for succession planning. Succession planning is not easy, it often is not quick, and no one solution will meet the needs of every nonprofit organization. Although there are great resources available in books, guides, and with the support of consultants, the essence of succession planning is about life. The life of the organization as it is envisioned in the future; the separation of the founder's identity from the organizational identity, and the work to institutionalize the spirit of the organization.

Nonprofit organizations are living organisms, and they are often led by and staffed by passionate individuals who serve the most vulnerable populations in their communities. Relationships, passion, compassion, and resilience are the foundation of how these organizations serve their communities. Founders are visionaries who followed a calling by starting these vital community-based nonprofit organizations, and key stakeholders in their communities should have the desire and should feel a responsibility to continue this important work.

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Appendix A

E-mail Letter to Community Experts

Subject Line: Request for Assistance

Good afternoon Ms. Brown,

Thank you for taking the time to read my e-mail. I am a doctoral candidate in the St. John Fisher College Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. In addition to being a full-time student, I am the Director of Operations at On Point for College, a community-based nonprofit organization in Syracuse, New York. Because of the strong connections that you have with a broad network of nonprofit organizations in Southern Central New York, it is my hope that you will consider my request for assistance with the study I will be conducting.

I hope to speak with a small group of community-based organizations that may be engaging in leadership planning, talent development, and/or thinking about how organizational knowledge is developed and retained (parts of the succession planning equation). My interest lies in understanding founders who have thought about how their organization may "live" past their tenure as CEO/Executive leader. I have learned that founders may take steps (often very organically) to plan for the future of their organization in this way. Succession planning does not need to include an already planned transition, but rather a commitment to explore how the organization may live on.

If you know of organizations that this topic may resonate with, and that may consider exploring the topic with me, please consider sharing the name(s) of the organization and I will contact the executive leader, or please feel free to share my request directly with the executive leader(s). I can be reached via e-mail at tme07876@sjfc.edu, or by phone at 315-418-0450 with any questions.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Best regards,
Tanya

Appendix B

E-mail Letter of Introduction to Potential Participants

Subject Line: Request for Assistance

Good afternoon Ms. Doe,

Thank you for taking the time to read my e-mail. I am a doctoral candidate in the St. John Fisher College Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. In addition to being a full-time student, I am the Director of Operations at On Point for College, a community-based nonprofit organization in Syracuse, New York. It is my hope that you will consider my request for assistance with the study I will be conducting. The study will focus on community-based organizations that are often created to address unmet needs of the most vulnerable populations within their communities. These organizations are often the "lifeblood" for community members.

I hope to speak with a small group of community-based organizations that may be engaging in leadership planning, talent development, and/or thinking about how organizational knowledge is developed and retained (parts of the succession planning equation). My interest lies in understanding founders who have thought about how their organization may "live" past their tenure as CEO/Executive leader. I have learned that founders may take steps (often very organically) to plan for the future of their organization in this way. Succession planning does not need to include an already planned transition, but rather a commitment to explore how the organization may live on. If these thoughts resonate with you, I ask that you please consider exploring the topic with me.

I can be reached via e-mail at tme07876@sjfc.edu, or by phone at 315-418-0450 with any questions.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request.

Best regards,
Tanya

Appendix C

E-mail Letter of Participant Selection

Subject Line: Request for Assistance: Participant Selection

Good afternoon Ms. Doe,

Thank you for your interest in my research! The title of my study is, *"Understanding Succession Planning Through the Lived Experience of Nonprofit Organization Founding Executive Leaders."* The study will focus on exploring the experiences of four to six nonprofit founding executive leaders from across the Northeast who self-identify as engaging in succession planning within their organizations.

Study participants will be selected who can respond "yes" to the following questions:
- Have you founded a nonprofit organization that currently has at least five employees?
- Are you currently in the position of executive leader or CEO?
- Have you engaged in (or do you currently engage in) activities that you consider to be:
  - ways of thinking about leadership continuity in key positions within your organization;
  - involve developing organizational knowledge for the future;
  - involve retaining organizational knowledge for the future; and/or encourage individual advancement?

Participation in the study is not expected to be complex or time-consuming. The process will involve a brief introductory phone call (or e-mail) followed by a face-to-face interview that will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you.

If you can respond "yes" to the questions above and would like to move forward with participation, please forward a few dates and times over the next 4-6 weeks that you are available.

Thank you again for taking the time to consider my request.

Best regards,
Tanya

Appendix D

E-mail Letter to Participants Selected

Subject Line: Documentation for Research Participation

Good afternoon Mr. Doe,

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study. A face-to-face interview is scheduled for *Thursday, August 10th at 3:00 pm.*

Please find attached:

- **Letter of Participation:** Please review and keep for your records.

- **Informational Form:** A one-page informational form is being provided to you that summarizes details of the study. Please review and keep for your records.

- **Informed Consent Form:** Please review and if you consent to participate in the study, please sign and return. I will sign and provide a copy at our meeting.

- **Demographic Profile Questionnaire:** The demographic profile questionnaire can be completed during a brief phone call at a time that is convenient for you, or if you prefer, you have the option to complete the demographic profile questionnaire via e-mail.

If you have any questions about the documents attached, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,
Tanya

Appendix E

Informational Form

Regarding Data Collection and Participant Rights

- The title of the study is "Understanding Succession Planning Through the Lived Experience of Nonprofit Organization Founding Executive Leaders."

- The researcher is Tanya M. Eastman, a full-time doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. The researcher is also the Director of Operations at On Point for College, a Syracuse-based community-based nonprofit organization that supports low-income, first-generation college students in gaining access to and successfully completing post-secondary education.

- The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of between four to six nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identify as engaging in succession planning within their organizations. The study will add new insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experience succession planning.

- The researcher will conduct one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with four to six nonprofit organization founding directors who self-identify as engaging in succession planning within their organizations.

- The three data gathering techniques to be utilized are a demographic profile questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and a research notebook including field notes and reflective memos. All paper documents and electronic documents collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a secured and locked file cabinet at the researcher's home address.

- The identity of the participants and their organizations will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the participants and their organizations.

- Participation in the study is completely voluntary. Participants can withdraw their participation in the study at any point by simply informing the researcher that they no longer would like to participate. There will be no repercussions for withdrawing from the study.

Letter of Participation

Jane Doe
123 East Avenue
Rochester, New York 13206

July 18, 2017

Dear Ms. Doe:

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in this voluntary study. You have been chosen because you have founded a nonprofit organization that currently has at least five employees, have self-identified as engaging in succession planning, and have an interest in understanding how you and other founders make sense of succession planning within the organizations that you have created.

I have been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, NY to conduct research for my dissertation in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. The study will focus on exploring the experiences of between four to six nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identify as engaging in succession planning within their organizations. The study will add new insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experience succession planning. Through exploring the experiences of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who engage in succession planning, we may learn more about why many nonprofit organization founding executive leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning but have yet to engage in the process.

A one-page informational form is being provided to you that summarizes details of the study. **Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you will have the option of terminating your participation at any time without any penalty or repercussions.** Additionally, your participation will be confidential. During all aspects of the study, your identity will be protected by the use of a pseudonym. Your organization will also be assigned a pseudonym as an additional measure to protect privacy.

All paper documents and electronic documents collected and analyzed for this study will be kept in a secured and locked file cabinet at the researcher's home address. Only the researcher will have access to the secured file cabinet. All paper documents, electronic documents, and analyzed materials will be kept at the secured location for three years

after completion of the study, after which time, all documents will be destroyed by shredding (paper documents) and erasing (electronic documents).

An initial demographic profile questionnaire is included with this letter. I would like to request fifteen minutes of your time for a brief introductory phone call at a time that is convenient for you. During the phone call, we will discuss the purpose of the study and I will ask you the questions included in the demographic questionnaire. If you would prefer, you have the option to complete the demographic profile questionnaire via e-mail. A face-to-face interview has been scheduled for **August 1, 2017, at 12:00 pm.**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Tanya M. Eastman, Doctoral Candidate
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St. John Fisher College: Informed Consent Form

Title of study: Understanding Succession Planning Through the Lived Experience of Nonprofit Organization Founding Executive leaders

Name(s) of researcher(s): Tanya M. Eastman

Faculty Supervisor: Kim VanDerLinden, Ph.D.
Phone for Faculty Supervisor for further information: 716-238-1471

Purpose of study: This study will focus on exploring the experiences of between four to six nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who self-identify as engaging in succession planning within their organizations. The study will add new insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experience succession planning. Through exploring the experiences of nonprofit organization founding executive leaders who engage in succession planning, we may learn more about why many nonprofit organization founding executive leaders acknowledge the importance of succession planning, but have yet to engage in succession planning.

Place of study: Throughout the United States. Specific location determined by the participant.
Length of participation:
- One day for 15 minutes – introduction and demographic profile questionnaire (phone call or e-mail)
- One day for 60-90 minutes – face-to-face interview
- One day for 30 minutes – as necessary, follow-up (phone call or e-mail)

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

There are no apparent risks. You may experience undue stress related to talking about succession planning during the interview and there is the risk of loss of time. Problems involving the identification of participants, recruitment efforts or data collection are not expected. Participation is voluntary. Participants who feel uncomfortable or who change their minds about participating will be told that they may stop participating at any time. If you have any problems during or after the interview, you should contact your primary care provider.

The benefits include calling attention to a phenomenon that most organizations go through so that other organizations may benefit. The knowledge gained from this

research may be presented to others through published works and presentations and will be a resource in future related scholarly work.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:
Pseudonyms will be used during the completion of all forms, as well as in the interview sessions, and in the typed transcripts to ensure confidentiality and privacy of the participants and their organizations.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits thoroughly explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

_____   _____   _____
Print name (Participant)   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Print name (Investigator)   Signature   Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact your primary care provider for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study, you can contact Jill Rathbun by phone at (585) 385-8012 or by e-mail at irb@sjfc.edu.

Appendix H

Demographic Profile Questionnaire

Today's Date: _____

Characteristics of the Organization

Name of Organization: _____

Date Organization was Founded: _____   Number of Employees: _____

Founder Characteristics

Name of Interviewee: _____

Position within the Organization: _____

Age (at time of questionnaire): _____   Gender Identification: _____

What is the highest level of education you have achieved? _____

What was your profession before founding the organization? _____

Succession Planning Activities

Please respond yes or no to each of the following questions. During our one-on-one interview, we will explore each of the questions below in detail.

Have you ever engaged in activities that you consider deliberate and systematic succession planning at your organization? [Yes/No]

Have you ever engaged in activities that you consider ensure leadership continuity in key positions in your organization? [Yes/No]

Have you ever engaged in activities that you consider involve *developing* organizational knowledge for the future? [Yes/No]

Have you ever engaged in activities that you consider involve *retaining* organizational knowledge for the future? [Yes/No]

Have you ever engaged in activities that you consider encourage individual advancement at your organization? [Yes/No]

Please select two pseudonyms to be used throughout the engagement and in all materials.

Pseudonym of Interviewee: _____   Pseudonym of Organization: _____

Appendix I

Interview Protocol: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study of Nonprofit Organization Founding Executive Leader Succession Planning

Date of Interview: _____ Time of Interview: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Interviewee: _____

Review purpose of the study: The purpose of the study is to explore the meaning that between four to six nonprofit organization founding executive leaders assign to their experience with succession planning. The study will add new insights into how nonprofit organization founding executive leaders experience and assign meaning to succession planning.

Review participant rights: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw your participation in the study at any point by simply informing me (the researcher) that you no longer want to participate. There will be no repercussions for withdrawing from the study.

Interview Questions

1. Can you please share with me how the organization came to be?

2. Can you please tell me what this organization has meant to you through the years?

3. Can you please describe for me how you think about the *future* of the organization?

4. I understand that many things can influence business decisions; can you *describe* for me what has *influenced* your decisions to engage in succession planning?

5. When did you begin thinking about how the organization could "live" beyond your tenure?

6. When did you begin thinking about succession planning?

7. You agreed to speak to me as someone who is engaged in succession planning. Can you please explain to me what the various components of succession planning *have meant to you*:

a. Can you explain to me what it means to you to have *deliberate and systematic* succession planning?

　　b. Can you explain to me what the *transfer of organizational knowledge* within succession planning has meant to you?

　　　　i. Prompt: Types of knowledge to pass – the spirit of the organization, life lessons, and operations

　　c. Can you also tell me what your experience in *developing and retaining your team members* has meant to you?

　　d. Can you also tell me what the experience of *encouraging individual advancement* has meant to you?

　　e. Prompts: Can you please clarify your comment regarding too ___? Do you have an example you can share that would help me to understand this part of your experience? Help me understand more about _____? So what I understand from your description is _____, would this be accurate?

8. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience with succession planning?

9. Would you consider sharing some of your materials, writing, or notes on the areas you just shared with me?

Close interview: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Follow-up call/e-mail: After the interview is transcribed, I may reach out to you to ensure that I have an accurate understanding of what you have shared today. I can send you the information via e-mail, or we can have a brief phone call, whichever is more convenient for you. If I do not hear back from you at that point, I will assume that I represented your meaning correctly.

Next steps: Over the next two months data will be collected and analyzed from between four to six participants. The study will be finalized in Spring 2018. Once the study is approved for distribution, a copy of the study will be provided to you.

Appendix J

Document Analysis Criteria Worksheet

Organization: _____ Date of Analysis: _____

Analyzed public documents

Comments:

_____
_____
_____

*Analyzed organizational materials that provide evidence of **succession planning***.

1. Deliberate and systematic effort

   Comments:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Ensure leadership continuity in key positions

   Comments:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Develop intellectual capital for the future

   Comments:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. Retain intellectual capital for the future

   Comments:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. Encourage individual advancement

   Comments:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. Additional Comments/Notes:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Appendix K

IPA Data Analysis Worksheet

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: Data Analysis Worksheet

Updated 10/12/2017

Participant Name: _____   Participant Organization: _____

Date Begin Analysis (Stage 1-4): _____   Date End Analysis (Stage 1-4): _____

General Considerations:
How do you disassemble (deconstruct) the data? How do you reassemble the data?
What is the meaning of the data as it applies to your study and your research question?

Stage of IPA Data Analysis	Description of Stage	Detailed Steps to be Followed
1: Reading and Rereading	The initial stage of an IPA analysis involves selecting a single participant transcript and "immersing oneself in the original data" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 82). Several close detailed reads and rereads of the transcribed data will occur. Smith et al. (2009) recommend that the researcher record initial, and most striking, observations about the transcript in the research notebook to suspend the researcher's first impressions, often called "bracketing".	☐ Read 1 - Listen to audio recording and read transcript: make corrections as required ☐ Document initial thoughts in a reflective memo ☐ Print a "clean transcript" in the coding framework (3 columns) ☐ Member check selected: Yes/No ☐ Member check feedback received: Yes/No/NA ☐ Read 2 – listen to audio recording and read clean transcript ☐ Note recollections/observations ☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo ☐ Read 3 – listen to audio recording and read clean transcript ☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo Notes: - The beginning process of entering the participant's world – enter phase of active engagement with the data - Precoding: circling, highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages that strike you – codable moments worthy of attention (Saldana, p20) - The focus directs our analytical attention towards our participants' attempts to make sense of their experience (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p.79) - Move from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretive (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009, p. 79)

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| 2: Initial Noting | The initial level of analysis involves examining the semantic content and language on a very exploratory level (Smith et al., 2009). Stage two of IPA analysis involves initial note-taking and free textual analysis, during which there are "no rules about what is commented upon and there is no requirement" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 83). Initial noting does not require text be broken into meaning units, the purpose is to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data. Smith et al. (2009) state that initial noting includes descriptive comments, linguistic comments, conceptual comments, and deconstruction. | ☐ Descriptive comments: focused on describing the content of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript. Key words, phrases, or explanations which the participant used (p.84) [normal text]
☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo

☐ Linguistic comments: focused on exploring specific use of language by the participant (p.88)
☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo

☐ Conceptual comments: focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (p.88)
☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo

☐ Deconstruction (p.90)

Consider the following:

- What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- How, exactly, do they do this?
- How do they characterize and understand what is going on?
- What assumptions are they making?
- What do I see going on here?
- Why did I include them?
- How is this same/different form other incidents recorded elsewhere in field notes?
- What is the broader important/significance of this incident?
- What surprised me? What intrigued me? What disturbed me?

Notes:
- Aim is to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes and comments on the data
- Conduct a close analysis of the data
- Page set-up: themes/codes/original transcript/exploratory comments |

3: Developing Emergent Themes	The third stage of IPA analysis includes looking at the data and developing emergent themes (codes). Themes are expressed as phrases that speak to the essence of the related data and represent not only the participant's original words and thoughts but also the researcher's interpretation (Smith et al., 2009).	**Cycle 1 Coding**
		
		☐ In vivo Coding
		☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo
		
		☐ Initial Coding
		☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo
		
		☐ Concept Coding
		☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo
		
		☐ Complete Cycle 1 coding: Document thoughts in reflective memo
		
		☐ Create Cycle 1 Code Report in Atlis.ti
		
		Cycle 2 Coding
		
		☐ Axial Coding
		    ○ Notice, collect and think
		    ○ Process of establishing networks, relationships between codes
		    ○ Code neighbors, code patters, code hierarchies
		    ○ Create super codes or code families
		    ○ Development of narrative to capture data as "operational models of the phenomena and to map the complexity of the story" (Saldana, 2013, p.227)
		    ○ Which codes are telling the story of the data?
		
		☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo
		
		☐ Focused Coding
		☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo

		☐ Complete Cycle 2 coding: Document thoughts in reflective memo ☐ Create Cycle 2 Code Report in Atlis.ti Notes: - Attempt to reduce the volume of details. - Maintain complexity, in terms of mapping the interpretations, connections and patterns between exploratory notes - Shift from working with initial transcripts to initial notes - Deconstruction of the narrative flow of interview – then a "new" whole comes together @ the end
4: Identification of Connections	Next, the emergent themes are reviewed for patters (abstraction), super-ordinate status (subsumption), oppositional relationships (polarization), contextualization, the frequency (numeration), and specific interplay (function) (Smith et al., 2009). Clusters (themes) are given a descriptive label which conveys the conceptual nature of the themes therein. Some themes may be dropped because either they do not fit well with the emerging structure, or have a weak	(p.97) ☐ Abstraction: review for patterns (superordinate) ☐ Subsumption: super-ordinate status ☐ Polarization: oppositional relationships ☐ Contextualization: connections ☐ Numeration: the frequency of the code ☐ Function: specific interplay – positive/negative presentation in transcript ☐ Bring it together ☐ Document thoughts in reflective memo ☐ Create Network in Atlis.ti (print/save)

	evidential base (Smith et al., 2009). Subthemes are nested within a single superordinate theme, defined as the outcomes of the interactive process of moving back and forth between various analytic stages, ensuring the integrity of participant words are preserved (Smith et al., 2009).	Notes: - Involves looking at connections between emerging themes, grouping them together according to conceptual similarities and providing each cluster with a descriptive label - Document the process that is followed - Graphically represent the structure of the emerging themes/codes