

EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS OF SUCCESSION PLANNING WITHIN HIGHER
EDUCATION

A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Matthew A. Swanson

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Liberty University, School of Business

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Abstract

Higher education institutions provide programs and services in support of personal, professional, and community development. The positive impact of higher education is threatened by the imminent departures of experienced employees responsible for implementing institutional programs and services. Research suggests succession planning assists organizations in responding to the potential departures of experienced employees while successfully serving stakeholders, yet a majority of higher education institutions do not possess adequate succession planning programs. Employee perceptions are essential to developing and evaluating programs, however, there is currently a lack of available insight into employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning within the field of higher education. In addition, the perceptions of employees pertaining to succession planning serving within a southeastern United States community college were unknown and created an inability to assess the strategic importance of succession planning within the institution. Therefore, this qualitative study utilized a single-site case study methodology to examine employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with qualified research participants and the interview data were triangulated through the utilization of field notes and existing data obtained through the scholarly and professional literature. Employees within the researched institution perceived succession planning to be non-existent. In addition, employees believed succession planning deficiencies impeded the researched institution's ability to respond to change, move forward, implement its mission, and serve its stakeholders. Finally, employees perceived the development of a succession planning program would have a positive strategic impact. Findings were applied to the fields of business, human resources, and higher education.

Key words: community college, higher education, human capital, strategy, succession planning

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my grandfather, Roger Swanson, and grandmother, Gloria Collinson, who passed away while I completed my doctoral program. My grandfather and grandmother dedicated their lives to investing in and serving others. In addition, they strived to ensure that people were always more important than the process and set an example of the importance of always taking care of others. My grandparents changed the lives of a multitude of people, and their legacy continues through the individuals they prepared to succeed them in life.

I would also like to dedicate this study to the love of my life, Emily, and to all of my incredible family and friends. Thank you for teaching me the “joie de vivre” and for loving and supporting me throughout this journey.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this study to the educators across the globe who invest in the lives of others and their communities on a daily basis. To every faculty member, educational staff member, and administrator- thank you!

Proverbs 2:1-15

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Higher education institutions within the United States play an important role in personal, professional, community, and economic development (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). The services provided by higher education institutions are implemented, and supported, by faculty, staff, and administrators (Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). These employees enable institutions to provide invaluable programs and services to their stakeholders, and without employees, benefits provided by institutions would cease to exist (Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). Institutions and communities should be alarmed with current projections indicating that experienced employees will depart their institutions, primarily through retirement, on an increasing basis within the next several years (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). The departure of experienced employees has the potential to negatively impact institutional services, and impede institutions in implementing, and fulfilling, their missions and strategic priorities in a consistent manner (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). Institutions must prepare for employee departures and ensure that they are able to continuously meet the needs of their communities.

Succession planning programs are proven to be effective at assisting organizations and institutions in avoiding negative impacts associated with employee departures, and in meeting the needs of stakeholders (Washington, 2016; Mallard, 2015). Despite the recognized effectiveness of succession planning, current studies suggest the presence of succession planning deficiencies within the educational arena (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016; Washington, 2016). While imminent employee departures should certainly alarm institutional stakeholders, even more alarming is the presence of succession planning deficiencies within higher education (Richards,

2016; Washington, 2016). Succession planning deficiencies indicate that higher education institutions are, in part, unprepared to navigate the impacts associated with employee departures (Jackson, 2017; Richards, 2016).

Employees are in an ideal position to assist in understanding the impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, on an institution's strategic capabilities (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). In addition, employees are able to provide perspectives that can assist in evaluating the effectiveness of succession planning programs or the presence of succession planning deficiencies (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). Finally, understanding the strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, can assist leaders in making critical succession planning decisions within their institutions (Jackson, 2017). Understanding the perspectives of employees pertaining to succession planning can assist in determining the strategic impact of succession planning within institutions. Therefore, this purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the perspectives of employees pertaining to the impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, on a higher education institution's abilities to implement strategies, and fulfill its mission in a consistent and effective manner.

Background of the Problem

Higher education institutions within the United States face an imminent personnel and human capital crises (Jackson, 2017; Richards, 2016; Washington, 2016). Educational institutions are projected to experience rapid turnover, as well as the widespread departures of experienced employees through attrition and retirement in the coming years (Jackson, 2017; Mallard, 2015; Washington, 2016). Institutional leaders generally accept that the widespread departures of experienced employees will create knowledge gaps and hinder operations, yet a significant number

of educational institutions report feeling unprepared to respond to the impending departures (Bozer, Kuna, & Santora, 2015; Morris & Laipple, 2015). Institutions offer invaluable services to stakeholders throughout the nation (Beck, 2017; Long, Johnson, Faught, & Street, 2013). Employee departures have the potential to impede the abilities of institutions to successfully implement, maintain, and improve stakeholder services (Beck, 2017; Long et al., 2013).

Succession planning assists in preparing organizations and institutions to successfully respond to employee departures and position vacancies (Washington, 2016; Mallard, 2015). Institutional success, sustainability, health, and impact can be maintained and enhanced through succession planning, yet a significant number of institutions lack fully developed and effective succession plans (Easter & Brooks, 2017; Bozer et al., 2015). According to a recent study conducted by the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), only 14 percent of higher education Chief Business Officers reported the presence of a formalized succession plan within their institutions (Jackson, 2017). This statistic is alarming as 44 percent of Chief Business Officers indicated in 2016 that their next professional step was retirement, and 58 percent of institutional Chief Executive Officers were reported as being over 60 years old in 2017 (Jackson, 2017). The information presented by Jackson (2017) echoes Richard's (2016) and Washington's (2016) studies and indicates an urgent need to develop leadership pipelines through formalized succession planning within higher education institutions because key institutional employees are departing, or are preparing to depart.

Effective succession plans assist institutions in filling vacancies with the right person in the right position at the right time (Easter & Brooks, 2017; Jestin, 2017). Vacant positions, even under ideal circumstances, can hinder an institution's ability to implement strategic priorities and

initiatives in a consistent manner (Berns & Klarner, 2017; Shapiro, Hom, Shen, & Agarwal, 2016). Position vacancies can create a sense of uncertainty and instability amongst employees and stakeholders (Oppon, Oduro-Asaberem, & Owusu, 2016). Instability and uncertainty can hinder an institution's abilities to move forward, fulfill its mission, and to be successful (Darvish & Temelie, 2014; Holland, 2016). Succession planning deficiencies have the potential to lead to a lack of qualified and prepared personnel within institutional positions (Bennett, 2015; Holland, 2016). In turn, deficiencies can lead to a potential crisis within institutions that prohibits institutions from fulfilling their missions and providing a dynamic experience for stakeholders due to a lack of qualified and prepared personnel (Bennett, 2015; Holland, 2016).

The impending crisis associated with succession planning deficiencies within educational institutions is most prevalent in community or two-year colleges (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). Community colleges, by nature of their design, are well positioned to respond to the needs of local communities, organizations, and economies (Cameron, 2013). The institutions provide affordable educational opportunities and assist in the development of a qualified workforce (Cameron, 2013). Circumstances that impede a community college's abilities to fulfill its mission, such as succession planning deficiencies, have the potential to negatively impact communities and the United States economy (Richards, 2016).

Succession planning deficiencies weaken institutional effectiveness due to instability, knowledge gaps, and position vacancies (Scott & Sanders-McBryde, 2012). Employees, regardless of their levels of commitment, will inevitably leave and create position vacancies (Shapiro et al., 2016). Succession plans assist leaders in managing vacancies and in providing the stability needed to move institutions forward (Geroy, Caleb, & Wright, 2017). Community college leaders must

understand the current state of succession planning within their institutions and develop succession plans that will lead to long-term sustainability and the fulfillment of institutional missions (Cameron, 2013).

Institutional sustainability necessitates the development of succession plans for positions involved in implementing, fulfilling, or directing strategic priorities and initiatives (Salustri, 2016). Positions with a significant impact on institutional strategies are considered to be key positions (Salustri, 2016). Key positions have a high degree of influence on institutional operations, programs, strategy, and stakeholder experiences (Rothwell, 2010). Every educational institution, regardless of its size, includes key positions (Stewart, 2016). Vacancies in key positions within higher education compromise and institution's abilities to fulfill its mission and strategic priorities (Stewart, 2016).

While key positions are recognized as important to institutional success, higher education institutions often fail to formally develop succession plans for key positions (Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016). Institutions risk underperforming and compromising their strategic impact when succession plans for key positions do not exist (Morris & Laipple, 2015). Responding efficiently and effectively to key position vacancies is a growing concern for educational institutions due to the instability and uncertainty associated with key position vacancies (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016). Neglecting succession planning for key positions often results in feelings of uncertainty that have the potential to lead to chaos and distraction (Ray & Marshall, 2005). Chaos and distraction, in turn, negatively impact the strategic capabilities of institutions (Ray & Marshall, 2005). Stability is provided through succession planning and strategic impact can be dependent upon developing and implementing succession plans for key positions (Santora, Sarros, Bozer, Esposito, & Bassi, 2015).

Educational institutions, including community colleges, must respond to succession planning deficiencies in order to continuously and consistently fulfill their missions, as well as successfully serve their stakeholders (Cameron, 2013). Succession plans, or the lack thereof, will directly impact the future of higher education institutions throughout the United States (Easter & Brooks, 2017; Richards, 2016). In addition, succession plans will assist in determining if qualified personnel are in place to maintain and improve institutional programs and services (Easter & Brooks, 2017; Richards, 2016). While there are multiple factors influencing the future of higher education institutions within the United States, the presence of succession planning, or the lack thereof, can be an indicator of an institution's future abilities to be successful and to serve their stakeholders (Stewart, 2016).

Problem Statement

The general problem to be addressed is the lack of available insight and knowledge of employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the field of higher education. Employee perceptions are foundational to the development and evaluation of organizational policies, procedures, and programs (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Huang & Miao, 2016; Jiang, Hu, Liu, & Lepak, 2017). Decision-makers are able to obtain valuable insights from employee perceptions that can be utilized as a tool to create or improve strategic programs and policies (Antwi, Opoku, Seth, & Osei-Boateng, 2016; Rijswijk, Akkerman, Schaap, & Tartwijk, 2016). According to Cavanaugh (2017) and Trickel (2015), employee perceptions, when known, can be utilized by educational leaders to develop succession plans, as well as to understand the strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within their institutions. Employee

perceptions can also assist in overcoming barriers associated with succession planning within higher education institutions by obtaining employee buy-in (Cavanaugh, 2017).

Succession planning is paramount to implementing and fulfilling institutional missions and strategies in a consistent manner within higher education (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Hawthorne, 2011). Institutions find it difficult to fulfill their missions and to have a positive impact on their communities when key positions are not filled by talented individuals (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016; Janson, 2015). As such, succession planning can be essential to the success of higher education institutions (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Hawthorne, 2011). Institutional strategies and programs are directly impacted by succession plans, yet the development of succession plans is not prevalent within higher education (Desai, Lockett, & Paton, 2016; Grossman, 2014). The specific problem to be addressed is that the perceptions of employees pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, serving within a southeastern United States community college are unknown, thus leading to an inability to assess the strategic importance of succession planning within the institution.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning within a community college located in the southeastern United States. Human perceptions are shaped and developed primarily through past experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Rijswijk et al., 2016). Past experiences not only shape and develop current perceptions, they also impact future perceptions, decisions, and outcomes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Rijswijk et al., 2016). Perceptions can provide information pertaining to the success, or lack thereof, of an organization or program (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Rijswijk et al., 2016). Employee

perceptions will provide insight pertaining to succession planning within the institution, and will assist in identifying impediments to the succession planning process. The past experiences of employees will assist in understanding the deficiencies, barriers, and impact associated with succession planning within the institution.

Employees of the researched community college possess unique perspectives that can assist in confirming succession planning barriers identified in previous research. In addition, the employees can assist in identifying additional barriers to succession planning within education institutions. Finally, employee perspectives will provide insight pertaining to the impact of succession planning on institutional stability and the ability of the institution to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner. Employees directly experience succession planning because it is an experience directly tied to employment and professional development (Trickel, 2015). As such, understanding the perspectives of employees that have experienced succession planning, or the lack thereof, provides a direct view of succession planning's strategic impact.

Nature of the Study

This study utilized the qualitative research method and case study design to examine, interpret, and understand employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning. Qualitative research assists in developing an understanding of a specific phenomenon, as well as in interpreting the phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). For the purposes of this study, the phenomenon is succession planning and the impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, on the researched institution's abilities to fulfill its mission and implement strategies in a consistent manner. The study required an in-depth understanding of human opinions and perceptions that could only be obtained through qualitative research (Yin, 2015). Perceptions assist in developing an

understanding of a researched phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). This study utilized perceptions to understand the strategic impact, or lack thereof, of succession planning within the researched institution.

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research because qualitative research is dedicated to developing an understanding of human perspectives and contextual conditions (Yin, 2015). In contrast, quantitative research attempts to control contextual conditions through artificial experiments and considers the preconceptions of the research (Yin, 2015). The qualitative research method was the appropriate method for this study because the study required an understanding of employee perceptions to satisfy the research question and to fulfill the purpose of this study. The following sections will discuss the methods and designs considered, and ultimately selected, within this study.

Discussion of method.

Research methods directly influence the manner in which researchers approach problems, seek answers, and conduct research (Taylor, Bogdan, & Devault, 2015). Quantitative research was not selected for this study because it is primarily concerned with determining the validity of objective theories and analyzing variable relationships (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research requires the use of mathematical, statistical, or numerical data thus making a quantitative approach ineffective for this study (Sukamolson, 2012). The research method was determined as ineffective because mathematical, statistical, and numerical data were not utilized within this study. Numerical, mathematical, and statistical data were not be utilized as this study required an in-depth understanding of participant perspectives and opinions. Open-ended questions were utilized to

collect data and quantitative research often requires closed-ended questions (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

According to Creswell (2014), quantitative research requires random sampling. This study required targeted and purposeful sampling due to the need to understand the perspectives of the researched institution's employees. Finally, quantitative research requires a controlled environment, however, this study will include interviewing research participants within their natural environment (Creswell, 2014). Researched phenomenon's are best understood within a natural environment as the natural environment assists in understanding the phenomenon's context (Huang & Miao, 2016; Trickle, 2015). Qualitative researchers utilize patterns established within the data to develop concepts and insights (Taylor et al., 2015). Quantitative researchers collect data to test preconceived theories and hypotheses (Taylor et al., 2015).

The mixed-method approach requires the use of both the qualitative and quantitative research methods (Ritchie et al., 2013). As discussed previously in this section, the quantitative method was not feasible for this study because the business problem at hand required an in-depth understanding that could only be obtained through the open-ended approach associated with qualitative research (Sukamolson, 2012). Mixed-method studies combine qualitative and quantitative research within different phases of the study (Ritchie et al., 2013). The mixed-method approach was not appropriate for this study because qualitative research was required to answer the research questions and the quantitative approach would impede the researcher's abilities to satisfy the research questions associated with this study. As such, the quantitative method was not implemented within this study thus preventing the implementation of the mixed methods approach.

Qualitative research.

Qualitative research studies are important to the fields of business and management because the research is often focused on the personal perspectives and opinions of participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Studies that are qualitative in nature often provide multiple viewpoints and perspectives (Abildgaard, Saksvik, & Nielsen, 2016). Research participants provided the perspectives and information needed to understand the past succession planning experiences of the researched institution's employees. The past experiences provided insight pertaining to the barriers, or lack thereof, to succession planning within the institution. In addition, the employee perceptions assisted in developing an understanding of succession planning's impact on the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner.

Qualitative research provides an understanding of the meaning participants assign to succession planning, stability, and the consistent implementation of strategic programs (Hong, Pluye, Bujold, & Wassef, 2017). Meanings can be generated through past experiences and the perceptions of research participants (Hong et al., 2017). The study sought to understand how employees of a community college located in the southeastern United States perceived succession planning, and if succession planning deficiencies have impeded the institution's abilities to consistently implement its mission and strategies through the perspectives of college employees. Qualitative research provides the flexibility and framework required to explore human perspectives and opinions and to utilize the information as research (Hong et al., 2017). Flexibility is necessary for this study because perspectives have the potential to vary between individual employees (Hong et al., 2017). The flexibility provided by qualitative research allows researchers to follow the data and information obtained through research participants (Hong et al., 2017).

This study will utilize a hermeneutical philosophy of research which coincides with qualitative studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Meaning associated with succession planning, and succession planning's impact on the implementation of strategy, within the context of the researched institution can be generated through hermeneutics. (Myers, 2013). Hermeneutics requires an interpretive research approach throughout the research process (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Qualitative research focuses on human actions, beliefs, and understandings, thus interpretation is a fundamental component of qualitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). The study required the interpretation of multiple viewpoints in order to understand employee perspectives pertaining to succession planning within the researched institution. Viewpoints also provided insight into employee perspectives pertaining to succession planning's impact, or potential impact, on institutional stability and the institution's ability to fulfill its mission and strategies in a consistent manner.

Data are often collected via open-ended interview questions in qualitative studies (Abildgaard et al., 2016). Open-ended interviews were utilized within this study because open-ended questions have the potential to provide in-depth information and understanding (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2013). Personal interviews assist the researcher in interpreting the data provided by research participants and in understanding the perspectives of research participants (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015). Interviews that are open-ended in nature are an appropriate method of data collection in qualitative research (O'Flaherty & Phillips, 2015).

Open-ended interviews were ideal for this study because they present an opportunity to follow the data where it leads, ask follow-up questions, and to fully understand the perspectives and opinions of research participants. In addition, open-ended interviews enabled the researcher to

understand the perspectives of research participants pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution (O’Flaherty & Phillips, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2013).

Finally, the qualitative approach is ideal for small data samples and limited populations (Fremeth, Holburn, & Richter, 2016). Qualitative research can legitimize data collected from smaller population samples (Oun & Bach, 2014). Data were collected from a limited population in this study as participants were limited to the full-time employees of the researched institution.

Discussion of design.

Qualitative research designs include ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, phenomenology and case studies (Silverman, 2016). Ethnography is concerned with researching and understanding the culture, beliefs, and values of specific people groups (Yin, 2016). Direct observation techniques are foundational to ethnographic research designs (Silverman, 2016). The primary strategies associated with ethnographic designs are participant observation and non-participant observation (Silverman, 2016). Ethnographic research is distinguished from other qualitative research designs by its use of active observations (Silverman, 2016). Interviews require a separate technique, active listening, in addition to the active observations utilized in ethnographic research (Silverman, 2016). Interviews and active listening were utilized within this study, thus an ethnographic design was not selected. Grounded theory seeks to build, or develop, theories derived from the collected data (Taylor et al., 2015). This study does not seek to develop new theories, but to apply current theories to solve an institutional problem.

Narrative designs focus on the stories, or narratives, individuals share with other individuals (Taylor et al., 2015). Researchers utilizing narrative designs are often concerned with how humans narrate their personal versions of reality (Taylor et al., 2015). Narrative designs require the

consideration of a story's content and how the story was delivered (Taylor et al., 2015). The delivery provides psychological and contextual insights that can be utilized to determine perceptions of reality (Taylor et al., 2015). This study required the consideration of content, but how the research participants deliver their answers was not considered. Narrative designs consider the current mental and emotional states of research participants (Taylor et al., 2015). This research study required participants to consider past experiences, but not necessarily emotions. As such, the narrative design was not appropriate for this study.

Phenomenological research designs are well suited for researching and understanding lived experiences through the perspectives of individuals that participated in the experience (Ash & Simpson, 2016; Cherman & Rocha-Pinto, 2016; Van Manen, 2016). Phenomenology, in its simplest form, is the study of the human experience (Gallagher, 2016). Phenomenological research should be utilized when the research problem requires an understanding of a common human experience within a specific group of people (Creswell, 2014). The researcher within this study initially considered phenomenology as the research design, however, the design was not selected because of phenomenology's focus on the past lived experiences of individuals (Mark, 2017). This research study involved researching not only a past experience, but also a current lived experience with current institutional employees. In addition, phenomenological studies do not often consider perceptions pertaining to a current business process (Mark, 2017). The purpose of this study was to understand perceptions pertaining to not only a current event, but also to an organizational process, succession planning. As such, phenomenology was not selected as the research design for this study.

Case studies.

The research design for this qualitative study was a single site case study. Qualitative case studies are often utilized to explore, explain, and describe topics (Bordenave, 2017; Yin, 2014). Case studies are well suited to explore the succession planning experiences of individuals, as well as the strategic impact and importance of succession planning (Davenport, 2012; Jackson, 2017). The design is ideal when conducting in-depth investigations and research pertaining to current events (Toliver, 2017; Trickel, 2015; Yin, 2014). In addition, case study designs are generally accepted as one of the quintessential designs for researching a contemporary business problem or phenomenon (Bordenave, 2017; Ejakpomewhe, 2017; Toliver, 2017). Case study research is relevant when research seeks to explain a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2017). In addition, case studies are relevant when research questions require an in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Case studies distinguish themselves because their usage as a design often arises out of a desire to understand a complex social phenomenon or event (Yin, 2017). Finally, Yin (2014) found the case study design to be ideal when investigating and exploring organizational processes.

This study researched and investigated perceptions pertaining to succession planning. In addition, this study was exploratory in nature because the specific problem addressed within this study had not been addressed in previous scholarly research (Bordenave, 2017). Succession planning is generally accepted as not only an organizational process, but also as a contemporary business phenomenon (Desai et al., 2016; Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016). As such, it was determined that the case study design was ideal for implementing a study that was exploratory in

nature, addressing the specific business problem, fulfilling the purpose of this study, and resolving the research question associated with this study.

Case study designs are utilized to understand the real-life context of a contemporary phenomenon, as well as to answer research questions that are concerned with how, or why, something occurred (Yin, 2013). Single cases are appropriate when the case is utilized to examine unique events (Yin, 2013). Multiple case studies, in contrast, are used to reveal support for the replication of theories, or to present contrasting results (Yin, 2013). Successful succession plans must meet the unique needs of the institution, thus a single case study was deemed appropriate. This study did not seek to replicate theories throughout multiple institutions, but did seek to understand the strategic impact of the researched phenomenon within one institution.

Case studies and scholarly succession planning research.

The selection of the case study design is consistent with previous scholarly succession planning research conducted by Bordenave (2017), Dillard (2017), Toliver (2017), and Trickel (2015). Dillard (2017) utilized the case study design to examine the succession planning perceptions held by healthcare executives. The case study design was considered ideal by Dillard (2017) because it provided insight into a lived experience, succession planning. Coleman (2013), Dennis-Leigh (2012), and Trickel (2015) established succession planning as a lived experienced within the literature. In addition, the purpose of this study was to examine, or explore, employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning. As such, the case study design was well suited to provide insight into employee perceptions and fulfill the purpose of this study.

Toliver (2017) selected a single site case study design while researching succession planning because the design enabled the researcher to explore a contemporary phenomenon in its

natural setting. In addition, the design enabled the researcher to collect data through observations and interviews with individuals that experienced the researched phenomenon (Toliver, 2017). Interviews, observations, and field notes were the data collection methods employed within this study in a manner consistent with previous succession planning research conducted by Bordenave (2017), Dillard (2017), and Frigoli (2017). Open-ended questions require reflection and often lead to understanding the perspective of humans in regards to an experienced phenomenon (Gallagher, 2016). The semi-structured open-ended interview questions utilized to collect data within this study were compatible with the case study design.

Bordenave (2017) utilized a single site case study to research the perceptions of succession planning held by private practice audiologists. Qualitative single site case studies, according to the research study conducted by Bordenave (2017), allow for the collection of empirical data. Empirical data, or evidence, are based upon observations and experiences rather than pure theory (Bordenave, 2017; Dillard, 2017). Bordenave (2017) submitted that individuals possessing a common shared experience like succession planning qualify as an empirical analysis unit within a case study. This study utilized participant observations and interviews to collect empirical data from individuals possessing a common shared experience related to succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution.

Summary of the nature of the study.

This study utilized the qualitative research method in an effort to fulfill the purpose of this study. The qualitative method is well suited for studies requiring an understanding of human perspectives. Single site case studies, the selected design of this study, allows researchers to understand a current event or phenomenon from the perspectives of individuals that are currently

experiencing the researched event. Succession planning is, as established within the literature, best understood from the perspectives of individuals possessing experience with the researched succession planning program (Trickel, 2015). As such, the case study design employed within this study allowed the researcher to understand succession planning, as well as satisfy the research question and sub-questions associated with this study.

Research Questions

Qualitative research questions should lead to an understanding of how a social process occurs (Taylor et al., 2015). The questions should be grounded within the literature review, be socially relevant, and harness originality (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition, qualitative research questions provide direction, but must also provide the researcher with the flexibility required to follow the data (Taylor et al., 2015). Succession planning within educational institutions and, in particular, community colleges, is socially important due to the role community colleges play in developing a qualified workforce, as well as in responding to the needs of the local community and economy (Richards, 2016).

The researched institution plays a similar role within the local community and succession planning, or the lack thereof, has the potential to impact the institution's abilities to fulfill this role. As such, researching succession planning within the institution is socially relevant to the institution's local community. The social process in this study is how succession planning affects the strategic capabilities of the institution. Originality refers to obtaining new information and understandings, as such, the process attempts to avoid what is already known (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The following research question, and sub-questions, were designed to provide an

understanding of employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution.

Question One: What are the perspectives held by institutional employees pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution?

Sub-Question 1: What are the past experiences of college employees in regards to institutional succession planning?

Sub-Question 2: How has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner?

Sub-Question 3: What, if any, succession planning deficiencies exist, or have existed, within the institution?

Sub-Question 4: What were, and are, the impediments to succession planning within the institution?

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks provide context, direction, and a guiding influence to qualitative research studies (Padgett, 2016). The conceptual framework for this study was human capital theory. Human capital theory derives its foundation from the view that organizations develop a sustainable competitive advantage through its human resources, or employees (Buta, 2015). According to human capital theory, recruitment, retention, professional development, career progression, and knowledge transfer directly influence the human resources component of a sustainable competitive advantage (Buta, 2015). Organizations must develop employees and ensure proper transfer of knowledge in order to maintain their sustainable competitive advantages (Buta, 2015).

Human capital theory views professional development and skill enhancements as investments that organizations must grow and harness (LeCounte, Prieto, & Simone, 2017). Improved productivity, retention, and strategic capabilities are considered to be a return on investment by human capital theorists (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). Career progression, trainings, and coaching are elements of human capital theory that are directly related to succession planning (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017; LeCounte et al., 2017). In addition, knowledge transfer and employee development programs are essential components of successful succession plans (Buta, 2015).

Human capital theory suggests talented employees enable organizations to fulfill their missions and strategies (Buta, 2015). Coff and Raffiee (2015) suggested that human capital theory assumes advantages tied to human resources are sustainable when employees have little desire to leave the organization. Succession planning assists organizations in implementing strategies, and in retaining employees by providing opportunities for development, enhanced performance, and career progression (Arita, Munyao, Muriuki, & George, 2016; Cragun & Wright, 2017). Accordingly, succession planning is directly related to human capital theory, and components of human capital theory directly influence succession planning programs. Organizations invest in employees, or human capital, while implementing succession plans with the intent of providing professional development and organizational sustainability.

Succession planning research.

Dillard (2017), Kariuki and Ochiri (2017), and LeCounte et al. (2017) utilized human capital theory as a framework when researching succession planning within organizations. The use of human capital theory as a conceptual framework is a recognition of organizational decisions to invest in their employees through succession programs (Dillard, 2017). Internal candidates were

able to enhance organizational operations and provide sustainability when compared to external candidates (LeCounte et al., 2017). The human capital possessed by the internal candidates was found to be specific to the organization, thus the internal candidates were able to better understand the operations and mission of the organization (LeCounte et al., 2017).

Succession planning, when viewed from the framework of human capital theory, was considered to be a worthwhile investment in the organization researched by Kariuki and Ochiri (2017). Organizations that invested, and progressed, their employees (human capital) were found to have enhanced strategic capabilities (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). This study adopted a similar approach and views succession planning as an avenue to invest in employees in support of enhancing strategic capabilities and institutional sustainability. Employees are directly involved, or impacted, by human capital investment and succession planning activities (Dillard, 2017). Accordingly, employees are in an ideal position to share their experiences pertaining to professional and human capital investment activities.

Summary of the conceptual framework.

Human capital theory is an appropriate framework for this study because the theory suggests that organizations, and institutions, should invest in talented employees in an effort to move forward and successfully implement strategic priorities. Succession planning is an ongoing organizational commitment and investment that can assist organizations in moving forward, competing, and in successfully implementing strategies (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Cragun & Wright, 2017). In addition, succession planning is an element of talent management concerned with ensuring human capital is available to perform the essential tasks related to implementing, and advancing, strategic priorities (Cragun & Wright, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore

employee perspectives pertaining to succession planning in an effort to understand what, if any, strategic impact succession planning has on higher education institutions. When viewed within the framework of human capital theory, succession planning is an employee investment strategy that has the potential to enhance performance and strategic capabilities (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017; LeCounte et al., 2017). The selected framework allows the research to be guided by the concept that succession planning is a strategic investment in employees and that employees are well positioned to describe the impact of the investment, or lack thereof, within the institution.

Definition of Terms

Community colleges: higher education institutions that predominantly grant associate, or two-year, degrees. The term was used synonymously with “junior college” within the scholarly literature (Gayer, 2017; Grady, 2017).

Key positions: positions that have a high degree of influence over an institution’s success, ability to achieve goals, programs and services, and ability to operate in a sustainable manner (Madichie & Nyakang, 2016; Stewart, 2016).

Southeastern United States: states and commonwealths located within the United States of America including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (Bense, 2016; Garrett, 2017).

Succession planning: a systematic and continuous effort to support institutional stability through the identification and development of the right employees to fill the right key positions at the right time (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Hawthorne, 2011; Ishak & Kamil, 2016; Stewart, 2016).

Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations

The following sections discuss the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations associated with this study. These sections are of particular importance to this study, as well as to scholarly research, as they describe the restrictions associated with this study and the research contained within this study (Simon & Goes, 2013). In addition, the sections provide a portion of the context essential to understanding this study's research and conclusions (Simon & Goes, 2013). The sections below will describe restrictions in the form of this study's boundaries, the items that must be accepted as true while reviewing this study, and the weaknesses of this study.

Assumptions.

Assumptions are claims that are necessary to the relevancy of the study and are partially out of the researcher's control (Simon & Goes, 2013). In addition, assumptions are considered to be unproven beliefs related to the research (Dillard, 2017). The first assumption associated with this study is that research participants answered all questions truthfully. Risks associated with this assumption can be mitigated by guaranteeing anonymity to research participants (Simon & Goes, 2013). Participants were guaranteed anonymity throughout this process as employee names and position titles were not published. The second assumption associated with this study is that the research participants held to a similar and consistent definition of succession planning. Risks associated with this assumption have been mitigated by providing the definition of succession planning established within the definitions section of this study to research participants prior to the start of the interview process.

Limitations.

Limitations are the study's weaknesses and are generally outside of the researcher's control (Dillard, 2017; Simon & Goes, 2013). The first limitation associated with this study is associated with the qualitative nature of the research. Qualitative research is difficult to replicate and validate because the research occurs within natural settings (Simon & Goes, 2013). Natural settings have the potential to change throughout time as can the opinions of research participants. Succession planning is a fluid process that often changes as operating environments change. Perspectives associated with the current status of succession planning have the potential to change as organizations adapt to their operating environments.

The second limitation associated with this study is related to time. As stated previously, succession planning needs often change with the institution and the institution's environment (Salustri, 2016). The employee perspectives researched in this study may only be relevant to the current time period. While time is a limitation, the limitation coincides with the nature of case studies as the framework allows for current and changing definitions (Mark, 2017; Van Manen, 2016). The third limitation associated with this study is related to the application of the study. While this study and associated research may be relevant to multiple educational institutions, in general, the concepts and findings are specifically applicable to the researched institution.

Delimitations.

Delimitations refer to the boundaries, or scope, of the study and are often within the researcher's control (Dillard, 2017; Simon & Goes, 2013). Criteria for selecting research participants is considered to be a delimitation (Simon & Goes, 2013). Current service as a full-time employee of the researched institution was the only criteria for membership within the

research population. The definition of an institutional employee is discussed within the next chapter. Perspectives associated with succession planning and this study were limited to the perspectives of the college's current employees. Past employees, as well as future employees, were not selected to participate in this research. As such, an additional boundary for this study was the current time period. The past and the future were not researched although the research findings do have the potential to influence future succession planning efforts. Geography served as the third delimitation of this study. The researched institution is located in, and its employees are domiciled in the southeastern United States of America. Similar studies conducted outside of the region could produce different results.

The research focus served as the final delimitation of this study. Succession planning served as the overarching research focus for this study, however, succession planning is a broad and extensive topic. The scope was initially narrowed by targeting the community colleges within the region for a study pertaining to institutional succession planning, however, the scope remained broad. Succession planning needs have the potential to vary within institutions, thus it became necessary to further narrow the scope. Researching succession planning within one institution further narrowed the scope of this study. The scope was narrowed to focus the research solely on the succession planning perspectives of current employees of the researched institution. As such, the relevancy of this study was restricted to not only the geographical region, but also to the selected institution. While the scope of this study was limited, single site case studies were utilized by Richards (2016) and Toliver (2017) to research succession planning. The scope was found to be appropriate because succession planning requirements are often unique to individual organizations

and institutions (Richards, 2016; Toliver, 2017). As such, it was important to study succession planning within the context of a unique, or individual, educational institution.

Significance of the Study

Community colleges play an integral role in student, community, and economic development (Gill, 2016; Hornak, Ozaki, & Lunceford, 2016). Institutional employees are responsible for developing and implementing the programs and services that support the integral role of community colleges, yet there are projected increases in employee attrition on the horizon (Gill, 2016). Institutions report feeling unprepared to successfully navigate increased attrition, thus the sustainability of programs and services that are integral to stakeholders are threatened (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014). Succession planning is generally accepted as a strategy that can be utilized to avoid the potential negative impacts associated with employee attrition (Washington, 2016; Mallard, 2015). Additionally, succession planning is often utilized as a strategy to provide stability and maintain essential programs and services (Washington, 2016; Mallard, 2015). As such, this study is significant as it sought to understand the strategic impact, or lack thereof, of succession planning within a community college. This section elaborates on the significance of this study and describes the reduction in gaps, implications for biblical integration, and relationship to the field of study.

Reduction of gaps.

This study seeks to understand the perspectives of employees pertaining to their past succession planning experiences within the researched higher education institution. Understanding the impact and scope of succession planning initiatives is an important component of an efficient and effective succession planning program (Geroy et al., 2017). Institutions generally accept the

need to participate in succession planning, however, institutional leaders often lack the time and resources needed to develop and implement an effective plan (Geroy et al., 2017). Developing an understanding of succession planning can assist institutional leaders in targeting their succession planning efforts, thus minimizing the use of financial and time related resources (Stewart, 2016). This study will assist the researched institution in targeting succession planning efforts and in efficiently utilizing resources available for succession planning. In addition, the understanding developed within this study will assist in the development of effective succession plans, as well as assist in the reduction of succession plan deficiencies within the researched institution.

Succession planning must be examined at the individual institutional, and organizational, level due to the unique succession planning needs associated with individual institutions and organizations (Oppong, Oduro-Asabere, & Owusu, 2016). Thus, gaps frequently exist within the topic of succession planning due to the need for individualized succession planning research (Salustri, 2016). Barton (2017) suggested that succession planning deficiencies currently exist within the educational arena. Succession planning gaps currently exist within the higher education arena due to a lack of research attention and general succession planning deficiencies within higher education institutions (Pitre-Davis, 2015). This study reduced this gap by researching succession planning within one individual higher education institution.

Cragun and Wright (2017) identified non-executive succession planning as a critical area for future research because it is the level at which succession events occur at a higher rate. This study reduced the gap identified by Cragun and Wright (2017) by researching both executive and non-executive succession planning. The examination of succession planning within one unique educational institution, and the examination of succession planning within multiple positional

levels, reduced gaps identified within previous scholarly succession planning research. This study will examine succession planning for all key positions within the institution as defined within the definitions section of this study.

Grossman (2014) presented research indicating that succession plans would be implemented on an increased basis within higher education if stakeholders understood the potential strategic impact of succession planning programs within institutions. The study conducted by Grossman (2014) focused on the feelings of research participants pertaining to succession planning, however, additional research pertaining to the strategic impact of succession planning was recommended. This study reduced gaps by examining the potential strategic impact of succession planning within higher education. In addition, the study reduced gaps by assisting higher education stakeholders in understanding if succession planning impacts strategic capabilities within institutions. Finally, Yadav and Shankar (2017) demonstrated that a need currently exists for academic researchers to focus on issues that are intimately linked with successful succession planning. This study explored issues that are intimately linked with succession planning, specifically the strategic impact of succession planning, and will assist, in part, in satisfying the need identified by Yadav and Shankar (2017).

Implications for biblical integration.

Succession planning is prevalent throughout scripture and is a component of Christian discipleship (Hollinger, 2013). Scripture states that God developed a succession plan for Moses and identified Joshua as the successor for Moses (Deuteronomy 31:1-6, English Standard Version). Moses encouraged Joshua and prepared Joshua to take his place in leading the Israelites (Deuteronomy 31:7-8; English Standard Version). Joshua was able to spend time preparing to

assume his leadership role and responsibilities (Joshua 1, English Standard Version). Moses' position was established as a key position that directly impacted the future of the Israelites as evidenced by God's appointment of a successor to fill his position (Deuteronomy 31, English Standard Version).

The biblical example of Moses and Joshua is an early example of succession planning and a reminder of the importance of identifying key positions and providing opportunities to prepare and develop individuals to fill positions in a successful manner. While not directly stated within scripture, it is assumed that a vacancy in Moses' position would have led to worldly instability amongst the Israelites. Deficient succession plans in this scenario would have likely impaired the Israelites abilities to follow God's direction. God's divine wisdom led him to anoint a successor to provide leadership, direction, and stability.

In the New Testament, Timothy succeeded Paul in ministering to the church in Ephesus (1st Timothy 1, English Standard Version). Paul understood the importance of identifying and preparing a successor to his ministry and Ephesus, and eventually, his entire ministry within the Christian church (1st & 2nd Timothy, English Standard Version). Timothy provided stability and guidance to the church, and assisted the church in moving forward and fulfilling their mission (1st Timothy 1 & 4, English Standard Version). While the term succession planning was not utilized within scripture, the concepts associated with modern succession planning are prevalent. Successors within the early church were identified, developed, and prepared to assume key positions of ministry and leadership. Timothy continued Paul's ministry, and his appointment avoided potential impediments to the church's fulfillment of its mission and calling.

Christ's identification and development of the apostles is an example of succession planning that played an essential role in the establishment of the early Christian church (Hollinger, 2013). This early example of succession planning is a reminder of the role succession planning plays in sustainability. The apostles followed Christ's example and developed individuals to succeed them in ministry (Hollinger, 2013). Succession planning through discipleship assists in the continuation of ministry and the impact of the gospel. Christ developed His disciples and set a succession planning example for believers. Christians are called to invest in, and develop, others and to prepare individuals to succeed them in this world (Hollinger, 2013). Understanding the impact of succession planning, and the impact of succession planning deficiencies, can assist Christians in following Christ's example and to participate in successful succession planning efforts. Succession planning is directly related to the Christian faith and early examples of succession planning are prevalent throughout scripture.

Relationship to field of study.

This study is directly related to the field of human resources due to the study's focus on a core human resources function, succession planning. Succession planning is a core function of human resource departments, as well as a fundamental component of employee development programs and strategies (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017; Sharma & Sengupta, 2017). Human resource professionals are often responsible for coordinating, and creating, employee development and succession management programs (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017; Sharma & Sengupta, 2017). Institutional leaders must involve the human resource department in the development of succession plans if they are to be effective (Arita et al., 2016). As such, human resources professionals should understand succession planning concepts, strategies, and theories (Arita et al.,

2016). Finally, involving the human resources department in the succession planning process can assist in preventing problems associated with position transitions, leadership instability, and premature promotions (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017).

The succession planning process provides the framework for the development plans of potential successors to key institutional positions (Sharma & Sengupta, 2017). In addition, succession plans provide motivation for the implementation of meaningful coaching and mentoring programs (Sharma & Sengupta, 2017). Coaching and mentorship programs are methods of developing employees, the coordination of which often fall within the auspices of human resource management (Ognjenovic, 2015). Development and coaching programs assist in preparing employees to excel while often improving morale (Ognjenovic, 2015). Succession planning is a form of talent management and talent management is a human resource strategy (Sharma & Sengupta, 2017). Finally, succession planning can be utilized in conjunction with workforce planning and retention programs (Ognjenovic, 2015). Human resource professionals are often responsible for developing, recommending, and implementing talent management and workforce planning programs within organizations and institutions (Ognjenovic, 2015). Succession planning is directly related to the field of human resources as it directly impacts organizational and institutional human resources through professional development, career progression, morale, and retention.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A review of the literature, to include professional and scholarly sources, grounded this research study. Significant attention has been afforded to the topic of succession planning within the scholarly and professional literature. Organizations have viewed succession planning as a

strategic priority since the middle of the twentieth century, however, from the earliest days of recorded history, human societies have viewed various forms of succession planning as imperative to their survival (Glenn, 2016). The academy has produced numerous scholarly studies related to succession planning in the 20th and 21st centuries that clearly demonstrate the evolution of succession planning, and the view of succession planning's importance, as society and industries moved forward throughout history (Glenn, 2016).

While significant attention has been afforded to succession planning within the literature, the attention has primarily been granted to the study of succession planning within for profit organizations (Glenn, 2016). The attention afforded to corporations can primarily be attributed to the initial recognition of succession planning's strategic importance by corporate chief executives (Glenn, 2016). Further attention can be credited to the myriad of issues faced by corporations, including, increased competition, finances, and a changing workforce (Dillard, 2017). To date, the scholarly and professional literature continues to display the significant attention granted to the study of for-profit, and corporate, succession planning.

Despite the fact that the educational arena faces the same myriad of issues as their corporate counterparts, scholarly research pertaining to succession planning within the field of higher education is sparse (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017; Dillard, 2017; Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). Deficiencies in research related to higher education succession planning can primarily be attributed to the initial reluctance of the academy to embrace succession planning as an important institutional strategy (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017; Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). The literature displayed a noticeable increase in higher education succession planning research throughout the 21st century. This increase is reflective of the recognition by institutional

stakeholders that succession planning is an appropriate response to the burgeoning departures of experienced institutional employees (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017). Despite this rapidly increasing recognition, deficiencies in scholarly research pertaining to succession planning within higher education remains, at least to date, noticeable.

Overview.

The literature presented in this review explores the evolution of succession planning, as well as a diverse range of succession planning concepts and theories from both the for-profit and non-profit arenas. Guiding this review was the central purpose of researching the relationship between succession planning and the consistent implementation of strategic programs and initiatives within higher education institutions. Specifically, this review sought to examine the strategic impact of succession planning by analyzing literature related to general succession planning concepts, corporate succession planning, non-profit succession planning, higher education succession planning, and the strategic use of succession planning. While scholarly research pertaining to succession planning within higher education was found to be sparse, the literature did present significant evidence relating to the impact of succession planning on abilities to implement strategies within the corporate, non-profit, government and educational arenas (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). The consensus developed through the research and literature, including literature related to higher education, is that succession plans provide stability to organizations and institutions (Boockock, 2015). Succession plans are beneficial because the provided stability allows succession plans to have a positive impact on the consistent implementation of strategies (Boockock, 2015).

Scholarly peer-reviewed and professional, journals, books, and articles were reviewed and are summarized within this section. The literature review was directly related to this study's research question: how has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner? As such, the intent of the review was to develop an understanding of current literature related to succession planning within the educational arena, as well as the correlation between succession planning, strategy implementation, stability, and success. The review of the literature is divided into seven sections separated by topic and designed to demonstrate the direct relationship between succession planning, stability, and strategy implementation within organizations and educational institutions.

In order to understand the purpose and scope of succession planning it is important to understand the historical developments, definitions, and strategic benefits associated with succession planning. The first section provides a review of these topics within the literature and demonstrates that succession planning in and of itself is a strategy. Following the succession planning section, the impact of succession planning on organizational and institutional stability was examined. The literature demonstrated that succession planning is a tool that can be utilized to provide stability and to avoid chaos (Peters-Hawkins, Reed, & Kingsberry, 2017). Chaos negatively influences operations and abilities to implement strategies (Quinn, 2015). Stability, however, can serve as an antidote to chaos and provides opportunities for organizations to successfully move forward (Weare, 2015). Following the chaos and stability section is the section that examines the strategic impact of succession planning. Specifically, the section examined the role of succession planning in the successful and continuous implementation of strategies.

Succession planning was found to play an essential role in executing strategies, moving organizations forward, and in implementing key programs (Hildebrand, 2015).

Succession planning within the non-profit arena was briefly examined due to the non-profit status of most higher education institutions. Immediately following the review of non-profit succession planning, succession planning within higher education was reviewed within the scholarly and professional literature. While the literature provided consistent evidence that succession planning within higher education is, and should be, different than corporate succession planning, it also provides evidence that some corporate succession planning principles can be applied within the academy (Darvish & Temelie, 2014). Of particular importance is the literature's demonstration that succession planning within higher education directly impacts an institution's abilities to fulfill its mission and to implement various strategies in a consistent manner (Darvish & Temelie, 2014).

The following section includes a brief exploration of the relationship between human resources and succession planning. Evidence was presented that human resource professionals are, or should be, involved in the development of succession plans within higher education institutions (Hall-Ellis, 2015). Succession planning is thus directly related to the field of human resources and human resource professionals should, as stated within the literature, serve as strategic succession planning partners (Hall-Ellis, 2015). The final section of the literature reviewed is concerned with utilizing employee perspectives to generate reliable data within scholarly research. This research study utilized employee perceptions to generate data and answer the research question associated with this study. Perceptions were established as meeting scholarly research and data requirements within the literature (Huang & Miao, 2016). The literature supported the purpose of this study and

presented evidence that inadequate succession planning can impede an institution's abilities to provide stability and to implement strategies in a consistent manner (Trickel, 2015).

Succession Planning

The first major section of the literature review examines the historical evaluation of succession planning from early human history to general acceptance as an essential strategy within multiple arenas. In addition, the section elaborates on the definitions of succession planning and key positions that were provided within the definitions section of this study. Finally, the section describes succession planning as a strategy as well as relates succession planning to the selected conceptual framework, human capital theory.

Historical developments.

From origination to the current time-period, human groups and societies have attempted to develop structures and systems to assist in survival, harmonious living, and stability (Rothwell, 2010; Weare, 2015; Yadav & Shankar, 2017). One strategy of survival utilized by human societies throughout time is positional continuity (Weare, 2015; Yadav & Shankar, 2017). The earliest recordings of human history have publicized the process of monarchs preparing heirs to rule, and of royal counselors preparing monarchs and their heirs to govern (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Yadav & Shankar, 2017). These same recordings provide historical evidence of the importance humans have placed on elders preparing younger generations to succeed them throughout various societal roles (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Yadav & Shankar, 2017).

Monarchs, parents, elders, leaders, and business owners have, albeit without the exact phrase, participated in forms of succession planning throughout human history (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Weare, 2015; Yadav & Shankar, 2017). In addition, societal leaders have

throughout human history placed a value on human capital (Yadav & Shankar, 2017). Significant research, studies, and strategies related to succession planning has occurred throughout the 20th century and has continued into the 21st century (Bozer et al., 2015). While the succession planning process has differed throughout societies and history, the primary purpose of survival through continuity, and the preparation of successors, has remained (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Yadav & Shankar, 2017).

Succession planning concepts, theories, and strategies within the business arena have received significant attention within the academic and professional literature. The substantial depth of succession planning research can be attributed to the changing natures of succession planning and the business arena (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). Throughout history, organizations have generally accepted the reality that individuals will eventually leave and create vacancies within their previous positions (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). Central themes associated with succession planning, such as continuity, have been researched and discussed within the management arena for well over a century, however, succession planning's name is relatively new when compared to the actual ideals and goals of succession planning (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015; Rothwell, 2010).

Rothwell (2010) noted that Henri Fayol (1841-1925) was one of the first authors to place the responsibility of providing stability through employee tenure on an organization's leadership team. According to Rothwell (2010), Fayol held firmly to a belief that abdication of this responsibility by the leadership team would lead to unqualified individuals filling key organizational positions. In 1916, Fayol argued that organizational strength is determined by its people and that ill-prepared people create weak organizations (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). Fayol's

warning created an interest in developing individuals to lead effectively within organizations, and in recruiting talented leaders (Rothwell, 2010).

Chester Barnard studied succession planning within his own organization in the early 20th century (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). Barnard argued that replacing his entire management team with a new management team that was unfamiliar with his company would result in organizational chaos in less than one day (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). The research conducted by Barnard presented evidence of the importance of properly preparing employees to succeed their managers and leaders (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). Barnard's evidence assisted in establishing succession planning as an essential leadership development plan within organizations and institutionalized many of the ideals and strategies associated with succession planning as a leadership development tool. The research conducted by Barnard is significant because core succession planning concepts within the business arena can be contributed to not only academics, but to business practitioners and professionals (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). Barnard and Fayol ultimately supported the framework of leadership succession planning through their writings and research (Gilbert, 2017).

The modern view of succession planning began to form during the mid-20th century with CEO succession being the initial primary focus (Gilbert, 2017). Significant resources were dedicated to developing and implementing succession plans for CEOs and senior organizational leadership positions (Rothwell, 2010). Organizations and experts eventually realized that the benefits associated with succession planning were not limited to senior leadership positions (Stewart, 2016). In 1961, Trow researched the impact of succession planning for multiple positions within small businesses (Glenn, 2016). Trow concluded that organizations with succession plans

were less likely to experience the negative impacts associated with employee turnover (Glenn, 2016).

The scope and definition of succession planning continued to broaden until it was generally accepted that effective succession plans included both leadership and key positions within organizations (Gilbert, 2017; Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). Succession planning developed into a broad concept, and research pertaining to succession planning began to cover a wide range of topics, themes, strategies, and industries in the later part of the 20th century (Bozer et al., 2015). Succession planning, according to the literature, is a fluid and living process that should change with the organization, operating environment, and society (Gilbert, 2017; Marvin, 2015). The historic evolution of succession planning found within the scholarly literature supports the suggestion that the scope of succession planning as, in part, changed with society and throughout history (Gilbert, 2017; Marvin, 2015).

Despite the recognized and accepted benefits associated with succession planning in the corporate arena, research related to the impact of succession planning within higher education, non-profits, and government institutions did not receive attention within the literature until the latter part of the 20th century (Gilbert, 2017). Although succession planning within these arenas has received some attention, succession planning within the business arena has remained the primary focal point for succession planning research and discussion within the literature. Despite the differences between for-profit and non-profit organizations, two common themes pertaining to succession planning within both arenas emerged within the literature during the 21st century (Gilbert, 2017; Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). Significant percentages of for-profit and non-profit organizations possess inadequate succession plans, and the role of succession planning on

institutional and organizational success has been consistently demonstrated within both arenas (Ries, 2015).

Succession planning has received continuous attention within the literature, however, 21st century events, including the 2007 recession and various corporate scandals, inspired a renewed focus on succession planning (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). The renewed 21st century succession planning focus was not limited to the for-profit arena. Increasing departures of experienced higher education experienced higher education employees, including institutional chief executives, inspired an elevated focus on succession planning within higher education that was reflected in the publication dates of the scholarly literature. Manning (2017) described the higher education workforce as greying due to a deficiency in talent pipelines. The description provided by Manning (2017) demonstrates the elevated and, in some cases, new, succession planning focus within the educational arena.

Defined.

The definition of succession planning has changed throughout history as well as throughout the scholarly and professional literature (Gilbert, 2017; Marvin, 2015). As discussed previously, succession planning was described as a fluid process that often changes with organizations and time within the literature (Gilbert, 2017; Marvin, 2015; Salustri, 2016). Succession planning definitions, albeit slightly, can become outdated when changes occur within the business arena, and as society moves forward (Gilbert, 2017; Marvin, 2015). Scholarly succession planning research must establish a definition that future readers can not only utilize to compare historical definition trends, but to interpret the results of the study. One consistent historical theme found within the literature is that succession planning is defined differently within each organization because

succession plans must fit the unique needs of organizations and institutions (Marvin, 2015; Salustri, 2016). Broad definitions of succession planning provide overarching guidance and ideals, however, organizations must define succession planning from a micro perspective in order to ensure succession plans are developed and implemented effectively within unique organizations (Rothwell, 2015).

For the purpose of this study, succession planning is defined as a systematic and continuous effort to support institutional stability through the identification and development of the right employees to fill the right key positions at the right time (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016; Hawthorne, 2011; Ishak & Kamil, 2016; Stewart 2016). The definition of succession planning utilized within this study is supported throughout the literature, and provides an appropriate context for considering succession planning within the educational arena. Frigo and Ubelhart (2016) noted the definition of succession planning adopted within this study requires strategic planning and significant preparation. In addition, Frigo and Ubelhart (2016) provided a reminder that succession planning, when implemented properly, is a continuous process. As such, organizations should continuously prepare to participate in succession planning, and the organization's definition of succession planning will likely change throughout time.

Succession planning's primary objectives, for the purpose of this study, are to ensure individuals are prepared to fill vacancies in key positions successfully when vacancies occur, and to assist organizations in avoiding negative consequences associated with position vacancies (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015; Nadler-Moodie & Croce, 2012). In addition, the continuity of business operations and strategy implementation is an objective of this definition of succession planning (Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016). Finally, succession planning's definition should not be interpreted to be

an entitlement program for employees, but a strategic process that targets individuals that will meet the unique needs of the position and stakeholders (Baker, 2017; Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016).

Succession planning moves beyond simply replacing an individual and filling a vacant position to preparing an individual to successfully serve with minimal notice (Kumaran, 2015). Replacement is a component of the succession planning life-cycle, however, employees are strategically selected and prepared in an effective succession planning program. Effective succession planning involves identifying key positions, assessing current employees, identifying employees with the potential to fill key roles, and developing identified employees (Gray, 2014).

Baker (2017) suggested that succession planning can be compared to a race in which a mentor passes the baton of succession planning to their protégé. The protégé is then responsible for completing the next portion of the succession planning process and, as required, altering the route (Baker, 2017). Organizations must transfer knowledge, adapt to change, and develop sustainable competitive advantages if they are to be successful (Baker, 2017). Organizations are able to use succession planning to develop the human resources required to navigate change and successfully compete. Succession planning is a continuous process designed to assist an organization in successfully moving forward through developing, and utilizing, exceptional human capital and resources. Accordingly, the definition of succession planning adopted for this study is consistent with the view found within the literature that succession planning is a strategic and continuous process that should prepare, and develop, talented employees to assist their organizations in successfully moving forward in the race.

Key positions.

Effective succession plans should not be, according to the literature, limited to leadership positions (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014; Rothwell, 2010). Succession plans must consider key positions and leadership positions in order to be effective and ensure stability (Rothwell, 2010). Key positions must be the central focus of succession planning programs found within modern organizations, and institutions, if they are to be successful (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014). Seniwoliba (2015) established that vacancies in key positions can derail an institution, and prohibit an institution from reaching its goals. Institutions are unable to develop successful succession plans, and meet institutional objectives, without identifying the key positions found within the institution (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014). When key positions are considered during the succession planning process, the purpose of succession planning, according to research conducted by Glenn (2016), transitions to ensuring organizations are prepared to fill vacancies in key positions with qualified, and prepared, individuals.

Ellinger, Trapskin, Black, Kotis, and Alexander's (2014) research demonstrated the importance of identifying key positions at the beginning of the succession planning process. Taking the initial step of identifying key positions provided guidance to the succession planning processes researched by Ellinger et al. (2014), and ensured the succession plans were developed for the appropriate positions. In addition to providing guidance to the succession planning process, identifying key positions at the beginning of the succession planning process assists in properly managing the resources, including time and fiscal resources available for developing and implementing succession plans (Darvish & Temelie, 2014). Higher education institutions often report time, directional, and fiscal resource limitations as a barrier to developing succession plans.

As such, discussing and researching key positions was deemed to be appropriate for this review and project by the researcher.

For the purpose of this study, key positions are defined as positions that have a high degree of influence over an institution's success, ability to achieve goals, programs and services, and ability to operate in a sustainable manner (Madichie & Nyakang, 2016; Stewart, 2016). The identification of key institutional positions was recommended as a strategy to formalize succession planning efforts within higher education institutions (Darvish & Temelie, 2014). Vacancies in key positions within higher education compromise and institution's abilities to fulfill its mission and strategic priorities (Stewart, 2016). While key positions are recognized as important to institutional success, higher education institutions often fail to formally develop succession plans for key positions (Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016). Institutions risk underperforming and compromising their strategic impact when succession plans for key positions do not exist (Morris & Laipple, 2015).

Key positions must be the central focus of successful succession planning efforts (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014; Stewart, 2016). Gandhi and Kumar (2014) presented evidence that institutions were unable to develop successful succession plans and meet institutional objectives without identifying key positions and focusing succession planning efforts on key positions. Developing succession plans for key positions is relevant to all industries, institutions, and organizations and must be considered as a component of the succession planning process. Key positions often provide the stability required for maintaining operations and implementing strategic initiatives (Stewart, 2016). Organizations are able to utilize succession planning to prepare current employees to fill vacancies in key positions as they arise while enhancing operations (Dresang, 2017). Consistency within key

positions can ensure that organizations are able to use their human capital to provide sustainability and develop strategic competitive advantages (Dresang, 2017; Stewart, 2016).

Succession planning as a strategy.

The role of succession planning in supporting the consistent implementation of strategies is a focal point of this study, however, it is important to first understand that succession planning can be a strategy in and of itself (Acree-Hamann, 2016; Jackson, 2017). Succession planning is generally accepted as a strategy organizations and institutions can utilize to navigate strategic and operational challenges (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). In addition, succession planning can be utilized to successfully implement other organizational and institutional strategies (Jackson, 2017). Boocock (2015) presented arguments supporting the fact that strategic succession planning is essential to an organization's future. Implementing strategic succession plans assisted organizations in surviving and in enhancing success (Boocock, 2015). Thurmond (2018) identified succession planning as essential to developing leaders and maintaining a continuous talent pipeline. Leadership development and talent pipelines were perceived as essential to providing sustainable and effective services and to maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Thurmond, 2018).

Organizational leaders are concerned over finding qualified replacements for their positions (Sherman, 2014). Sherman (2014) presented succession planning as an avenue to address this concern within organizations. The author discussed succession planning as a strategy to ensure orderly transitions, the continuity of services and operations, and stability within the healthcare section (Sherman, 2014). Succession planning was identified as a key business strategy that enables organizations to provide consistent and meaningful services (Sherman, 2014). Organizations were encouraged to prioritize succession planning when discussing organizational

strategies by Acree-Hamann (2016). Organizations and institutions are able to utilize succession planning strategically to prepare for the future and enhance employee capabilities (Boocock, 2015). Vacancies in key positions can create delays in operations and negatively impact abilities to satisfy the needs of stakeholders (Baray, 2016). Baray (2016) presented succession planning as a method organizations can utilize to efficiently recover and provide stability when vacancies in key positions exist.

Long et al. (2013) researched the use of succession planning as a strategy within higher education institutions. The research indicated that higher education institutions often teach business management students to utilize succession planning within the corporate arena, but do not practice what they teach students internally (Long et al., 2013). Succession planning programs were established as proactive processes that assisted in ensuring key positions are continuously filled with individuals that are committed to institutional missions, values, and strategies (Long et al., 2013). Long et al.'s (2013) research demonstrated that successful succession programs assist institutions in adapting to changing environments, retaining talented employees, providing institutional stability, and strategy implementation. Institutions must adapt to change, provide stability, and employ talented individuals, if they are to be effective in their services to stakeholders (Long et al., 2013). Succession planning is a strategic program that can assist institutions in maintaining success, improving their strategic impact, and in adapting to change in an effective manner.

Perrenoud and Sullivan (2017) explored succession planning as a strategy within the construction industry. The authors presented evidence that construction organizations with succession plans are likely to be more successful and profitable than construction organizations

without succession plans (Perrenoud & Sullivan, 2017). Organizations were able to utilize succession planning as a strategy for success and for maintaining sustainable competitive advantages (Perrenoud & Sullivan, 2017). Quinn (2015) recommended succession planning as a method to ensure workforce continuity and adequate workforce capacity within the nursing industry. Succession plans provided an opportunity to develop talented nurses and ensure the right talent was available at the right time to service patients. Organizations and institutions equipped with effective succession plans often outperform organizations and institutions with insufficient succession plans (Desrang, 2017). Succession planning not only supports strategy, but the literature demonstrates that succession planning can be utilized as a strategy to advance organizations and move organizations toward a sustainable competitive advantage. The need for succession planning will, according to Dresang (2017), always exist within organizations and institutions that desire to continue operating in an effective manner.

Human capital theory.

Human capital theorists believe that people are an organization's most important asset, and, as such, are a form of capital that is worth a significant personal and professional investment (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). The modern version of human capital theory was pioneered by Schultz in 1961 (Dillard, 2017). Schultz proposed that human capital consisted of the knowledge, skills, and abilities humans could utilize to maximize earnings (Dillard, 2017). In addition, Schultz conducted research indicating that human capital, when maximized, could enhance economic conditions and organizational profits (Dillard, 2017). Investing in human capital is, as proven by Schultz's pioneering research, a strategic contribution to economic and financial growth (Dillard, 2017). Becker (1993) built upon Schultz's work and presented research indicating that training

organization's provide to employees increased the employee's personal market value while also providing value to the organization. The research presented by Becker (1993) solidified the concept that the human capital possessed by employees should be maximized through employer investments (Dillard, 2017).

Organizations, and institutions, according to human capital theorists, receive significant benefits, and strategic competitive advantages, by continuously investing in their people (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). Accordingly, developing and refining human capital is considered to be a strategy by human capital theorists because human capital directly impacts organizational strategic capabilities (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017; Mencl, Wefald, & van Ittersum, 2016). Enhanced performance, improved results, and increased strategic capabilities are considered to be a return on investing in people (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017; Mencl et al., 2016). Succession planning directly contributes to the advancement of human capital and to human capital theory because it is a component of professional development, career advancement, and performance management (Desai et al., 2016; Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). When utilized in a strategic manner, succession planning is an investment that enhances the human capital of organizations, and the human capital of individual employees, through training, mentorship, and coaching (Desai et al., 2016; Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017).

Human capital is considered to be an employee's accumulated experiences, abilities, and knowledge (Desai et al., 2016). Individuals can accumulate human capital through education, hobbies, employment experience, and professional development (Mooney, Semadeni, & Kesner, 2017). Organizations are able to enhance human capital and individuals are able to accumulate human capital through strategic succession planning and professional development programs

(Mooney et al., 2017). Gillies (2016) presented evidence that human capital theorists view professional development and education as an investments. Enhancing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of employees has the potential to improve their lives, advance organizations, and improve economic conditions (Gillies, 2016). The value of human capital investment increases when skills are able to be transferred across positional and, at times, organizational, boundaries (Mooney et al., 2017). Skill transferability can be enhanced through succession planning and professional development (Mooney et al., 2017). Succession planning is thus an investment in the development and advancement of human capital.

Desai et al. (2016) explored the relationship between succession planning and human capital theory. Employee departures were found to negatively impact human capital, however, organizations were able to mitigate negative impacts through succession planning (Desai et al., 2016). Succession planning was determined to be a strategy organizations can deploy to align human capital with the needs of the organizations (Desai et al., 2016). In addition, succession planning efforts were found to enhance human capital and the competitive capabilities of organizations (Desai et al., 2016). Competitive capabilities were enhanced by providing sustainability through human capital and by ensuring human capital was aligned with the missions and strategic priorities of organizations (Desai et al., 2016). Succession planning bridges the knowledge gaps within human capital that are associated with vacant positions and employee departures, and mitigates risks associated with human capital deficiencies (Klein & Salk, 2013). As suggested within the literature, it is difficult to sustain organizational human capital without the use of succession planning.

Higher education institutions not only benefit, and receive sustainability, from human capital, but they also play an important role in the development of human capital through education (Clunies, 2004; Marginson, 2017). Higher education institutions provide development opportunities for students and prepare students to succeed in the workforce (Marginson, 2017). Sustainability and strategic capabilities play an important role in an institution's ability to improve economic conditions and to provide meaningful learning experiences (Marginson, 2017). Institutions are able to utilize internal human capital to enhance the human capital of their students and communities (Marginson, 2017). Succession planning, as previously demonstrated, plays an important role in providing sustainable human capital. Higher education institutions can utilize succession planning as a strategy to develop the institutional sustainability required to provide continuous educational opportunities in support of the development of human capital.

Chaos avoidance and stability.

The literature established that organizations and educational institutions are able to minimize, or avoid, chaos related to position vacancies by utilizing succession planning (Dresang, 2017; Santora & Bozer, 2015). Succession planning provides opportunities for academic institutions, and businesses, to take a proactive approach in resolving destabilizing situations associated with position vacancies (Dresang, 2017). Proactive approaches play an important role in avoiding situations such as chaos that can hinder success. Succession plans ensure procedures are in place that assist in avoiding the chaos associated with position vacancies (Dresang, 2017). Chaos and instability, or perceptions of chaos and instability, have the potential to disrupt institutions by creating barriers to implementing key programs and services (Dresang, 2017). Disruptions and feelings of angst can create barriers that lessen institutional impact and the abilities

of institutions to consistently implement their missions and strategic priorities (Santora & Bozer, 2015).

Santora and Bozer (2015) explored the negative consequences associated with insufficient succession plans in the non-profit arena. Non-profits possessing insufficient succession plans were found to have a significant amount of employee angst and uncertainty (Santora & Bozer, 2015). Angst and uncertainty, according to Santora and Bozer (2015), create instability that has the potential to disrupt the implementation of strategies. Jennings (2018) researched CEO succession planning within nonprofits and found succession planning to ease feelings of anxiety and instability. Deficiencies within succession planning, according to Jennings (2018) often led to anxiety and perceptions of instability amongst employees. Succession planning enables the workforce continuity organizations require for stability (Quinn, 2015). Instability is created when organizations are unable to implement workforce continuity procedures when vacancies occur (Quinn, 2015). The result is often an inability to implement programs and strategies due to a loss of talent (Quinn, 2015).

The presence of formalized succession plans, or the lack thereof, have the potential to impact perceptions of risk and financial stability. Bills, Lisic, and Seidel (2017) discovered a direct correlation between the presence of succession planning and a decreased perception of financial risk and instability. The research conducted by Bills et al. (2017) resulted in a determination that organizations lacking a formal succession plan had a higher perception of risk by external auditors. Auditors have a lower perception of risk and found organizations to have higher financial stability when vacancies in key positions were filled through an internal succession plan program (Bills et al., 2017). Vacancies within key positions, specifically the senior leadership positions, were

perceived by auditors as creating chaos that could result in undue risk and financial instability (Bills et al., 2017). The researched auditors held these beliefs and perceptions because senior leadership positions were seen as playing pivotal operational and financial decision making roles (Bills et al., 2017). Auditors not only displayed their concerns in their findings, but also displayed concerns by charging a higher fee to the organizations lacking formal succession plans (Bills et al., 2017).

Non-profits.

Santora and Bozer (2015) discovered that non-profits with sufficient succession plans in place were able to prevent instability and chaos during vacancies in key positions. In addition, organizations were able to utilize succession plans to ensure the consistent implementation of missions and strategic priorities (Santora, Sarros, & Esposito, 2014). Bozer et al. (2015) identified a positive correlation between succession planning and predictors of continuous success within Israeli nonprofits. The authors tested hypotheses to determine the correlations and to compare Israeli nonprofits with succession and development plans with nonprofits lacking the aforementioned plans (Bozer et al., 2015). Succession plans were found to provide a leadership pipeline that prepared employees to fill key positions (Bozer et al., 2015). The consistency provided through succession planning efforts minimized occurrences or perceptions of chaos and assisted in moving organizational strategies forward (Bozer et al., 2015).

Jarrell and Pewitt (2007) examined the impact of succession planning on stability by conducting a case study of governmental succession planning within the City of Plano, Texas. Jarrell and Pewitt (2007) presented evidence that sustainability is an important factor within government institutions. Succession plans within the City of Plano played a direct role in the

sustainability of city and community programs and initiatives (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). This case study is relevant as government institutions are often considered to be non-profits and many public colleges and universities are considered to be government agencies. Higher education institutions provide services to the community, and the stability generated from The City of Plano's succession plans can provide similar benefits to educational institutions.

Higher education.

Institutions can, in part, avoid chaos and provide operational stability through effective succession plans. Weare (2015) researched the effectiveness of succession planning within academic institutions and libraries. The author presented arguments pertaining to the usefulness of succession planning within academic institutions, including higher education institutions, schools, and libraries (Weare, 2015). Weare (2015) noted that succession planning in education is different than succession planning within the for-profit sector, however, evidence was presented that succession planning plays a role in operational stability within libraries. Perceptions of instability associated with vacancies in key positions could have, according to Weare (2015), a negative impact on library operations and advancement. Strategic planning and implementation were impeded in institutions lacking sufficient succession plans (Weare, 2015). While it is plausible that other factors could impede the consistent implementation of strategies, the literature clearly identifies succession planning, or the lack thereof, as a factor determining the abilities to implement strategies.

Consistent and continuous improvement were identified by Hardie (2015) as foundational to an educational institution's abilities to fulfill its mission and overcome strategic challenges. Succession plans and leadership development programs were identified as methods institutions

could utilize to develop and maintain a culture of consistency and continuous improvement (Hardie, 2015). Consistency, as identified previously, promotes stability and plays a role in the successful implementation of missions and strategies. While succession plans are not the only solution to instability and inability to fulfill institutional missions and strategies, they do serve as a valuable resource in creating consistency and stability when vacancies in key positions occur. Succession plans provide the stability and perceptions thereof that are necessary to ensure continuity in operations (Deshwal, 2015). Finally, succession plans provide the flexibility that is often needed to successfully respond to, and avoid the pitfalls of, change (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). The literature supports the negative impact chaos and instability have on abilities to implement strategies in a consistent manner. In addition, the literature displays the role succession planning plays in avoiding chaos and instability.

Succession planning's impact on strategy.

Significant attention has been granted throughout the literature on the impact succession planning has on organizational ability, or inability, to implement strategies (Deshwal, 2015). Succession planning, according to the literature, contributes directly to an organization's abilities to development, and implement, strategic goals and programs (Hildebrand, 2015; Leuzinger, Rowe, & Brannon, 2016). The long-term strategic viability of organizations is often impacted by succession plans because they assist organizations in having the right people in place to meet objectives and the needs of stakeholders (Deshwal, 2015). As such, succession plans, according to the literature, have the potential to significantly impact strategic capabilities (Deshwal, 2015; Hildebrand, 2015; Leuzinger et al., 2016).

Succession plans play an important role in fostering and ensuring alignment with various strategies (Hildebrand, 2015; McDermott & Marshall, 2016). Hildebrand (2015) explored the role succession plans play in consistently aligning for-profit objectives and activities with business strategies. Succession plans were found to be an essential component in strategic alignment (Hildebrand, 2015). Additionally, for-profit organizations identified consistent implementation of strategies and strategic alignment as rationales for investing in succession planning programs (Hildebrand, 2015). McDermott and Marshall (2016) supported this concept and argued that the departure of senior employees impedes the fulfillment of business objectives.

Succession plans were presented as a tool organizations can utilize to fulfill objectives despite employee departures by Acree-Hamann (2016), Stephens (2016), and McDermott and Marshall (2016). Organizations lacking sufficient succession plans, according to Acree-Hamann (2016), are likely to have a dismal future. Stephens (2016) suggested vacancies in key positions can lead to the aforementioned dismal future because suboptimal decisions and operations are often implemented during periods of key position vacancies. Organizations, according to Stephens (2016), can easily slip into a rushed crisis mode when vacancies arise without developed succession plans. Strategic planning, including succession planning, assists organizations in navigating crises and in implementing appropriate strategies and decisions despite the loss of key personnel (Acree-Hamann, 2016; Stephens, 2016).

Strategy execution.

Succession planning assists organizations in flourishing through the execution of strategic priorities and initiatives (Donner, Gridley, Ulreich, & Bluth, 2017; Stephens, 2016; Timms, 2016). Organizations are able to flourish because succession plans have the potential to enhance

organizational stability and capabilities by preparing talented employees to fill vacancies within key positions (Donner et al., 2017; Stephens, 2016; Timms, 2016). Strategies assist organizations and institutions in competing, however, strategies are of minimal benefit if they are unable to be competently and consistently executed (Stephens, 2016; Timms, 2016). Employees are responsible for executing strategies and succession planning assists in ensuring employees are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to execute strategies in a competent and effective manner (Stephens, 2016; Timms, 2016). Timms (2016) argued that strategies answer the questions of why, why, and when and succession plans answer the question of who. Proper succession plans demonstrate an institution's ability to provide a qualified individual to serve in key positions and execute strategies when vacancies exist (Timms, 2016). Strategic failure, according to Timms (2016), is far more likely when succession plans are not present, or properly implemented.

Donner et al. (2017) examined the impact of succession plans on radiology departments' abilities to fulfill their goals and departmental strategies. The research presented by Donner et al. (2017) displayed a direct correlation between succession plans and the department's strategic capabilities. When talented employees were prepared to fill vacancies in key positions the department was able to move forward strategically in a consistent manner (Donner et al., 2017). The research also displayed the negative strategic consequences associated with succession planning deficiencies within the researched radiology departments, including decreased abilities to serve stakeholders and meet goals (Donner et al., 2017). Radiology departments possessing formal succession plans were found to be able to implement strategies effectively in a consistent manner, especially when compared to their counterparts possessing succession planning deficiencies (Donner et al., 2017).

The role of succession planning in the execution of higher education strategies was examined by Charbonneau and Freeman (2016). Charbonneau and Freeman (2016) suggested that educational institutions must have succession plans in place in order to prepare employees to serve competently in key positions, and to execute institutional strategies in a consistent and effective manner. Research was presented pertaining to the strategic impact of succession planning within educational institutions (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016). Charbonneau and Freeman (2016) presented research demonstrating a direct correlation between the strategic capabilities of institutions and succession planning.

Leuzinger and Rowe (2017) displayed the importance of utilizing succession planning to move academic organizations forward through harnessing talent and momentum. Institutions must move forward and adapt to the changing needs of stakeholders (Leuzinger & Rowe, 2017). Vacancies in key positions can lead to a loss of momentum and create roadblocks for institutions as they attempt to continuously look toward the future (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Leuzinger & Rowe, 2017). Succession planning assists institutions and organizations in moving past potential roadblocks and in maintaining positive momentum.

Preparing employees.

Fulfillment of organizational and institutional missions and strategies is largely dependent upon employee capabilities and motivation (Anderson, 2015; Leuzinger et al., 2016). Succession plans assist institutions in ensuring the right person is prepared to fill vacancies in key positions at the right time (Anderson, 2015; Leuzinger et al., 2016). The fulfillment of missions and strategies can be impaired when the wrong person is placed in a key position (Anderson, 2015).

Newhall (2015) suggested strategic succession planning requires organizations to consider the future potential of employees and not just high performance. The consideration of future potential assists organizations in avoiding the selection of an individual that might not perform well in the future (Leuzinger & Rowe, 2017; Newhall, 2015). In one recent doctoral study, Parfitt (2017) researched succession planning within multiple public schools within the United States. The study demonstrated it was detrimental to simply place a current employee in a vacant leadership position because the employee may not be adequately prepared to serve within the new role (Parfitt, 2017). Succession plans identify, and prepare, individuals to move into vacant positions and serve successfully (Parfitt, 2017).

Anderson (2015) displayed the role succession planning plays in avoiding the selection of the wrong individuals for specific key positions. The author researched succession planning within governmental law enforcement agencies and found that law enforcement agencies possessing succession plans were more likely to consistently fill their missions and objectives within their communities (Anderson, 2015). Huynh (2016) applied these principles within academic libraries. The case studies presented by Huynh (2016) presented evidence that succession planning is a developmental process that considers current and future needs. Developing employees as a part of the succession planning process provided stability and assisted the libraries in ensuring talented employees were available to move the institutions forward (Huynh, 2016). The case studies demonstrated the right individuals serving in the right position provide a foundation to implement strategies and missions effectively and consistently (Huynh, 2016).

Anderson (2015) suggested that succession planning can be beneficial even when law enforcement agencies are required to hire external candidates to fill key positions due to

government requirements. This suggestion was presented by Anderson (2015) because succession planning encourages leaders to consider the future and the role of specific positions throughout the organization. Succession planning also prepares internal candidates and ensures resources are available to provide a smooth transition for internal and external candidates (Anderson, 2015; Leuzinger & Rowe, 2017). Public higher education institutions are often faced with similar challenges associated with government hiring, yet the consideration of the future and smooth transitions can play a role in the consistent fulfillment of institutional missions and roles within their communities.

Non-profit succession planning.

Principles associated with non-profit succession planning are often applicable to higher education institutions because a majority of institutions are considered to be non-profit organizations (Golden, 2014). For the purpose of this study it was important to provide a brief review of literature associated with non-profit succession planning. Succession planning within non-profit organizations has received limited, albeit increasing, attention as a research topic (Glenn, 2016; McKee & Froelich, 2016). Research into non-profit succession planning is considered to be in the developmental stages and minimal literature pertaining to non-profit research is available (McKee & Froelich, 2016). McKee and Froelich (2016) noted that non-profit succession planning research is based primarily on the context of succession planning in for-profit organizations. Initially, non-profits utilized for-profit, or corporate, succession planning concepts as the foundation for their succession plans (Glenn, 2016; McKee & Froelich, 2016).

While principles associated with corporate succession planning can certainly be applied to non-profit succession planning, evidence suggests inadequate succession plans are developed

within non-profits when only corporate principles are applied (Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011). Froelich et al. (2011) presented the importance of considering non-profit succession planning within the context of the non-profit environment. This argument supported previous research indicating that succession plans are fluid and unique to individual organizations. Research pertaining to non-profits and higher education must be considered within the context of their environments according to Froelich et al. (2011).

Throughout the 1990s, scholarly research began to indicate that nonprofit organizations could receive substantial benefits from succession planning (Glenn, 2016). Studies related to nonprofit succession planning continued into the 21st century, however, the studies were minimal in comparison to the for-profit studies (Glenn, 2016). These studies continued to display the positive benefits associated with nonprofit succession planning, and also displayed succession planning deficiencies within the nonprofit sector (Glenn, 2016; Santora & Bozer, 2015). The literature suggested that non-profits are inadequately prepared to navigate the challenges associated with vacant positions and successions (McKee & Froelich, 2016). The failure of non-profit leaders to develop succession plans has led to substantial disruptions in operations and services (Santora & Bozer, 2015).

Froelich et al. (2011) suggested that non-profit industry leaders have reasons to be concerned regarding the lack of succession plans within the non-profit arena. Santora and Bozer (2015) reminded industry leaders of the importance of acknowledging and confronting the need for non-profits to design succession plans and shared examples of the dangers associated with avoiding succession plans. The research presented by Santora and Bozer (2015) and Froelich et al. (2011) demonstrated that succession planning directly impacts the sustainability and operations of

nonprofit organizations. Their results coincided with a study conducted by Pynes (2009) that supported considering succession planning during the creation of strategic plans by nonprofit organizations.

Non-profits can suffer when succession plans are inadequate, and it is possible for non-profits to close their doors when individuals are unprepared to serve in key positions (Gilbert, 2017). Gilbert's (2017) research demonstrated the rapid decline non-profit organizations can experience when key positions remain vacant within their organizations. Froelich and McKee (2016) and Santora and Bozer (2015) presented research indicating the non-profits are able to fulfill their missions and services to their communities in a continuing manner when succession plans are developed and implemented. Non-profits are able to continue their operations efficiently and effectively similarly to their corporate counterparts through the use of succession planning (McKee & Froelich, 2016). Programs, efficiencies, and strategies were improved within non-profits due, in part, to successful succession planning initiatives (McKee & Froelich, 2016). While not all higher education institutions are considered to be non-profit organizations, for the purpose of this study, it was important to understand that succession plans, or the lack thereof, can impact higher education institutions in a similar manner as their non-profit organization counterparts.

Succession planning and higher education.

Succession planning within institutions of learning and, in particular, higher education institutions has received inadequate attention throughout the literature (Barton, 2017; Pitre-Davis, 2015; Seniwoliba, 2015). Succession planning is more prevalent in academic institutions globally than within the United States (Cavanaugh, 2017). Historically, American higher education institutions have participated in minimal succession planning activities (Pitre-Davis, 2015;

Seniwoliba, 2015). The literature, however, demonstrated a general acceptance of succession planning benefits and principles amongst leaders of colleges and universities throughout the United States of America (Barton, 2017; Pitre-Davis, 2015). Pitre-Davis (2015) suggested that while the importance of succession planning is generally accepted within higher education institutions, academic traditions often lead to a reluctance amongst educational leaders to fully implement effective succession plans.

Institutional leaders face multiple barriers to succession planning; however, the barriers are navigable and can be overcome (Cavanaugh, 2017). The most significant barrier appears to be the tradition of shared governance, an oft recognized staple to higher education management (Barton, 2017). While the importance of shared governance is recognized within the literature, the literature also suggests that it has the potential to hinder succession planning and the future successes of educational institutions (Richards, 2016). Higher education leaders must balance the relevant traditions of the academy with the recognized need of implementing succession plans. Rigid institutional cultures also create a barrier to succession planning and institutions often deprive faculty and staff members with sufficient leadership and professional development opportunities (Barton, 2017). Cavanaugh (2017) presented evidence that institutions often find it difficult to obtain employee buy-in for succession planning because the institutions have historically searched externally to fill key positions.

Succession planning, as displayed within this section, has the potential to significantly benefit the academy, and yet, succession planning deficiencies within higher education are prevalent. Golden (2014) presented findings suggesting that as baby boomers retire, vacancies will occur at an increasing rate within key positions found within higher education institutions. Despite

understanding the projected turnover, Golden (2014) found institutions generally lacked formal and effective succession plans. Nakutis (2016) found institutions possessing succession planning deficiencies are often instable and unable to respond to the changing needs of stakeholders and economic conditions. In addition, institutions lacking formal succession plans find it difficult to fill positions with individuals prepared to meet the unique needs of the academy, institution, and community (Droegemeier et al., 2017). Succession plans provide stability during periods of environmental instability, assist in preparing individuals to fill unique positions within institutions, and can assist institutions in moving forward in service to the community (Droegemeier et al., 2017; Nakutis, 2016).

In one recent study, Cavanaugh (2017) found a direct correlation between the presence of succession plans and an institution's abilities to successfully manage unexpected disasters. Cavanaugh (2017) compared his findings to the 25th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which outlines the Presidential line of succession. Emergency successions should be strategically planned prior to the occurrence of an actual institutional emergency in order to provide stability and order (Cavanaugh, 2017). Cavanaugh's (2017) research not only underscored the importance of succession planning for managing emergencies within higher education, but also the importance in terms of preparing individuals to step forward and fill key or integral institutional positions. The research presented by Cavanaugh (2017) demonstrated that talent can best be developed from within and succession plans have the potential to provide direction to institutional professional development plans.

Corporate succession planning and higher education.

The similarities and differences between corporate and higher education succession planning practices were explored by Gilbert (2017). Higher education institutions appeared to implement succession plans inefficiently when compared to their corporate counterparts (Gilbert, 2017). In addition, the nature of higher education required that potential successors be cross trained in multiple areas (Gilbert, 2017). Research was presented demonstrating that a majority of the benefits associated with succession planning in the corporate arena can be realized within higher education institutions (Gilbert, 2017).

Fitzpatrick (2014) and Hashim and Hamid (2016) presented evidence that educational institutions can suffer financially in similar manners as their corporate counterparts when succession plans are inadequate. Rayburn, Grigsby, and Brubaker (2016) applied corporate succession planning strategies to develop succession plans for department chairs within higher education institutions. The authors presented evidence that corporate succession planning strategies are relevant and practical within educational institutions (Rayburn et al., 2016). Deans were encouraged to develop mentorship and coaching programs for potential department chair and current department chairs participated in the process of preparing faculty for service as a chair (Rayburn et al., 2016). The process played a role in preparing faculty to serve as a department chair when a chair position became vacant (Rayburn et al., 2016).

While corporate succession planning principles can be applied within higher education, institutions will develop insufficient succession plans if they only consider succession planning strategies from the corporate arena (Betts, Urias, & Betts, 2009; Clunies, 2004; Klein & Salk, 2013). Klein and Salk (2013) presented research indicating that corporate succession planning

principles can cause higher education succession plans to fail because corporate plans are often easily communicated and implemented from the top-down. Higher education succession plans require deliberate communication, institutional buy-in, and communication that connects succession planning to the institution's culture, mission, and strategies (Klein & Salk, 2013). Shared-governance is often applied within higher education institutions and the principles of shared-governance require this approach, rather than a top-down approach, to institutional succession planning (Klein & Salk, 2013).

Shared-governance is often defined as the process of involving key stakeholders in decisions (Klein & Salk, 2013). Key stakeholders include faculty, staff, and members of the administration (Klein & Salk, 2013). Succession plans must focus on current institutional assets and institutional stakeholders if they are to be successful within the academy (Betts et al., 2009; Klein & Salk, 2013). The academy, as displayed within the literature, must learn from corporate succession planning practices, however, succession planning principles must be adapted as needed to meet the unique needs of the academy and institution.

Employee development.

Employee development is a substantial element, and benefit of, succession planning within educational institutions and business organizations (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Rudhumbu & Maphosa, 2015; Washington, 2016). Rudhumbu and Maphosa (2015) evaluated succession planning as a component of talent management programs within private higher education institutions. Research directly correlated succession planning to talent management, and it was found that private higher education institutions are often unable to fill key positions successfully with talented replacements (Rudhumbu & Maphosa, 2015). Washington (2016) explored the positive impact of succession

planning on employee development programs within higher education institutions. Institutions are able to utilize succession planning to prepare employees to serve in key positions and provide the stability needed to continue institutional operations in an effective manner (Washington, 2016). Succession plans have the potential to inspire institutional leaders to implement employee development and mentorship programs (Fitzpatrick, 2014). The programs inspired by succession plans assisted institutions in retaining a talented workforce, thus, implementing institutional programs and strategies in a quality and consistent manner (Fitzpatrick, 2014).

Educational institutions must include professional development and transition plans as elements of succession plans if they are to be successful (Klein & Salk, 2013). Institutions must provide opportunities for growth and learning if they are to have qualified individuals prepared to assume key roles and responsibilities (Klein & Salk, 2013). Mentorship and leadership development programs were identified as solutions to developing qualified successors, however, institutions must identify the positions requiring a qualified successor in order to identify potential mentees (Golden, 2014). Aithal (2016) reported that institutions will find it difficult to obtain excellence without establishing formal succession plans that include well designed development programs. Development programs play an important role in ensuring employees are prepared to fill positions on an interim and permanent basis (Calareso, 2013). As established within the literature, succession planning is an essential component of the talent management and employee development programs that assist institutions in successfully fulfilling their missions and strategies.

Strategy implementation.

Succession planning and its relation to institutional strategies was discussed by Darvish and Temelie (2014). Higher education institutions were experiencing an increase in retirements and

succession planning was identified as a stabilizing strategy for institutions (Darvish & Temelie, 2014). Darvish and Temelie (2014) presented research suggesting that succession planning can minimize operational and programmatic gaps associated with vacancies in key institutional positions. The need for a formalized succession planning process within institutions as a method to fulfill missions and strategies was addressed (Darvish & Temelie, 2014). Institutions, according to Darvish and Temelie (2014), often adopt an informal succession planning process that has led to weak and insufficient succession planning efforts.

Kumar and Kota (2017) presented potential benefits associated with succession planning within higher education institutions through a case study on succession planning within Skyline University College. Succession plans were found to provide professional development opportunities and institutional stability during periods of potential uncertainty (Kumar & Kota, 2017). The authors demonstrated the importance of communicating succession plans to various stakeholders in order to avoid chaos and satisfy concerns pertaining to the strategic direction of the institution (Kumar & Kota, 2017). Smooth transitions are often associated with succession plans and assist institutions in avoiding potential disruptions to the student experience (Kumar & Kota, 2017). Institutional stability and the quality of institutional programs were maintained through succession planning efforts in the institutions researched by Kamil, Hasim, and Hamid (2016).

Succession planning initiatives at Daytona Community College and Guilford Technical Community College were examined by Wallin, Cameron, and Sharples (2005) in an effort to explore the benefits associated with succession planning in higher education institutions. Wallin et al. (2005) presented evidence that the benefits associated with succession planning at the colleges included, “the projected continuity of the organizational strategy, an increase in leadership

capability, desirability as an employer, increased employee satisfaction levels, and the ability to attract and retain top talent” (p. 24). While the impact of succession planning on strategy was not the primary focus of the study, the research presented provided evidence supporting succession planning’s impact on institutional abilities to maintain consistency in the implementation of various strategies. Wallin et al. (2005) suggested that institutions would not be able to provide the stability required to maintain operations and to implement strategies in a successful manner without the presence of succession planning. Succession plans have the potential to provide the foundation institutions need to move forward with various programs, strategies, and initiatives because of the stability afforded to institutions through succession plans.

Grossman (2014) researched succession planning within multiple Midwestern higher education institutions. Research participants indicated that the importance of succession planning was accepted within their institutions, however, implementation of actual succession planning programs and strategies was sparse (Grossman, 2014). Grossman’s (2014) research participants appeared to agree that succession planning deficiencies were harming institutions by creating leadership gaps and barriers to sustainability and continuity. Vacancies created interruptions, according to the perceptions of the research participants that harmed the institution’s abilities to implement strategies and programs in a consistent manner (Grossman, 2014). Grossman (2014) suggested the possibility that succession plans would be implemented on an increased basis if institutional stakeholders understood the strategic impact of succession planning in relation to sustainability and continuity.

Contingency strategy.

Calareso (2013) suggested that succession plans provide higher education institutions with a roadmap for the future that plays a role in avoiding chaos and managing difficult situations. These thoughts were echoed by Georgakakis and Ruigrok (2017) after conducting a study pertaining to executive succession planning within the corporate arena. Despite researching succession planning within different industries, Georgakakis and Ruigrok (2017) and Calareso (2013) found succession planning to be a useful contingency strategy. The contingency strategies could be deployed to avoid chaos and assist in maintaining sustainability (Calareso, 2013; Georgakakis & Ruigrok, 2017). Calareso (2013) researched the utilization of succession planning as a contingency strategy within educational institutions. Contingency plans were found to be important due to the unique nature of higher education (Calareso, 2013).

Calareso (2013) argued that developing succession plans in the context of contingency plans were necessary because educational institutions often require open searches and the principles associated with shared governance make it difficult to select one individual to fill vacancies in key positions. The succession plans proposed by Calareso (2013) involved preparing individuals to serve in key positions as an interim during the search process. Additionally, the plans required the development of formal search and selection procedures for institutions that clearly stated the process for filling positions and the timeline for filling positions (Calareso, 2013). Evidence was presented that formal procedures, timelines, and interim appointments avoided chaos and ensured the continuation of strategic programs (Calareso, 2013). Succession plans must be regularly assessed to ensure they are designed to meet the changing needs of the institution and they ensure chaos avoidance and the continuation of operations (Calareso, 2013; Church, 2014).

Calareso's research presenting succession planning as a contingency strategy within higher education is relevant to the context and scope of this study as contingency plans are often utilized within public higher education institutions (Darvish & Temelie, 2014; Georgakakis & Ruigrok, 2017). Succession planning as a component of contingency planning assists institutions in moving forward despite employee departures and personnel changes. Unexpected situations occur and contingency plans play an important role in successfully navigating and managing the unexpected.

Community colleges.

The setting for this single site case study was a community college located within the southeastern United States. As such, a brief review of the literature pertaining to community colleges within the United States is included within this section. The purpose of this section is to establish community colleges as integral components of educational systems and communities within the United States. In addition, this section will provide an overview of literature pertaining to succession planning, and the importance of succession planning, within community colleges.

Community colleges within the United States are predominantly public two-year higher education institutions (Swanger, 2016). The first community college, Joliet Junior College, was established in 1901 in the United States (Swanger, 2016). As such, the community college concept is relatively new to the field of higher education when compared to the history of universities and four-year institutions (Swanger, 2016). Community colleges are considered to be an integral component of higher education systems within the United States and often serve as feeder schools to four year higher education institutions (Gill, 2016; Hornak et al., 2016; Swanger, 2016).

Modern community colleges serve as multipurpose educational institutions and often offer alternative pathways in addition to credit, or transfer programs (Beck, 2017; Morest, 2013).

Alternative pathways include workforce, and technical programs in support of meeting student and community needs (Beck, 2017; Morest, 2013). Workforce programs offered by community colleges assist students in developing the skills required to meet the needs of community employers (Beck, 2017; Morest, 2013). According to Beck (2017), “for over a century, community colleges across the nation have helped students meet their educational and personal goals while establishing an educated and well-trained workforce to support the nation’s growing economy” (p. 34).

The American Association of Community Colleges reported that approximately 1,100 community colleges serve well over seven million students annually (AACC, 2016). Recent studies suggest that approximately nine out of ten individuals within the United States live within 25 miles of a local community college (Beck, 2017; Morest, 2013). The presence of community colleges has increased the accessibility of higher education throughout the nation (Beck, 2017; Morest, 2013). The majority of community colleges have evolved from technical training and workforce development institutions to fully accredited members of the academy (Beck, 2017; Gill, 2016).

Community colleges are highly valued by their communities due to their unique abilities to respond to the needs of the local community (Gill, 2016; Hornak et al., 2016). Swanger (2016) presented research suggesting that community colleges assists in developing local communities and in moving communities forward through affordable and open access educational programs. The institutions often serve members of low-income families and provide opportunities for individuals to enhance their quality of life (Gill, 2016). Programs offered by community colleges assist students in navigating transitional periods and in moving toward a successful personal and professional pathway (Crawford & Jarvis, 2011). Community colleges, as displayed within the

literature, play an important role in preparing students to succeed, community and economic development, and in workforce development. The institutions must successfully fulfil their missions and have a positive strategic impact if they are to continuously support communities and students throughout the United States.

Succession planning.

The American Association of Community College has presented evidence suggesting approximately 75 percent of community college executives plan to retire within the next decade (AACC, 2016). Gill (2016) suggested the future of community colleges would be in peril should institutions fail to plan for the succession of their senior leaders. Community colleges risk becoming irrelevant and instable without future planning and leadership (Gill, 2016). Hilley and Morris (2016) reported that community colleges are finding it increasingly difficult to replace retiring senior employees with qualified individuals.

Benard and Piland (2014) investigated the formulation of the Grow Your Own Leaders program within California community colleges. The program was designed to respond to growing concerns related to succession planning deficiencies within the community college district (Benard & Piland, 2014). Benard and Piland (2014) presented evidence establishing the need for succession planning programs within the community college district, however, the Grow Your Own Leaders program was failing because all employees were permitted to participate in the program. Identifying and targeting appropriate candidates for the program would have, according to Bernard and Piland (2014), enhanced the success of the program. The identification of potential successors begins with current members of an institution's leadership team (Bernard & Piland, 2014).

Reed (2017) investigated barriers to succession planning within community colleges. The barriers established by Reed (2017) include shifting priorities, budgetary constraints, and shared governance and are consistent with the barriers found within the university setting. Luna (2010) suggested that shared governance and traditions of the academy may cause leaders to be uncomfortable with identifying potential successors, however, it is possible to prepare individual's to fill roles in partnership with internal community college stakeholders. Higher education professionals must balance shared governance expectations with the need to prepare individuals to fill roles in support of institutional sustainability (Luna, 2010).

Institutions, including community colleges, are increasingly determined to improve student retention (Heller & Cassady, 2017; Hutto, 2017). Hutto (2017) explored the relationship between student retention and college employees within the community college setting. The results of Hutto's (2017) research indicate there is a direct correlation between student retention and the presence of talented and qualified employees. Succession planning was found to assist in improving retention through preparing individuals to fill full-time positions (Hutto, 2017).

The specific focus of Hutto's (2017) research was faculty, however, the data can be applied to positions directly influencing the student experience within community colleges. Retention rates are often directly applied to budget formulas, institutional rankings, and public perceptions (Hutto, 2017). Improved retention rates have the potential to partially relieve community colleges of the budgetary constraints identified as a barrier to succession planning. Retention is an institutional strategy that, according to the literature, is directly influenced by the succession planning and employee development process (Heller & Cassady, 2017; Hutto, 2017). Talented and qualified

employees filling the right positions at the right time have the potential to positively influence students, programs, and institutional retention (Heller & Cassady, 2017; Huto, 2017).

The literature suggested that succession planning programs have the potential to assist community colleges in serving students, communities, and organizations in a consistent and effective manner by preparing individuals to implement, and support, institutional programs (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). Community colleges throughout the United States play an important role within communities and educational systems. Vacancies in key positions, and instability, have the potential to impede community colleges from serving their stakeholders. Programs, including succession planning, that support stability, strategic priorities, and the fulfillment of missions are necessary if institutions are to continuously provide invaluable services throughout the nation.

Human resources and succession planning.

Successful succession plans are, according to the literature, directly tied to strategic human resource management (Froelich et al., 2011). The literature demonstrates that succession planning is an important issue within the field of human resources (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014; Glenn, 2016; Leuzinger et al., 2016). Human resource professionals play an important role in the development and implementation of succession plans and should be viewed as strategic succession planning partners within organizations (Leuzinger et al., 2016). The human resources departments within organizations and institutions often play important roles in developing the developmental culture required for succession plans to be effective and successful (Leuzinger et al., 2016). According to the literature, human resource professionals are uniquely qualified to promote, develop, and implement formal succession plans within their organizations (Froelich et al., 2011; Leuzinger et

al., 2016). Organizations have found it difficult to fully implement succession plans when coaching, mentoring, and development guidelines and trainings are not provided by human resources (Leuzinger et al., 2016).

The literature identifies human resources as a vital partner to the success of a succession planning program (Froelich et al., 2011). Gandhi and Kumar (2014) discussed the role human resource professionals play in the succession planning process by dividing the process into five distinct steps (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014). The steps included identifying key positions, identifying employee and position competencies, developing succession planning strategies, implementing the succession plan, and evaluating the effectiveness of the succession plan (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014). Human resource professionals, according to Gandhi and Kumar (2014), play a role in each step, however, their involvement is critical to the success of the first three steps. Professionals serving within human resources understand the role positions play within organizations and often serve as consultants for leaders designing employee development programs (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014). Human resource professionals benefit succession plans, however, the benefits associated with succession plans are also extended to human resources (Ogbari, Akinyele, & Dibia, 2015). Succession plans assist human resource professionals in human resource planning that, in turn, provides information needed to contribute positively to the orderly replacement of key employees and positions (Ogbari et al., 2015).

Human capital theory.

Human capital theory and the associated viewpoint that human capital leads to a sustainable competitive advantage is directly related to strategic human resource management and planning (Delery & Roumpi, 2017). Succession planning, and the associated human resource planning,

allows organizations to develop human capital to meet the current and future needs of the organization (Delery & Roumpi, 2017). According to the literature, human resource professionals are able to utilize succession planning to support enhancements to human capital development and planning (Delery & Roumpi, 2017). In addition, human resources professionals are able to utilize succession planning to improve the retention of talented human capital (Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Froelich et al., 2011). The literature demonstrates the relationship between human resources, human capital theory, and succession planning as well as the vital role human resource professionals play in the succession planning process. Human resources professionals must consider themselves strategic partners in the succession planning process as demonstrated within the literature and should be included in the development of succession plans.

Higher education human resources.

Seniwoliba (2015) discussed the need to align higher education human resource departments with succession planning in order to maximize the success of the succession plan and associated development activities. Higher education institutions with human resources departments are able to partner strategically with the unit leaders to provide employee development guidance and training to current institutional leaders (Seniwoliba, 2015). Developing potential leaders properly assists in ensuring succession plans can be executed properly and that qualified individuals are prepared to lead (Hall-Ellis, 2015). Additionally, academic human resources departments can assist in providing data to support succession planning decisions and targeted succession plans for key positions (Hall-Ellis, 2015).

Human resources professionals can often provide the guidance academic professionals require to develop effective and sustainable succession plans (Fitzpatrick, 2014). While human

resources professionals operate in different environments than their corporate counterparts, their influence and impact on succession planning programs, strategies, and initiatives is similar. Succession planning is relevant to the field of human resources and to those serving within human resources departments in higher education institutions. Human resource professionals must embrace succession planning as a strategy to advance and improve their organizations.

Employee perceptions as scholarly research.

Employee perspectives serve as a valuable resource to organizations seeking to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of initiatives and programs (Jiang et al., 2017; Huang & Miao, 2016). As demonstrated within the literature, data generated from employee perspectives and perceptions are acceptable for generating conclusions and answering research questions within qualitative research studies (Jiang et al., 2017; Huang & Miao, 2016). Researchers utilized employee perspectives within the literature to examine the effectiveness of multiple human resource and employee development programs, including succession planning. Leuzinger et al. (2016) generated data from employee perceptions to research the relationship between mentoring and successful succession planning within academic libraries. Interviews with library employees were utilized to understand, and record, the perceptions and perspectives of employees (Leuzinger et al., 2016). The authors concluded that mentoring improves succession planning by developing skills, transferring knowledge, enhancing competencies, and preparing internal employees to fill vacancies in key positions (Leuzinger et al., 2016).

Antwi et al. (2016) examined the value and importance of understanding employee perspectives when evaluating employee development and talent management programs. Succession planning was included as a component of talent management programs within the

researched organizations (Antwi et al., 2016). The research presented by Antwi et al. (2016) utilized employee perspectives to identify the impact and effectiveness to the researched programs. Shuck, Rocco, and Albornoz (2011) presented research demonstrating the importance of understanding employee perspectives when designing, and evaluating the effectiveness of, human resource programs. Organizations, according to Shuck et al. (2011) are unable to grasp the impact of employee development programs without examining the perspectives of their employees. Generating data from the perspectives and perceptions of employees allows researchers and organizations to understand how employees perceive strategic development programs (Shuck et al., 2011). The perspectives of employees can thus lead to the generation of meaningful data useful to scholarly research and programmatic evaluations.

Jiang et al. (2017) demonstrated that employee perceptions of development activities often differ from the perceptions of senior managers. The research presented by Jiang et al. (2017) also demonstrated there is often a variance within employee perceptions pertaining to the same phenomenon. Humans are unique and have the potential to interpret and view events differently in comparison to the interpretation of other humans (Jiang et al., 2017). Interpretation variances were contributed to age differences and length of organizational tenure (Jiang et al., 2017). Perhaps the most significant finding presented by Jiang et al. (2017) was that employee perceptions of development activities, including succession planning, directly impacts organizational commitment, morale, and buy-in.

Jiang et al. (2017) concluded that data generated from employee perceptions brings significant meaning and use to scholarly research. Huang and Miao (2016) utilized employee perspectives to examine customer complaints within the hospitality industry. The authors

presented literature demonstrating the appropriateness of utilizing employee perspectives to generate scholarly data while researching a specific phenomenon (Huang & Miao, 2016). Previous scholarly research has established the use of employee perspectives as not only acceptable, but as imperative to the generation of a clear understanding of the researched phenomenon.

Higher education.

Within the past decade, research pertaining to community college succession planning in Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Colorado has emerged within the literature (Trickel, 2015). The studies concluded that employees frequently identified succession planning deficiencies within their individual institutions when chief executives perceived succession planning to be sufficient (Trickel, 2015). Trickel (2015) suggested this consistent finding created a trend throughout multiple community college systems. The employees responsible for implementing institutional services were able to identify relevant succession plan deficiencies successfully when compared to institutional chief executives (Trickel, 2015). This trend suggests a disconnect between the perceptions of institutional executives and the perceptions of institutional employees.

Trickel (2015) established the importance of understanding employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning in order to assess the status of institutional succession planning. Erasmus, Naidoo, and Pierre (2017) utilized employee perceptions to evaluate talent management programs within a South African university. Employee perceptions led to the emergence of consistent themes pertaining to the status of talent management programs within the university (Erasmus et al., 2017). Erasmus et al. (2017) noted within their conclusions the data generated from employee perceptions indicated gaps within the institution's succession planning program.

Higher education institutions and scholarly researchers, as demonstrated by Erasmus et al. (2017), as well as Trickle (2015), are able to receive valuable information pertaining to succession planning and talent management programs from the perceptions of employees.

Summary of the literature review.

This study sought to examine how succession planning, or the lack thereof, impacted a higher education institution's abilities to implement and fulfill strategic priorities in a consistent manner. As such, scholarly literature related to succession planning was thoroughly reviewed and summarized within this section. Specifically, literature was examined that pertained to the history of succession planning, succession planning's strategic impact, and the use of succession planning as a strategy. In addition, literature pertaining to succession planning within higher education and non-profits, the relationship between the field of human resources and succession planning, and the use of employee perceptions within scholarly research was examined. Finally, succession planning was defined with support from the literature and the relationship between human capital theory, human resources, business, and succession planning was explored.

The literature displayed several themes that support the focus of this study. Succession planning, as found within the literature, directly impacts strategic capabilities, sustainability, and competitive capabilities (Boocock, 2015; Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015; Perrenoud & Sullivan, 2017). Vacancies within key positions have the potential to produce chaos and to prohibit organizations, and institutions, from successfully moving forward (Quinn, 2015; Santora & Bozer, 2015). In addition, key position vacancies have the potential to inhibit institutions from providing and supporting programs important to stakeholders (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014). Succession planning programs play a role in avoiding chaos, supporting institutional strategies, and in

developing plans to assist in moving organizations forward despite vacancies within key positions (Leuzinger et al., 2016; Morris & Laipple, 2015; Stewart, 2016). Organizations and institutions, as established within the literature, find it difficult to implement strategies and maintain competitive advantages when succession planning deficiencies are present (Quinn, 2015; Weare, 2015).

Deficiencies in research pertaining to succession planning within higher education were displayed, however, researchers concluded that succession planning directly impacts institutional capabilities and strategies (Barton, 2017; Seniwoliba, 2015). In addition, dangers associated with succession planning deficiencies within higher education institutions were established within the literature (Golden, 2014; Pitre-Davis, 2015). Specific dangers included the inability of institutions to provide key programs and services and respond to change (Hardie, 2015). In addition, succession planning deficiencies decreased the community and economic impacts of institutions (Hardie, 2015). Community colleges, as established within the literature, serve as integral components of educational systems and communities throughout the United States (Beck, 2017; Richards, 2016; Morest, 2013). Instability within community colleges can disrupt vital community and educational programs, and succession planning was established as a strategy community colleges can utilize to avoid instability when vacancies occur within key positions (Beck, 2017; Richards, 2016; Morest, 2013). Finally, succession planning was identified as a strategic tool institutions could utilize to provide sustainable and effective services to their communities (Richards, 2016).

In regards to the nature and design of this study, qualitative research and the case study design was established within the literature as an appropriate research method and design for studies related to succession planning (Bordenave, 2017; Dillard, 2017; Frigoli, 2017). Succession

planning was established as a lived experience that can best be understood through the perspectives of individuals that have experienced succession planning (Coleman, 2013; Dennis-Leigh, 2012; Trickle, 2015). The literature established the necessity for organizations to adapt succession planning programs to meet their unique, and individual needs (Baker, 2017; Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016). As such, single site case studies were established within the literature as an appropriate research design (Kumar & Kota, 2017). Finally, the literature displayed a history of generating scholarly data from the perspectives and perceptions of employees and the appropriateness of utilizing human capital theory as the framework throughout scholarly succession planning research. (Antwi et al., 2016; Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Jiang et al., 2017). This research project is thus firmly rooted within the scholarly literature reviewed within this project. Key themes and ideals presented within the scholarly and professional literature supported the purpose of this study. Finally, the literature provided an essential foundation to solving the problem associated with this study.

Transition and Summary of Section 1

Section 1 contained the foundation of this qualitative single site case study, as well as discussed the significance of this study. The problem addressed by this study, that succession plan deficiencies have created a hindrance in a southeastern United States community college's abilities to consistently implement strategic programs and initiatives, was established within this section. This study's purpose, to examine employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning, was also established. In addition, the rationale for selecting a qualitative case study design was addressed, as well as the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations associated with this study. Section 1 provided the focus of this study by stating the research question, and sub-questions, establishing

human capital theory as the conceptual framework and by defining the key terms associated with this study. Finally, Section 1 concluded with a thorough review of the scholarly and professional literature. The next section discusses the research project in detail to include a discussion of the research design, the selected research method, and the reliability and validity of the collected data.

Section 2: The Project

This qualitative case study investigated succession planning's impact on an educational institution's abilities to fulfill its mission and implement strategies in a consistent manner. The study sought to understand the perspectives of employees pertaining to succession planning in order to satisfy the research question, as well as to investigate succession planning's impact on the institution. Open-ended personal interviews were conducted with employees of the institution, and a single site case study research design was utilized. This section explains the research project and describes the role of the researcher, research participants, the research method, and the research design. In addition, this section describes the population and sample, data collection methods, and data analysis methods utilized within this study. Finally, the reliability and validity of the collected data are addressed within this section.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning within a community college located in the southeastern United States. Human perceptions are shaped and developed primarily through past experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Rijswijk et al., 2016). Past experiences not only shape and develop current perceptions, they also impact future perceptions, decisions, and outcomes (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Rijswijk et al., 2016). Perceptions can provide information pertaining to the success, or lack thereof, of an organization or program (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Rijswijk et al., 2016). Employee perceptions will provide insight pertaining to succession planning within the institution and will assist in identifying impediments to the succession planning process. The past experiences of

employees will assist in understanding the deficiencies, barriers, and impact associated with succession planning within the institution.

Employees of the researched community college possess unique perspectives that can assist in confirming succession planning barriers identified in previous research. In addition, the employees can assist in identifying additional barriers to succession planning within education institutions. Finally, employee perspectives will provide insight pertaining to the impact of succession planning on institutional stability and the ability of the institution to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner. Employees directly experience succession planning because it is an experience directly tied to employment and professional development (Trickel, 2015). As such, understanding the perspectives of employees that have experienced succession planning, or the lack thereof, provides a direct view of succession planning's strategic impact.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers play a prominent role in the collection of data and are data collection instruments (Creswell, 2014; Simon, 2011). The researcher in this study utilized personal, in-depth, and open-ended interviews to collect data from research participants and was the sole instrument of data collection. As such, the researcher played a prominent role within this qualitative study. Potential research participants were identified and contacted by the researcher and the researcher scheduled participants for interviews. The researcher utilized data compiled by the institution's human resources department to identify potential research participants and the population. Due to the use of information provided by the human resources department, the population was determined by data and not by the researcher.

The utilization of data to determine the population assisted in mitigating the prominent role of the researcher and potential bias in selection the population. In addition, the research participants were determined, in part, by information provided by the human resources department. Initial screenings to select research participants were conducted by the researcher through the use of data and email responses. The researcher moderated the semi-structured interviews and utilized participant responses to generate follow-up interview questions that led to the collection of insightful data. Initial interview questions were developed by the researcher and the researcher was responsible for ensuring the initial interview questions remained consistent throughout the interview sessions.

Sparkes and Smith (2013) stressed the importance of disclosing whether the researcher's role was overt or covert. Covert researchers do not disclose the actual reason for conducting the research to participants, and the actual reason for the researcher's presence is usually unknown to participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). Overt researchers ensure the research participants understand the reason and purpose associated with the research, and the actual reason for the researcher's presence is disclosed (Sparkes & Smith, 2013). The researcher in this study was overt and research participants understood the purpose of the research and the role of the researcher. Research participants were informed of the researcher's prominent role during the interview session.

Finally, the role of a qualitative researcher is, according to Mark (2017), strategic because qualitative researchers must balance interactions between theory, collected data, and the selected conceptual framework. Researchers must regulate interactions between information provided by research participants and information generated from the literature in order to avoid tainting or

influencing the information provided by the participants (Mark, 2017). The researcher did not disclose information found within the literature to research participants with the exception of the information found within the definitions section of this study. Data collected from research participants were viewed within the confines of the conceptual framework during the data analysis stage of this study and were also compared to information found within the literature. The researcher was responsible for viewing data within the confines of the framework as well as for comparing collected data to the scholarly literature.

Participants

Sargeant (2012) advised that qualitative research participants must be selected strategically in order to successfully answer research questions and collect meaningful data. The strategic selection of research participants assists in understanding the researched phenomenon (Sargeant, 2012). Participants must be qualified to answer the research question and must possess experience in, or with, the researched phenomenon (Sargeant, 2012). Qualifications are often established by the researcher with support from the literature (Sargeant, 2012). Succession planning is best understood through the perspectives of individuals that have experienced succession planning (Leland, Carman, & Swartz, 2012). In addition, the impact of succession planning can be understood through the perspectives of employees (Leland et al., 2012; Polk, 2016). As such, the participant qualifications for this study included at least one year of service as an institutional employee, experience with institutional succession planning, or the lack thereof, and experience serving the institution while at least one vacancy existed within a key position. The established requirements were grounded in the literature (Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Jiang et al., 2017) and

ensured that research participants possessed the perceptions and perspectives required to satisfy the research question and purpose of this study.

The institution's human resources department provided the information required to gain access members of the researched population and part of the information required to identify qualified research participants. The human resources department provided a list of the individuals possessing at least one year of employment experience with the institution. Employee names, positions, and institutional email addresses were included on the list from the human resources department. In this sense, the human resources department served as a gatekeeper for gaining access to members of the population and qualified research participants. Gatekeepers assist researchers in gaining access to members of the researched population and, at times, the sample population (Mark, 2017). The use of a gatekeeper to access population members and qualified research participants is consistent with the method utilized by Mark (2017) while conducting a scholarly succession planning study.

Quantitative research participants are often selected at random whereas qualitative research participants are selected purposefully (Sargeant, 2012). The data provided by the institution's human resources department led to the purposeful identification of a qualified research population. Creswell (2014) recommended limiting the number of research participants when conducting qualitative studies in order to provide ample opportunity to generate significant details and data. According to Creswell (2014), phenomena and events can be appropriately researched during qualitative case studies with approximately three to ten qualified research participants. Purposeful selection assists in ensuring that qualified research participants are selected for the research study

by selecting individuals that are able to provide perspectives pertaining to the researched phenomenon (Sargeant, 2012).

The researcher was able to develop a working relationship with research participants through the institution's chief executive officer and human resources department. In addition, the researcher was able to develop a working relationship through the researcher's employment status with the institution. Rapport was developed by providing a detailed description of the study, including the purpose of the study, to potential research participants. The established professional working relationship also assisted in developing rapport and was identified as a benefit when researching succession planning by Cook (2015). Finally, the researcher discussed the qualifications for serving as a research participant with the potential participants via email communication (Appendix C). Participants were asked to certify via email that they met the eligibility criteria prior to being selected as a research participant. The process not only assisted in developing a working relationship with the research participants, but also in ensuring qualified research participants were selected for the study.

The privacy and confidentiality of the research participants and data were protected and participants were notified of the methods utilized to protect their privacy prior to providing their consent to serve as a research participant (Appendix B). Interview recordings, research data, and records were maintained and stored on a password protected personal computer. The researcher was the only individual with access to the password and the computer. These measures to protect participant confidentiality were consistent with measures utilized by Byers (2016) during succession planning research. Physical records and the recording device were secured within the researcher's private home office. Only the researcher, doctoral program director, and dissertation

committee members were authorized to review confidential material. Interviews were conducted behind closed doors within a secure office, while in a public location, was generally secluded. Research data will be destroyed in three years and participant names and titles were not published within this study.

Research Method and Design

Research methods, or approaches, involve detailed methods pertaining to data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). According to Creswell (2014), scholarly research methods include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Quantitative research is utilized to test objective theories through examining the relationships amongst variables (Creswell, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). Instruments are utilized to measure variables, and numerical data are analyzed through statistical procedures (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is utilized to understand the meanings individuals assign to specific events and phenomena (Creswell, 2014). The mixed methods approach integrates qualitative and quantitative data to provide a complete understanding the research problem (Creswell, 2014).

This study utilized the qualitative research method to examine, interpret, and understand employee perceptions pertaining to a specific phenomenon, succession planning. Qualitative research assists in developing an understanding of specific phenomena and in interpreting the phenomena (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). For the purposes of this study, the phenomenon was succession planning and its impact on the researched institution's abilities to fulfill its mission and implement strategies in a consistent manner. The study required an in-depth understanding of human opinions and perceptions that can only be obtained through qualitative research (Yin, 2015). Perceptions assist in developing an understanding of phenomena (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Accordingly, qualitative research was paramount to resolving this study's research problem, fulfilling the purpose of this study and in satisfying the research question.

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research because qualitative research is dedicated to developing an understanding of human perspectives and contextual conditions (Yin, 2015). In contrast, quantitative research attempts to control contextual conditions through artificial experiments and considers the preconceptions of the research (Yin, 2015). Qualitative research has the potential to provide an understanding of the meaning participants assign to succession planning, stability, and the consistent implementation of strategic programs as demonstrated in researched conducted by Hong et al. (2017). Meanings can be generated through past experiences and the perceptions of research participants (Hong et al., 2017). This study utilized the qualitative design to collect perceptions as data. The qualitative research method provided the framework required to understand and satisfy the research question associated with this study by enabling the collection and analysis of appropriate and relevant data.

The researcher did not select the quantitative method and mixed-method for this study. Quantitative research was not selected for this study because it is primarily concerned with determining the validity of objective theories and analyzing variable relationships (Creswell, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). Quantitative research requires the use of mathematical, statistical, or numerical data thus making a quantitative approach ineffective for this study (Sukamolson, 2012). Numerical and statistical data were not utilized as this study required an in-depth understanding of participant perspectives and opinions. Mixed-method studies combine qualitative and quantitative research within different phases of the study (Ritchie et al., 2013). The mixed-method approach was not appropriate for this study because qualitative research was required to answer the research

questions and the quantitative approach would impede the researcher's abilities to satisfy the research questions associated with this study.

Discussion of design.

Research designs provide a foundation for planning, organizing, and implementing the research process (Toldeo-Pereyra, 2012). The manner in which researchers collect data, analyze data, approach problems, and seek answers are directly influenced by the selected research method and design (Taylor et al., 2015; Toldeo-Pereyra, 2012). As such, research designs play a foundational role in collecting and analyzing meaningful data in an effort to fulfill the purpose of a study and satisfy the research question (Toldeo-Pereyra, 2012). Creswell (2014) suggested the research design involves the procedures for inquiry, analysis, and interpretation. Within this study the qualitative method was utilized, and as such, only qualitative research designs were considered by the researcher. The research designs associated with the qualitative method include ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, phenomenology, and case study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Silverman, 2016).

The research design employed within this qualitative research project was a single site case study. Case study research designs involve the development of an in-depth case, event, or program analysis by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). According to Yin (2014), the case study design is well suited to research and understand business problems, current events, and complex phenomena. Case studies can also be utilized to investigate complex issues without relying on previous investigations and research (Toliver, 2017). The specific problem addressed within this study was that the perceptions held by employees that pertain to succession planning were unknown. Despite

nonexistent research pertaining to the specific problem, the selected design enabled the researcher to investigate and resolve a problem.

Case studies involve collecting data, analyzing data, and sharing the results of the study (Yin, 2014). Data generated from case studies often includes descriptions of the personal lived experiences of individuals that have experienced or participated in a specific current phenomenon. Succession planning is generally accepted as a phenomenon that occurs within institutions and organizations (Desai et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2017). The case study design was the ideal design to fulfil the purpose of this study as it enabled the researcher to collect, analyze, and share the perspectives of individuals that experienced the business problem and current event, succession planning.

Participant interviews served as the primary data collection method within this study. According to Trickett (2015) and Yin (2014), interviews with individuals that experienced the researched event are foundational to the successful implementation of the case study design. The primary data collection methods associated with case studies are interviews and participant observations (Toliver, 2017; Yin, 2014). This study utilized interviews as the primary data collection method because interviews are often utilized to understand lived experiences and human perspectives (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Desai et al., 2016). Case studies offer a unique strength as they are able to consider data from multiple sources including interviews, observations, and field notes (Trickett, 2015). In addition, case studies allow researchers to explore the researched phenomenon or event within its natural setting (Yin, 2014). Data collected within this study occurred within the researched institution and the natural setting.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of current institutional employees and case studies are designed to explore human perspectives related to a social phenomenon, business problem, experience, or current event (Trickel, 2015; Yin, 2014). Succession planning is considered to be a lived experience that is best understood through the perspectives of those who have experienced succession planning (Charbonneau & Freeman, 2016; Desai et al., 2016). In addition, succession planning is considered to be an event and complex business problem that occurs within organizations (Toliver, 2017). The case study design was ideal for collecting and understanding the perspectives of individuals that experienced succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution. Finally, the case study design was appropriate for addressing the research problem associated with this study because the strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution was best understood through the perspectives of institutional employees (Erasmus et al., 2017; Kamil et al., 2016). The single site case study design utilized within this study provided the design required to understand the strategic impact of succession planning through the perspectives of the employees that experienced the succession planning phenomenon within the institution.

Ethnographic research is concerned with studying shared language and behavioral patterns within the natural settings of specific cultural groups (Creswell, 2014). The collection of data within ethnographic research involves prolonged observations and personal interviews (Creswell, 2014). This study was not concerned with the patterns of specific cultural groups and observations were not utilized as a data collection method. As such, the ethnographic research design was not selected for this study. Grounded theory seeks to build or develop theories derived from the

collected data (Creswell, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). Grounded theory was not selected because this study did not seek to develop new theories, but to apply current theories to solve a problem.

Narrative designs involve studying the lives of individuals and retelling the stories within a narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2014). Researchers utilizing narrative designs are often concerned with how humans narrate their personal versions of reality (Taylor et al., 2015). Narrative designs require the consideration of a story's content and how the story was delivered, including social interactions and the tone of delivery (Taylor et al., 2015). This study was not concerned with the entirety of the research participant's lives, nor was this study concerned with how participants delivered their answers to interview questions. As such, the narrative design was not selected for this study.

Phenomenology is the study of past human experiences through the perspectives of individuals that participated in the experience (Ash & Simpson, 2016; Cherman & Rocha-Pinto, 2016; Van Manen, 2016). Montague (2016) suggested that phenomenological research seeks to conceptualize, or understand, what it is like to experience a specific phenomenon. The design relies on the interpretations of the human experiences held by selected research participants (Mark, 2017). This study, however, relied on triangulation through multiple sources of data, including interviews, observations, and field notes. While succession planning is considered to be a human experience, the design was not selected for this study because past human experiences are the primary focus of phenomenological studies. This study researched a current human experience by collecting data from current employees of the researched institution.

Summary of research method and design.

This study utilized the qualitative research method and a single site case study design. The qualitative method was selected because it is well suited for research with the intent of understanding human perspectives. Case studies are concerned with understanding current events through the perspectives of individuals that experienced the researched event or phenomenon. As such, the utilization of the qualitative method and implementation of a case study design were necessary to satisfy the research question and sub-questions associated with this study.

Population and Sampling

This section provides an in-depth discussion pertaining to the research population, sample population, and sampling method associated with this study. In addition, this section describes the criteria established for membership eligibility in the research population and sample population. Methods to screen participants to ensure the satisfaction of the established criteria are discussed, as well as the rationale for the criteria and screening methods. Finally, this section describes how the selected research participants were qualified to assist in providing the information necessary to satisfy the research question, and sub-questions, associated with this study.

Discussion of population.

Target research populations are considered to be the totality of a group of individuals or objects that possess predetermined common characteristics relevant to the study (Faeni, 2016). Previous succession planning research found within the literature has established firsthand experience of succession planning efforts as a predetermined population requirement (Erasmus et al., 2017; Trickle, 2015). Research requiring employee perspectives pertaining to succession planning established the population requirement as service as an employee of the researched

organization, or organizations (Erasmus et al., 2017; Trickel, 2015). Succession planning is a lived, and often unique, human experience. The specific needs of individual organizations and institutions often lead to unique succession planning strategies and definitions. Employees of individual organizations possess the knowledge, opinions, and insights required to develop an understanding of succession planning within individual organizations. As such, it is feasible that individuals lacking an employment relationship with an individual organization are unqualified to provide the information required to develop an adequate understanding of succession planning within the organization.

The sole population requirement for this study was current service as a full-time employee of the researched institution. Individuals possessing current full-time employment experience with the institution possessed the common characteristic required to be included in the target research population. As such, the population for this study consisted of individuals with full-time institutional employment experience. This population was appropriate because the population was in a unique position to provide information pertaining to the impact of institutional succession planning (Erasmus et al., 2017). Only institutional employees were uniquely qualified to describe experiences associated with employee perspectives pertaining to the impact of succession planning within the researched institution. Gender, ethnicity, race, socio-economic background, and age were not factors for inclusion in the target population. These elements were not utilized as factors because the focus of the study was a shared employee experience, succession planning. All employees, regardless of their demographics, were eligible for membership within the population. The determination to not utilize additional factors was consistent with the scholarly succession planning study conducted by Richards (2016).

Human resources, acting as gatekeeper, provided the researcher with a list of current full-time institutional employees. The list provided by the human resources department included the totality of the individuals that met the sole characteristic required to be included in the population. Utilizing the human resources department as a gatekeeper served a dual purpose within this study. The human resources department was able to identify all members of the population and provide this information to the researcher. In addition, the utilization of the human resources department ensured the population met the eligibility criteria for membership in the target population, service as a current full-time institutional employee. The Chief Executive Officer of the researched institution granted the human resources department permission to provide the information to the researcher as well as permission to the researcher to contact population members.

Discussion of sampling.

Sampling is the process of selecting a representative component or portion of the defined target population (Orcher, 2016). Samples are smaller subgroups that mirror their populations and assist in establishing generalizations and opinions from the population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). Samples utilized within scholarly research should assist in satisfying the research question (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). In its simplest form, a sample is any component of the target or research population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). Scholarly research sampling methods fall within two categories, probability and non-probability (Orcher, 2016; Sarstedt, Bengart, Shaltoni, & Lehmann, 2016). Probability sampling is appropriate when the sample is selected at random and when it is possible to identify all known potential samples within the researched population (Orcher, 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Non-probability sampling utilizes personal judgement,

minimizes random sample selection, and often places restrictions on the size and members of the sample population (Orcher, 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2016).

Generalization of research results has largely been associated with probability sampling within the academic literature because the samples are considered to be representative of the population (Sarstedt et al., 2016). Generalizability is the scope of the applicability of research findings within one setting to other settings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Applied research is often confined to specific organizations and is often only generalizable to identical situations and scenarios (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Despite the history of generalizing research through the utilization of probability sampling, the literature suggests research utilizing non-probability sampling can be generalizable through replication studies (Sarstedt et al., 2016; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Sarstedt et al. (2016) presented evidence pertaining to the use of replication studies to increase the validity and generalization of research associated with non-probability sampling within the advertising arena. Recommendations pertaining to replication studies can be provided as suggestions for further study by scholarly researchers (Sarstedt et al., 2016) and were included as a recommendation within this study.

Probability sampling methods.

Probability sampling methods include random sampling, cluster sampling, and stratified sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Random sampling is utilized when members of the population have an equal chance of being selected for the sample population (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Cluster sampling involves dividing the population into predefined groups or clusters based upon characteristics and the factors associated with the research (Orcher, 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Stratified sampling involves separating the

population into various strata, for example, age and gender (Orcher, 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2016).

While cluster sampling and stratified sampling differ, the methods find commonality through the utilization of random sampling elements (Orcher, 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Random samples are selected from within individual strata and stratified sampling and random clusters are selected within cluster sampling (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; Orcher, 2016; Sarstedt et al., 2016).

Probability sampling methods were not utilized as the sampling method for this study. As discussed within the literature, probability sampling methods require the use of random selection (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Random selection was not appropriate for this study because the research question suggested that a specific category of individuals should be sampled to satisfy the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). The particular category of individuals associated with this study includes individuals that have experienced succession planning within the researched institution. Probability sampling would allow for the possibility of including individuals that had not experienced succession planning within the researched institution. This possibility could lead to the inclusion of unqualified individuals within the sample population. As such, the sampling method would not lead to the development of an answer to the research question.

Non-probability sampling methods.

Non-probability sampling methods include convenience sampling, quota sampling, and purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Convenience sampling is often associated with easily recruiting, and accessing, research participants (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Sample members are selected based upon the ease in which the researcher can access potential members (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). In order to satisfy the

research question and sub-questions and fulfill the purpose of this study, data were required to be collected from individuals that experienced the researched phenomenon. The researcher could not select research participants solely by chance and accessibility, as such, convenience sampling was not utilized as a sampling method within this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Quota sampling involves the development of predefined characteristic controls and their distribution within the researched population (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Controls associated with quota sampling are often established utilizing the judgement of the researcher (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Specific distributions would not have allowed for the sole selection of individuals that experienced the researched phenomenon, as such, quota sampling was not utilized within this study. Purposeful sampling involves selecting sample participants that are qualified to assist in satisfying the research question and in completing the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Researchers establish criteria that assists in targeting appropriate members of the sample population (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Non-probability sampling methods are often utilized within qualitative research and are appropriate for use within this qualitative study (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Purposeful sampling.

The sampling method utilized within this study was purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a strategic sampling method in which the researcher ensures sample participants possess information relevant to the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting individuals that have experienced a specific phenomenon, and allows for the sole inclusion of research participants that are aligned with the researched phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Mark, 2017). The individuals identified as part of

the purposeful sampling process must be uniquely qualified to describe their experiences articulately and reflectively (Palinkas et al., 2015). Criterion sampling is considered to be the most common form of purposeful sampling and is used to target sample participants that meet specific criteria associated with satisfying the research question (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). The researcher establishes relevant criteria and selects individuals to join the sample because of their relevance to the established criteria and research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016).

Criteria established within scholarly research is often grounded within the scholarly and professional literature (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). Scholarly research pertaining to succession planning has established the importance of generating data from individuals that have experienced succession planning, or the lack thereof (Erasmus et al., 2017; Trickel, 2015). According to Creswell and Poth (2017) and Hancock and Algozzine (2016), case studies require that sample participants have experience in the case, event, and phenomenon being researched within the study. Researchers must strategically select individuals possessing knowledge pertaining to the researched phenomena and the associated research question (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Peters-Hawkins et al. (2017) utilized purposeful sampling while researching succession planning within an educational institution. According to Peters-Hawkins et al. (2017), purposeful sampling was justified because only individuals associated with the institution were qualified to provide insight into the succession planning process.

Purposeful sampling was not only appropriate, but required in order to accurately satisfy the research question and sub-questions associated with this study. The single case selected for this study was a higher education institution within the southeastern region of the United States.

Research participants were required to meet criteria established by the researcher in order to qualify for selection as a research participant. Four criteria were established by the researcher: (a) at least one full year of service as an institutional employee; (b) experience serving within the institution while at least one key institutional position was vacant; (c) individuals must have experienced the effects of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution; and (d) individuals must have been willing to share their perspectives and experiences in an honest and detailed manner. Members of the target population that met all three criteria were deemed qualified to serve as research participants. The criteria established for selection as a research participant was consistent with sampling criteria established by Benard and Piland (2014), Hilley and Morris (2016), Pepper (2016), and Reed (2017) in previous succession planning studies.

Participant screening.

The essence of a case study is understanding an experience and contemporary event through the perspectives of individuals that experienced the researched event (Reed, 2017; Yin, 2017). Additionally, case studies seek to describe and understand a contemporary event or social phenomenon (Yin, 2017). In order to research the strategic impact of succession planning within the researched institution, it was necessary to collect data from individuals that experienced succession planning, the social phenomenon and event, within the institution. This study aimed to understand the strategic impact of succession planning through the perspectives of employees that experienced succession planning. Accordingly, it was necessary to screen potential research participants in order to ensure they were qualified to provide perspectives related to the research phenomenon.

Two levels of participant screening were utilized within this study, gatekeeper screening and researcher screening. The human resources department implemented and fulfilled the first level of screening through service as the gatekeeper. Utilizing knowledgeable employees to serve as gatekeepers and screeners within a researched organization, or institution, is consistent with the qualitative succession planning studies conducted by Byers (2016) and Mark (2017). The human resources department screened participants by ensuring only full-time employees of the researched institution were submitted to the researcher as members of the target population. In addition, human resources assisted with screening by identifying the full-time institutional employees possessing at least one year of experience within the researched institution. This service not only ensured that all eligible members of the target population were identified, but also ensured the research participant criterion requiring at least one year of service was satisfied prior to potential participants receiving the initial recruitment email.

The researcher was responsible for implementing and fulfilling the second level of participant screening. Researcher screening is consistent with qualitative succession planning studies conducted by Cook (2015), Mark (2017), and Pepper (2016). The researcher screened participants through initial and follow-up recruitment email messages. Mark (2017) utilized participant recruitment to screen population members for eligibility to serve as qualified research participants. Potential research participants were asked to confirm via email message that they met the four qualifying criteria for selection as a research participant. The recruitment template utilized by the researcher can be found in Appendix C. The researcher reviewed all responses and confirmed that potential research participants satisfied the four criteria.

Summary of population and sampling.

The sole criterion for membership in the research population was current service as a full-time employee of the researched institution. Purposeful sampling was utilized in order to ensure members of sample population were qualified to share perspectives pertaining to succession planning's impact, or the lack thereof, on the researched institution. Participant screening procedures were implemented to assist in the selection of qualified research participants from the sample population. The sampling method and screening procedures utilized within this study assisted in the generation of research participants that possessed the perspectives necessary to satisfy the research question and sub-questions associated with this study. Finally, the method and procedures utilized were consistent with previous scholarly case study research.

Data Collection

Polkinghorne (2005) wrote the aim of data collection within scholarly qualitative research is to provide evidence in support of satisfying the research question and evidence of the investigative experience. Case studies, according to Hancock and Algozzine (2016), seek to understand phenomena and events from the perspectives of individuals possessing experience with the researched phenomenon, event, and case. Data collection within qualitative case study research is collected when individuals are able to share their lived experiences and describe the researched phenomenon (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013; Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; Silverman, 2015). For the purposes of this study, the researched phenomenon and event was succession planning, or the lack thereof, within a higher education institution located in the southeastern United States.

Hancock and Algozzine (2016), Kohlbacher (2006), and Yin (2017) presented evidence supporting multiple data collection methods within qualitative case studies to include personal

interviews, observations, field notes, and recorded narratives. Yin (2017) suggested the unique strength associated with case studies is the design's support of multiple data collection methods. The data collection methods supported by Hancock and Algozzine (2016), Kohlbacher (2006), and Yin (2017) coincide with Creswell's (2014) observation that interviews are a primary qualitative data collection method.

Personal interviews are the preferred method of primary data collection within qualitative case study research because the interviews often lead to an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and researched event (Englander, 2012; Flick, 2014; Yin, 2017). In addition, data collected through interviews can be supported by the researcher's field notes (Englander, 2012; Flick, 2014; Kohlbacher, 2006). In contrast, narratives are less likely to have structure and do not rely on the field notes of the researcher (Muylaert et al., 2014). Data were generated within this study through personal interviews and the field notes of the researcher. Field notes included a narrative of the interview as well as the researcher's observations. Additional details pertaining to the data collection process will be discussed below within the instruments, techniques, and organization sections.

Instruments.

Researchers conducting qualitative studies, according to Creswell (2014) and Merriam and Tisdell (2015), serve as the primary data collection instrument. Accordingly, the researcher served as the sole data collection instrument within this study. The primary data collection methods utilized within this study were personal interviews and field notes. Researchers often serve as the sole data collection instrument when conducting interviews in support of qualitative research

(Englander, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005). In addition, researchers are responsible for collecting personal field notes associated with the interviews (Englander, 2012; Polkinghorne, 2005).

Initial interview questions were designed by the researcher and can be found within the appendices section of this study. In addition, the researcher was responsible for asking follow-up questions, collecting responses, developing and collecting field notes, observing participants, securing data, and maintaining the confidentiality of research participants. The collected data, including verbatim interview transcriptions, can be found within the appendices section of this study. Placing the burden upon the researcher to develop follow-up questions is consistent with the semi-structured interview technique (Chan et al., 2013; Flick, 2014). Strategies to address threats to validity and consistency include the use of personal bracketing by the researcher, following-up with participants to confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts, and utilizing a consistent list of initial interview questions within each interview. The employed strategies will be discussed further within the data validity and reliability sections, and are consistent with recommendations developed by Englander (2012), Flick (2014), and Groenewald (2004).

Data collection techniques.

Personal interviews are generally accepted as the most common data collection method within qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Flick, 2014). In addition, interviews are suggested as being the primary method in which researchers conducting case studies can understand the researched case, event, and phenomenon (Englander, 2012; Yin, 2017). Data must be rich and related to the research topic in order to be useful within scholarly research projects (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Rich data are data that assists the researcher in developing a deep understanding of the researched phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Interviews are utilized as a

method to produce rich data within qualitative research projects (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Flick, 2014; Hartas, 2015). Collecting rich data was essential to fulfilling the purpose of this research study and to satisfying the research question, because the study sought to understand perspectives pertaining to succession planning within the researched institution.

The personal interview was the primary data collection technique utilized within this study. In addition to the personal interview, field notes were developed by the researcher and served as a data collection technique. The use of field notes or a field diary was found to support and enhance data collected via personal interviews by Braun and Clarke (2013). Field notes share the story of the researcher, assist in improving the reliability of data, and provide context to the interview and research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hartas, 2015). Interviews and field notes as data collection techniques are discussed in detail within the following sections.

Interviews.

Three distinct interview formats were established within the scholarly literature. Interview formats include structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews (Creswell, 2014; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hartas, 2015). Structured interviews distinguish themselves by strict adherence to established standardized questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hartas, 2015). Semi-structured interviews begin with established questions, however, they distinguish themselves by allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions unique to the individual interview (Chan et al., 2013; Englander, 2012). The direction of semi-structured interviews is largely determined by the interviewee's responses to the initial questions (Englander, 2012; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Unstructured interviews distinguish themselves by avoiding standardized and established questions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016). Interviewers follow the direction of the interviewee and generate

questions spontaneously within unstructured interviews (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016).

Unstructured interviews are often utilized within narrative and ethnographic research studies (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews are considered to be the ideal interview format for qualitative case study research because the researcher can guide the interview while adapting to interviewees, responses to questions, and the flow of the interview (Bordenave, 2017; Dillard, 2017). The ultimate goal of a semi-structured interview within a qualitative case study is to obtain a complete description and understanding of the researched experience from the perspective of the interviewee (Bordenave, 2017; Dillard, 2017). Research participants are able to share their perspectives by responding to a consistent set of interview questions and to unique follow-up questions (Englander, 2012). Accordingly, the interview format utilized within this study was the semi-structured format.

Interview sessions were scheduled in advance with the research participants. Prior to the start of each interview session, participants were asked to sign the consent form found within Appendix B. The researcher served as the sole interviewer and prepared an interview documentation sheet prior to the start of each interview. Information was added to the documentation sheet prior to the official start of, and throughout, the interview. Flick (2014) recommended utilizing documentation sheets when conducting interviews in order to document the context and circumstances associated with the collection of interview data. The documentation sheet contained biographical information and information pertaining to the setting, date, and time. Upon receiving consent, participants were informed of the official start of the interview and the associated recording.

Interviews were held in a private office located within the researched institution and began with a consistent set of questions found within Appendix D. Follow-up questions were asked by the interviewer based upon the initial dialogue and can be found in the interview transcripts located within the appendices. The interviewer asked broad open-ended questions designed to provide opportunities for the interviewee to share in-depth information pertaining to their experience with the researched phenomenon. The technique was consistent with scholarly interview recommendations provided by Bordenave (2017), Chan et al. (2013), Hartas (2015), and Zhang and Wildemuth (2016), and broad open-ended questions were found to be ideal when conducting qualitative case study research by Bordenave (2017) and Dillard (2017). Finally, the digital recordings of each interview were transcribed verbatim and participants were informed they would be asked to review the transcript of their interview, attest to the accuracy, or lack thereof, of the interview transcript, and, if necessary, provide clarifying remarks.

Protocols.

Interview protocols and questions utilized within this study were established within the scholarly and professional literature. Interview protocols should assist researchers in obtaining rich and meaningful data that represents the experiences of research participants (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). As such, interview protocols serve as instruments of inquiry and conversation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Initial interview questions were developed from suggestions found within the scholarly literature to include Englander (2012), Richards (2016), Sloan and Bowe (2014), and Zuleger (2016). Questions were designed to develop an inquiry based conversation with research participants in accordance with protocol recommendations provided by Castillo-Montoya (2016).

The researcher aligned interview questions with this study's research question. This study's research question was, how has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner? Alignment was achieved through the development of a benchmark that required finalized interview questions to possess the ability to solicit responses that would ultimately provide the responses or data necessary to answer the research question. The alignment and benchmarking protocol is consistent with protocols recommended by Castillo-Montoya (2016) and Seidman (2013).

Protocols utilized within this study, including the previously discussed protocols, were implemented to enhance the reliability of the data collection process. Interview protocols established by Creswell (2014) were followed, including the collection of identifying data, background information, and the use of several established open-ended questions in order to begin a constructive dialogue. Interviewees were asked a consistent set of initial interview questions from a list of questions previously established by the interviewee. The background and identifying information included the date of the interview, years of experience within the researched institution, and the participant's pseudonym. The identifying and background information collected during the interview process was consistent with information collected by Richards (2016) and Zuleger (2016). Finally, the interviewer refrained from interrupting research participants provided a private interview location, clearly transitioned to new questions, asked clarifying questions as needed, provided clarifying remarks when requested, and expressed verbal gratitude to participants in accordance with social interview protocols established by Rubin and Rubin (2012).

Field notes.

Field notes served as an additional source of data and as a collection technique within this study. Research diaries or field notes serve as important sources of data collection within qualitative research (Englander, 2012; Flick, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Field notes provide important context to interviews and serve as a data collection technique by providing an opportunity for researchers to share their thoughts, experiences, and observations (Englander, 2012; Flick, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In addition, field notes assist in improving the validity and reliability of data as well as enrich interview responses (Englander, 2012; Flick, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Field notes must be dated in order to connect the notes to a specific interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Field notes should include information pertaining to what the researcher felt, thought, saw, and heard within each interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) wrote that field notes are akin to interview transcripts and that complete field notes assist in properly analyzing data. According to Schensul and LeCompte (2013), field notes demonstrate the manner in which the study is based, the thoughts of the researcher, and context information. As such, it is difficult to generate scholarly data from interviews without the support of field notes (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). Field notes, according to Schensul and LeCompte (2013), enrich data collected through interviews.

Consistent with examples found within the scholarly and professional literature, the researcher developed field notes throughout interview sessions. In addition, the researcher utilized the field notes to develop a detailed narrative immediately following the conclusion of each interview session. Narratives were developed after interview sessions in an effort to augment the

field notes collected by the interviewer due to the need to focus on participant responses to interview questions. Data were collected by the researcher pertaining to the context of the interview, the thoughts of the researcher, and the researcher's observations throughout the interview. The field note collection process was consistent with recommendations provided by Flick (2014), Merriam and Tisdell (2015), and Schensul and LeCompte (2013). Field notes and narratives contributed to the raw data associated with this study and the field note template can be found within Appendix F.

Data organization techniques.

Data organization is paramount to the success of the research study and should be considered prior to the collection of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) recommended developing organizational processes prior to initiating the interview process. Researchers should create a data inventory spreadsheet that serves as an efficient reference the researcher can utilize to locate data and understand the data currently in the researcher's possession (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In order to be effective, data organization must make sense to the researcher and lead to the efficient retrieval of collected data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data collected in conjunction with this study were generated through semi-structured interviews and field notes. Prior to commencing data collection, the researcher developed file folders within a secured personal computer. File folders were organized by interview and each folder contained subfolders organized by data source. The personal computer was password protected and a second password was established and required to gain access to the folders containing data associated with this study. Access to the secured file folders was limited to the researcher, and, upon request, the program director and members of the researcher's doctoral committee.

Interviews were recorded digitally and transferred from the recorder to the appropriate file folder located within the secured computer. The recording device was secured in a lockable desk drawer and was accessible only by the researcher. Field notes were handwritten by the researcher within a notebook throughout the interview process. Upon completion of an interview, the researcher scanned the handwritten notes into the appropriate subfolder. In addition, the researcher utilized the handwritten notes to develop a typed narrative containing in-depth field notes designed to augment the initial field notes collected during the interview. Narratives were saved within the appropriate subfolder and secured via password protection. The notebook was secured within the lockable drawer containing the recorder and the typed narrative was placed within the appropriate subfolder.

Verbatim interview transcriptions were created from the digital recordings and placed within the appropriate password protected subfolder. The researcher created a data inventory spreadsheet that served as an efficient reference and included the type of data collected, the date of data collection, and location of the data. The spreadsheet was password protected and accessible only by the researcher, and, upon request, the doctoral program director and members of the researcher's doctoral committee. Finally, notes pertaining to the analysis of the data were generated and secured within a password protected file folder. In summation, the primary data organization technique utilized within this study was the use of a database consisting of password protected file folders and subfolders located on a password protected and secured personal computer.

Summary of data collection.

The implementation of the interview and field notes techniques occurred over multiple phases. First, potential participants were invited via email to serve as interviewees, or research participants. The email described the purpose of the study, included a summary of the research and interview process, and included the consent form for their review. Individuals willing to serve as interviewees or research participants were asked to schedule an interview time and were notified that a hard copy of the consent form would be provided prior to the start of the interview. The next phase involved discussing the consent form, obtaining a signature from willing participants, and conducting a semi-structured interview. The setting for each interview was a private and secured office located on the researched institution's property. Interview questions were open-ended and the researcher asked the same initial questions during each interview. Follow-up questions were created spontaneously, but were generated in response to the information provided by interviewees.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviewees were provided a copy of the interview transcript and were asked to review and certify that the transcription accurately portrayed their experiences, thoughts, and responses to questions. During the course of each interview, the researcher developed field notes that collected data related to the context of the interview, the thoughts of the researcher, and the researcher's observations. The final phase involved the researcher augmenting field notes by constructing field note narratives at the conclusion of each interview in an effort to enrich the collected data.

Data Analysis

This project utilized a qualitative case study design and implemented data collection methods supported by the selected design. As such, the researcher analyzed data in a manner

consistent with case study data analysis recommendations found within the literature. Case study designs are often employed by researchers to understand and explain a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2017). The data obtained throughout the collection process must assist researchers in satisfying the research question, as well as in explaining the researched phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Similarly, the collected data must be analyzed and examined in light of the research question (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). Researchers must take care to maintain the essence of the researched phenomenon and the context of the case study (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler, 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Data that are meaningful to the research effort must be interpreted within the context of the case study and should be utilized throughout the data analysis process (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). The context of the case study, a community college located within the southeastern United States, was utilized by the researcher when interpreting and analyzing data. Data were analyzed in light of the research question and sub-questions associated with this study in an effort to satisfy the research question and fulfill the purpose of this study.

Researchers should allow the case, experience, or phenomenon to dictate how the data should be analyzed in order to provide an accurate description of the experience (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Essentially, the literature recommended allowing the phenomenon and collected information to dictate the process that should be utilized to analyze the data to identify descriptions and themes (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). This recommendation was established to assist researchers in preserving the integrity of descriptions of the phenomenon provided by the research participants, as well as to identify relevant themes and patterns within the data (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

The researcher within this study allowed the data to dictate the analysis process by following the themes and patterns established within the collected data.

Analysis process.

While the phenomenon or case should dictate the data analysis process, the literature has established techniques that can be utilized to effectively analyze the data after the researcher identifies relevant descriptions of the phenomenon within the data. Data collected during qualitative case studies should be organized around specific topics, themes, or research questions (Hartley, 2004; Kohlbacher, 2006; Yin, 2017). Yin (2017) and Bernard et al. (2016) recommended examining and categorizing case study data to determine specific patterns and themes. The goal of case study analysis, according to Kohlbacher (2006), is to uncover matters, understand the researched phenomenon, and develop conclusions. Themes are identified within the collected data, thus the purpose of data analysis within case study research is to analyze the collected data in an effort to establish themes (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yin, 2017). Researchers are able to give voice to the essence of the experience or phenomenon through the identification of themes (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Data must be analyzed with the intent of providing an accurate voice to the essence of the researched phenomenon (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Within this study, the essence of the phenomenon and associated themes provided information required to answer this study's research question.

Descriptions of the researched phenomenon obtained through the interview process should be divided into meaning or thematic clusters by identifying significant terms within the descriptions (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The clusters should then be synthesized into a consistent description of the phenomenon

(Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). This process involves combining the clusters into a coherent description that captures the essence of the phenomenon (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yin, 2017). Essence is considered to be “that which holds the parts, or aspects, of the phenomenon together” (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011). The essence enables researchers to effectively present or publish findings related to the researched phenomenon and case (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Yin, 2017).

The researcher within this study analyzed data in a manner consistent with the recommendations made by Bernard et al. (2016), Hartley (2004), Kohlbacher (2006), and Yin (2017). Data were first organized by participant and then by interview question. The information was analyzed to discover specific themes and patterns within the interview data and field notes. Data were then organized or clustered into specific theme groups and analyzed to develop final patterns, themes, and recommendations for further study. Finally, the data were analyzed in light of the research question and framework associated with this study.

Core themes and descriptions that capture the essence of the phenomenon and case are established through combined clusters that can then be further analyzed utilizing field notes, the prior experience of the researcher, scholarly literature, and empathy (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Researchers should consider, according to the literature, reviewing the interview transcripts again and listening to the audio recordings, during this stage (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The final analysis should lead to a description of the common experience or case and core themes established within the data (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Accordingly, the goal of the data analysis process

within this study was to identify core themes that captured the essence of the researched phenomenon.

Real time data analysis.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested the analysis of qualitative data should coincide with the collection of data rather than occur after data collection. Real time analysis is required in order to ask relevant and meaningful follow-up questions (Hartas, 2015). In addition, the interviewer must consistently analyze the interviewee and the context surrounding the interview in order to develop meaningful and relevant field notes (Hartas, 2015). Finally, real time data analysis assists researchers in ensuring the collected data dictates the analysis method by enabling the researcher to follow identified themes and patterns (Hartas, 2015).

This study utilized semi-structured interviews, and as such, analyzed data in real time. In addition, the researcher participated in real time data analysis by following the themes and patterns identified within participant conversations and the collected data. The real time analysis technique coincided with Hartas' (2015) and Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) recommendations regarding analyzing data obtained through semi-structured interviews. The descriptions provided by the research participants are tied to a particular point in time and must be analyzed, at least in part, when the descriptions are provided (Hartas, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Failure to participate in real-time data analysis has the potential to compromise the integrity of the description and to remove a portion of the essence of the experience (Hartas, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Examples of the real-time analysis techniques utilized within this study can be found within the field notes, narratives, and follow-up interview questions.

Bracketing and reflexivity.

Prior to the start of data collection and throughout the data collection and analysis process, researchers must participate in a form of personal bracketing (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The purpose of personal bracketing is to preserve the integrity of the data and the description or descriptions of the phenomenon provided by the research participants (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Bracketing assists in ensuring the description provided within the results is that of the research participants and not of the researcher (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). In addition, the context of the researched case can be maintained through the use of personal bracketing (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Bracketing is considered to be a purposeful process that involves setting aside one's personal beliefs pertaining to the researched phenomenon (Chan et al., 2013; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015).

Personal bracketing is used to assist the researcher in avoiding undue influence over the participant's understanding of the researched phenomenon or in the description of the researched case (Chan et al., 2013; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The researcher within this study employed personal bracketing as a strategy to avoid undue influence and as a strategy to understand the researched case. Case studies assist researchers in understanding a contemporary phenomenon or event. When personal bracketing is utilized by research participants, it can taint the data by eliminating some of the perspectives and context required to understand the researched phenomenon (Kohlbacher, 2006). Bracketing has the potential to eliminate context when utilized by research participants, as such, research participants were not asked to participate in bracketing and were allowed to consider context within this study.

Qualitative researchers should bracket or set aside their preconceptions or prejudgments in relation to the researched phenomenon prior to analyzing the data (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Researchers must eliminate personal bias in order to describe the phenomenon from an objective perspective (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The bracketing process begins with reflexivity which involves the researcher reflecting about how their personal point of view might impact data collection and analysis (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Researchers must consider how they will ask questions to include their tone, facial expressions, wordings, and how they respond to answers (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The researcher must participate in reflexivity prior to the start of each interview and prior to the start of the data analysis process (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The researcher participated personal bracketing and reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis process by removing the researcher's opinion from the processes, and by avoiding the use of facial expressions, words, and tones that had the potential to influence the responses of the research participants. Bracketing and reflexivity utilized by the researcher within this study were consistent with recommendations provided by Phillips-Pula et al. (2011), Sloan and Bowe (2014), and Yuksel and Yildirim (2015).

Transcript review, field notes, and software.

The literature established the importance of creating verbatim interview transcripts and asking research participants to review the transcripts for accuracy, or lack thereof (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Participants should also, according to the literature, be provided an opportunity to provide clarifying statements or additional information pertaining to the researched phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The transcript review process improves the reliability of data and ensures that

accurate descriptions pertaining to the phenomenon are established (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Accordingly, this study included a transcript review process by asking research participants to review verbatim transcripts for accuracy, and if necessary, provide clarifying remarks.

Field notes were identified as being an important component of data collection and analysis because they provide an avenue for the researcher to triangulate data (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Field notes are created by the researcher and used to construct narratives that are then compared to the interview transcripts during the data analysis process (Hycner, 1985; Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Field notes, according to Yuksel and Yildirim (2015), should be compared to the interview transcripts and analyzed to assist in clustering transcript data into themes. The notes become imperative to the data analysis process, particularly when the researcher creates pertinent notes in real time during interview (Hartas, 2015).

Researchers should analyze field notes with the intent of supporting or verifying the themes established within the interview data (Hartas, 2015). The researcher within this study created real time field notes that were converted to field note narratives immediately following each interview. Field notes were analyzed in conjunction with data found within interview transcripts in order assist in the development of core themes and to provide an avenue for the triangulation of the data. Core interview themes were compared to the associated field note narratives in an effort to strengthen, or test, the established themes, as well as to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

Researchers often utilize technology to analyze data collected within scholarly research projects (Silver & Lewins, 2014). Software can be a useful research tool, however, the literature

recommended utilizing analytical software to organize data and create notes while conducting qualitative case study research (Silver & Lewins, 2014; Sohn, 2017). Studies in which the purpose is to understand human perceptions pertaining to an event or phenomenon should limit the use of software while analyzing data because software could cause the essence of the experience to be lost (Baskarada, McKay, & McKenna, 2013; Silver & Lewins, 2014; Sohn, 2017). Meaningful patterns and themes must be identified and interpreted by a human researcher within qualitative case study research (Baskarada et al., 2013). The analysis of qualitative data requires a human component that cannot be provided, at least currently, by qualitative software programs (Sohn, 2017). Accordingly, the researcher did not utilize software to analyze the data associated with this study.

Summary of data analysis.

Data analysis processes and techniques utilized within this study were grounded in the scholarly literature and examples provided by Hartas (2015), Hycner (1985), Merriam and Tisdell (2015), Richards (2016), Phillips-Pula et al. (2011), Sloan and Bowe (2014), Toliver (2017), Yuksel and Yildirim (2015), and Zuleger (2016). The researcher began by reviewing the verbatim interview transcripts, listening to the recorded interviews, and reviewing field notes. Transcripts were initially read in their entirety as if all information were of value to the study. Research participants were then asked to review the verbatim transcripts for accuracy, and if necessary, provided additional information or clarifying statements. Following the researcher's initial review and the participants' reviews, descriptive statements that demonstrated the essence of the experience and that assisted in the development of themes were identified and isolated. The isolated statements were then compared to the field notes and the recording of the interview.

The ultimate goal of the data analysis process utilized within this study was the identification of core themes. Themes were developed by clustering the descriptive statements into thematic groups based off of key words, or descriptions. Core themes were developed from the initial set of themes in a similar manner. The strength of the core themes was tested and enhanced through triangulation. Triangulation occurred by continuously comparing the descriptive statements and core themes to the field notes, including the analysis that began during the data collection process. The triangulation process was utilized to strengthen and test the core themes developed through the data analysis process. Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher engaged in personal bracketing, including reflexivity in an effort to eliminate personal biases and preconceived notions regarding the research phenomenon.

Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability of scholarly research and the associated findings are directly tied to the credibility of the research study (Lub, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). Quantitative research studies utilize statistical methods to demonstrate the credibility of the research findings, however, these methods are not applicable to qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015). The literature displayed a lack of generally accepted criteria for demonstrating reliability and validity within qualitative research, however, several strategies were presented within the literature (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Qualitative research study strategies are designed to ensure the trustworthiness of the research study and findings (Lub, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). Strategies include accounting and bracketing for personal biases, verbatim transcripts, meticulous record keeping, and inviting participants to review verbatim transcripts and provide clarifying remarks (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Trustworthiness supports validity and reliability within qualitative research and assists in demonstrating the credibility of the research findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). Scholarly research must be of the upmost quality and demonstrate credibility if the findings are to be useful within professional and academic fields (Noble & Smith, 2015; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). This section is designed to display the credibility and quality of the research study and associated findings through reliability and validity.

Reliability.

The definition of reliability differs significantly between qualitative and quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Reliability within quantitative research is defined as the exact replicability of the results and associated processes (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). The literature suggests the quantitative definition of reliability cannot be easily applied to qualitative research because the diverse paradigms associated with qualitative research can cause exact replicability to be challenging (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). In addition, the definition can be counterintuitive in studies directly tied to developing an in-depth understanding of a human experience (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Exact replication can be difficult and counterintuitive within qualitative research because human subjects are unique individuals with the potential to provide unique or differing perspectives and opinions (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015).

Attempting exact replication has the potential to inhibit human nature and prevent human subjects from sharing their unique and individual opinions (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Time is also an inhibitor of exact replication as the perspectives provided by human research participants have the potential to differ with time. This study is directly related to developing an understanding of a

phenomenon or experience, thus exact replicability could be counterintuitive to the nature of this study.

Reliability within qualitative research, and this study, is concerned with consistency (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). The methodology utilized within qualitative research should consistently yield data, however, the data are allowed to differ in richness and ambience (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). This standard is appropriate within qualitative research because it considers the potential that a study utilizing the same methodology, but with different human subjects, will provide different results (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Additionally, the standard considers the possibility that conducting the same study at a different period in time might produce different information. So long as the methodology leads to the consistent generation of data or findings, reliability exists within qualitative case studies (Baškarada, 2017; Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015; Yin, 2017).

Consistency is not limited to the generation of future data and findings. Reliability can be demonstrated through the consistent application of procedures within a qualitative study (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). The current study demonstrated reliability by consistently applying the data collection and analysis techniques described within previous sections. In addition, the researcher consistently utilized the established open-ended interview questions within each interview. This process ensured each participant had the opportunity to answer the same initial questions. Participants were selected in a consistent manner by utilizing the information provided by potential participants within the interest and screening questionnaire. This process led to the consistent application of purposeful sampling procedures and the sampling criteria. Consistent recruitment methods were utilized throughout the study as all participants received the

same recruitment email on the same day and the data were organized in a consistent manner throughout the research process.

Triangulation is a strategy utilized within qualitative research to test and demonstrate reliability by converging information from different data sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014; Creswell, 2014). Methodological triangulation involves the utilization of multiple data collection methods when researching the same phenomenon in an effort to reduce bias, improve reliability, and strengthen findings (Carter et al., 2014; Toliver, 2017; Wilkinson, 2016). The collection of field notes and interviews is considered to be a form of methodological triangulation (Carter et al., 2014; Toliver, 2017; Wilkinson, 2016). Data were collected from interviews and field notes within this study, thus methodological triangulation was achieved and utilized as a method to demonstrate reliability. The combination of interview data with field notes enhances trustworthiness and the understanding of the phenomenon's context (Carter et al., 2014; Toliver, 2017). Field notes and interview transcripts were initially analyzed separately and were then analyzed together in order to participate in methodological triangulation and improve the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings.

Validity.

Validity within scholarly qualitative research refers to the appropriateness of the research processes, tools, and data (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Qualitative case study research is considered to be valid when the findings accurately present the research participants' perspectives pertaining to the researched case, meaning the findings are credible and confirmable (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Silverman, 2015; Yin, 2017). Case study research is also considered valid when the researched phenomenon is successfully described and understood

from the perspectives of individuals' possession experience with the researched phenomenon and case (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; Silverman, 2015). Additionally, a comprehensive review of the scholarly and professional literature enhances the validity of the case study research when relevant gaps within the literature are discovered (Baskarada et al., 2014). The researcher within this study conducted a comprehensive literature review and discovered relevant gaps within the literature as demonstrated within section one of this study.

Quantitative research studies are often considered valid when the findings reflect the data in an accurate and precise manner (Lub, 2015; Noble & Smith, 2015). Research processes, tools, and data include the research methodology, research design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Methodologies are considered to be valid when they enable the detection of findings within the appropriate context (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Sampling is considered valid when the procedures and methods are distinctive and appropriate for the purpose of the research (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015).

The research method and design utilized within this study were selected because of their use in previous scholarly research studies related to succession planning (Wilkinson, 2016). Case study designs are utilized to provide an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon or event from the perspectives of individuals that have experienced the phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Succession planning is considered to be a lived experience, as such, it is best understood from the perspectives of individuals that have experienced succession planning. Purposeful sampling was utilized because it ensures members of the sample population have experienced the researched phenomenon, succession planning (Toliver, 2017; Wilkinson, 2016). Open-ended semi-structured interviews and field notes served as the data sources within this study. The data collection methods

were consistent with qualitative case study research and previous succession planning studies (Bordenave, 2017; Toliver, 2017). Research processes, tools, and data utilized within this study were appropriate and consistent with previous studies found within the scholarly and professional literature.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) established procedures designed to improve the validity of qualitative research through the demonstration of credibility and confirmability. The procedures established by Lincoln and Guba have been utilized throughout the scholarly literature and include audit trails, member checks, negative case selection, peer debriefing, and prolonged observation (Lub, 2015). Negative case selection involves stretching data interpretation by seeking out and explaining outliers within the data (Lub, 2015). Peer debriefing involves selecting a reviewer to serve as a devil's advocate of sorts and ask difficult questions challenging the study (Lub, 2015). Prolonged observations involve the extension of the study over a significant period of time (Lub, 2015). While these procedures are useful within qualitative research, this study utilized audit trail and member checks due to the qualitative case study design associated with this study.

Audit trail involves documenting the research process chronologically through raw data and data analysis products (Lub, 2015). The audit trail should demonstrate that findings are supported by the data (Lub, 2015). Verbatim interview transcripts, interview notes, and field notes created the audit trail within this study. Dates were utilized throughout the data collection process and a chronological audit trail was created. Finally, member checking involves providing participants an opportunity to review the verbatim transcripts for accuracy (Lub, 2015; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Research participants within this study were asked to review the verbatim interview transcripts, and if necessary, provide clarifying remarks and additional information. Verbatim transcripts were not

analyzed in an effort to identify core themes until they were deemed accurate by the research participants.

Data saturation.

Data saturation can be utilized as a method to enhance validity within qualitative research studies (Simon & Goes, 2013). Saturation can occur when a sufficient quantity of rich data have been collected (Baskarada et al., 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Rich data are considered to be data that are intricate, detailed, layered, and of the upmost quality. According to Bernard (2012), participant interviews can lead to the collection of rich data within qualitative research studies. This study utilized participant interviews as the primary method to collect data and, as such, satisfied Bernard's (2012) recommendation for collecting rich data.

Standards for achieving data saturation within qualitative studies are inconsistent within the scholarly literature (Bruce, 2007; Nascimento et al., 2018). As such, saturation standards must be clearly defined within individual studies if saturation is to be utilized effectively as a validation method (Bruce, 2007). Data saturation within this study was considered to be the point in which the collection of new data via participant interviews was able to cease (Baskarada et al., 2013; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). The point of cessation was reached when participant interviews led to no new information in light of the research question. This standard was consistent with standards for data saturation employed by Fusch and Ness (2015), O'Reilly and Parker (2012), and Saunders et al. (2017). When no new information is available new themes are unable to be developed and data saturation has been achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Saunders et al., 2017). This study achieved data saturation through the collection of rich information through

interviews with research participants. Interviews ceased when no new information and no new themes were generated in light of the research question.

Summary of reliability and validity.

This section addressed the reliability and validity of the data collected within this study. Data collected within qualitative case study research are considered valid when the data accurately represents the perspectives of research participants. Research participants were asked to attest to the validity of the collected data by confirming the accuracy of verbatim interview transcripts, thus confirming the validity of data collected via participant interviews. Each research participant agreed to review the verbatim transcripts and complete the transcript review form. Transcriptions were conducted by the same transcription service and each participant was provided with a copy of the transcription and transcription review form. The researcher created an audit trail through the utilization of interview transcripts, field notes, and interview documentation sheets. Dates were consistently used throughout the interview and data collection process in order to create an audit trail and validate the participation of each research participant. Finally, data saturation was utilized as a method to enhance the validity of the collected data. Saturation occurred within this study when no new information was collected in light of the research question.

Triangulation was utilized within this study to test the reliability and demonstrate the trustworthiness of the collected data and findings. Field notes and interview transcripts were initially analyzed separately and were then analyzed together in order to participate in methodological triangulation and improve the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings. Reliability was also demonstrated through the consistent application of research procedures and protocols. Each interview was held in the same private lactation, participants were greeted in a

similar manner, and instructions were provided to participants in a consistent manner. Participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions and were also provided the same definitions of succession planning and key positions as utilized within this study. The same set of open-ended interview questions was asked to each participant in the same order and all follow-up questions were inspired by participant responses. Finally, each participant was provided an opportunity to share additional information and clarifying remarks prior to the conclusion of the interview.

Transition and Summary of Section 2

This section provided a thorough description of the research project, as well as an in-depth discussion pertaining to the project's applicability to the purpose of this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore employee perceptions pertaining to the strategic impact of succession planning, or lack thereof, within a community college located in the southeastern United States. In order to describe the research project and demonstrate the project's abilities to fulfill the purpose of this study, the role of the researcher, research participants, research design, research population, and sampling strategy were addressed within this section. Additionally, this section discussed data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and the reliability and validity of the collected data. The project's design, elements, techniques, and strategies were consistent with examples found within the scholarly and professional literature, and were employed to fulfill the purpose of this study.

Essential to the fulfillment of the purpose of this study was the project's abilities to satisfy the research question. This study's research question was, how has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner? The single site case study design of this research study was employed to

satisfy the research question and allowed the researcher to understand the impact of succession planning from the perspectives of the employees that experienced succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution. In order to ensure research participants had experienced succession planning within the institution, a purposeful sampling strategy was utilized. The purposeful sampling strategy ensured selected research participants were qualified to share perspectives pertaining to succession planning. Acting as gatekeepers, the human resources department of the researched institution screened potential research participants. Additional screening was conducted by the researcher in a manner consistent with the literature. The screening methods employed ensured only qualified members of the population were selected as research participants.

Selected research participants were asked to participate in individual semi-structured interviews consisting of previously established open-ended questions. The researcher played an active role as the primary data collection instrument within this study, was responsible for asking follow-up interview questions to participant responses, and was responsible for generating field notes. Data collection via participant interviews ceased when no new information was collected in light of the research question, thus leading to data saturation. Participant responses were analyzed to address the research question and to fulfill the purpose of this study in conjunction with the researcher's field notes. The following section is the culmination of this study and includes a presentation of the findings, a discussion pertaining to the applicability of the findings, and the researcher's personal reflections.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 serves as the apotheosis of this qualitative single site case study. In addition, this section demonstrates how this study attempted to address the study's identified problem. The problem this study attempted to address was, succession plan deficiencies had created a hindrance in a southeastern United States community college's ability to consistently implement strategic programs and initiatives. Section 3 begins with an overview of the study and then presents the results and associated analysis generated from the research study. In addition, this section includes applications for professional practice, as well as the researcher's recommendations and personal reflections that were prompted by this study. The section concludes with a summary of the study as well the conclusions generated from the results of the study.

Overview of the Study

This qualitative case study examined the strategic impact of succession planning within a higher education institution through the perspectives of institutional employees. The examination of the strategic impact of succession planning within higher education is an important topic because programs offered by educational institutions assist in personal, professional, community, and economic development (Gill, 2016; Hornak et al., 2016). Employees responsible for offering and supporting these programs and initiatives are rapidly departing the educational arena (Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). These departures can create instability that causes a disruption in programs and services, thus negatively impacting communities and educational stakeholders (Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016).

Succession planning is an initiative that can provide stability and lead to a continuation of strategic programs, despite employee departures (Berns & Klarner, 2017; Shapiro et al., 2016).

Higher education leaders generally accept succession planning as beneficial, yet its implementation has not been prioritized within the educational arena (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016).

Developing an understanding of succession planning's strategic impact within higher education is of the upmost importance as it may lead to the prioritization of strategic succession planning within educational institutions (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017; Grossman, 2014). In addition, developing an understanding can assist in providing the stability required for educational institutions to continuously meet the changing needs of their communities and stakeholders (Chiocchio & Gharibpour, 2017; Grossman, 2014). As such, the central focus of this study was to understand succession planning's impact, or lack thereof, on a southeastern community college's ability to implement its mission and strategic priorities in a consistent and effective manner.

The purpose of exploring succession planning's impact, or lack thereof, within a higher education institution was to better understand the relationship between succession planning and institutional strategic capabilities within the field of higher education. Succession planning's strategic impact is, as demonstrated within the literature, generally understood within the corporate arena, however, there is minimal formal understanding of succession planning's strategic impact within higher education. Higher education professionals and leaders are often responsible for navigating competing priorities with minimal resources. As a result, succession planning is often considered to be a trifling topic and program within higher education institutions. Developing an understanding of succession planning's strategic impact within a higher education institution may equip higher education professionals and leaders with the information needed to prioritize succession planning programs within their institutions. Accordingly, the goal of this study was to display the strategic impact, or lack thereof, of succession planning in order to assist educational

leaders in determining if succession planning programs should be prioritized within their perspective institutions.

In order to consummate the purpose, intent, and goal of this study, a thorough review of the scholarly and professional literature was conducted. The researcher undertook the literature review as an initial step in developing a thorough understanding of the researched topic through existing literature. Scholarly and professional literature was obtained from online academic databases, including EBSCO, ProQuest, and Business Source Complete. In addition, scholarly print materials and doctoral dissertations were reviewed as a component of the literature review. Well over 75 articles were reviewed with a majority published no earlier than 2015.

The literature review led to the identification of gaps within the literature, as well as the selection of the conceptual framework employed within this study. Gaps identified within the literature included the need to examine succession planning within individual institutions (Oppong et al., 2016), the need to research non-executive succession planning (Cragun & Wright, 2017), and the need to research elements of successful succession planning, or lack thereof, within higher education institutions (Yadav & Shankar, 2017). On a macro level, one consistent gap identified within the literature was the need to conduct additional succession planning research within higher education (Barton, 2017; Pitre-Davis, 2015; Salustri, 2016). This study attempted to reduce the aforementioned gaps by researching executive and non-executive succession planning, or the lack thereof, within an individual higher education institution while reviewing potential elements of successful higher education succession plans.

Human capital theory was selected as the conceptual framework for this study consistent with the framework utilized by Kariuki and Ochiri (2017) and LeCounte et al. (2017) within their

succession planning research studies. The human capital framework viewing employees as essential assets worth investing in through professional development and skill enhancement was utilized throughout this study by the researcher. Human capital theory was an ideal framework for this study because succession planning is an investment activity. In addition, human capital theorists view qualified and talented employees as an essential element of success. Accordingly, the researcher attempted to determine the strategic impact of succession planning, an employee activity within higher education, including the impact of succession planning on institutional success.

Consistent with qualitative case studies, new research data were collected through semi-structured interviews with qualified research participants who had experienced succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution. Research participants were required to meet four established criteria and were selected from the research population consisting of current full-time employees of the researched institution. The researcher served as the primary data collection instrument and asked a consistent set of open-ended questions as well as relevant follow-up questions prompted by participant responses. In addition, the researcher was responsible for developing field notes associated with individual interviews. Data collection via participant interviews ceased when no new information was obtained in light of the research question. Saturation was achieved through the collection of rich information via participant interviews and when no new information and themes were able to be generated.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Research participants were asked to review and attest to the accuracy of, the transcriptions. Data were then analyzed by isolating and clustering descriptive statements and words in an effort to develop core themes.

Triangulation was utilized in the analysis process to test the core themes and occurred by comparing core themes to field notes and the scholarly and professional literature. In addition, triangulation was utilized to enhance the reliability of the collected data.

Data collection and analysis protocols and procedures were consistent with previous scholarly research conducted by Englander (2012), Richards (2016), Sloan and Bowe (2014), Yin (2017), Yuksel and Yildirim (2015), and Zuleger (2016). Real-time analysis was utilized to develop relevant follow-up questions to participant responses and to determine if new information was obtained in light of the research question. Data analysis also occurred after interview sessions while the researcher compiled thoughts pertaining to the interview and generated post-interview narratives. In addition, the researcher analyzed data by reviewing the interview transcripts, listening to the recordings, and consistently reviewing the field notes and narratives. The researcher followed Institutional Review Board, or IRB, protocols including obtaining IRB approval prior to the commencement of the field study, obtaining consent, and implementing proper protocols for data security.

The data collected via interviews with five qualified research participants, field notes, and the scholarly and professional literature led to the development of themes. Each theme is described in detail within the next section and assisted in answering the research question, and sub-research questions, associated with this study. The identified themes contributed to the fulfillment of the purpose of this study and assisted in solving this study's identified business problem.

Presentation of the Findings

Data collected through the interview process, including participant responses and the researcher's field notes, led to the generation of relevant and practical themes. This section

provides an overview of the findings and themes associated with this study. Findings and themes were generated through the triangulation of interview responses, field notes, and existing data found within the scholarly and professional literature. The researcher compared participant responses to the field notes generated throughout each interview session. Clusters and themes were developed and then compared to the scholarly and professional literature. Data collection via participant interviews served as the primary data collection method and ceased upon achieving data saturation. Saturation was considered to be the point at which no new information was obtained through participant interviews in light of the research question.

Four themes were identified and established within the collected data. The themes answered the research question associated with this study which was, what are the perspectives held by institutional employees pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution? In addition, the themes answered the sub-research questions associated this study. Each theme answered the research question through providing an understanding of employee perspectives pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the researched institution. Finally, the themes were directly related to this study's conceptual framework, human capital theory. The themes clearly indicated that succession planning is an investment in human capital and the investment has the potential to play a significant strategic role in and improve the researched institution.

Themes generated from the collected data and research findings are explained in detail within their perspective sub-sections. The first theme was the researched institution from the perspectives of the participants, does not possess a formal succession planning program. This theme was established as the first theme because it must be understood the participants perceived

the next two themes to be the direct result of succession planning deficiencies. Thus, there is a direct connection between the first theme and the remaining themes. The second theme was research participants perceived the lack of a succession planning program as an impediment to institution's ability to successfully move forward and respond to change. In addition, employees perceived the lack of a formal succession planning program as having a negative impact on the institution's ability to serve its stakeholders. The final theme was employees perceived that implementing a formal succession planning program would have a positive strategic impact on the researched institution.

Each theme was supported by the interview data, field notes, and the scholarly and professional literature. The data were analyzed to identify repetitive and key words or phrases. Key words and phrases were grouped into clusters and clusters were then analyzed and developed into themes. The established themes assisted in answering the research question associated with this study, solving the identified business problem and in fulfilling the purpose of this study.

The researched institution does not possess a formal succession planning program.

Consistent with information found within the scholarly and professional literature, the research participants unanimously perceived a formal succession planning program to be non-existent within the researched institution. The perceptions support previous research found within the scholarly literature indicating that succession planning programs were either deficient or non-existent within higher education institutions (Bennett, 2015; Holland, 2016; Richards, 2016). Employee 1 observed, "there hasn't been an investment in the people that are here to train them, identify them, then train them for vacancies that could happen now or in the future." According to employee 4, "there was no succession planning, there was no OK I'm going to be leaving in 6

months, or here you go this how you learn things.” As demonstrated within these quotes, the participants perceived there to be significant succession planning deficiencies and a lack of investment in succession activities by the institution. This theme and the associated perceptions are directly connected to the next two themes as participants perceived the next two themes to be a direct result the lack of a formal succession planning program.

The unanimous perceptions pertaining to the non-existence of a formal succession planning program directly relate to and assist in answering sub-research questions 1 and 3. Sub-question 1 asks, what are the past experiences of college employees in regards to institutional succession planning? While sub-question 3 asks, what, if any, succession planning deficiencies exist or have existed within the institution, and what are the circumstances surrounding the deficiencies? As indicated by the participant responses, employees have not experienced succession planning within the researched institution and formal succession planning efforts are deficient.

Barriers to succession planning were identified by employees 2, 4, 5. The perspectives provided by the research participants assisted in answering sub-research question 4 which asked, what were, and are, the impediments to succession planning within the institution? Employee 2 suggested layoffs, budget cuts, and time contributed to succession planning deficiencies. These deficiencies are consistent with Reed’s (2017) observation that resource constraints create barriers to succession planning. When viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework, succession planning could assist the institution in overcoming resource constraints by investing in their most important resource, their employees.

Turnover and individuals hoarding knowledge were identified by employee 4 as contributing to succession planning deficiencies. According to employee 4, the mindset of several

employees is that, “if I teach you to do my job, you’re going to take my job.” Employee 5 perceived “good old boy politics” and cliques as contributory to succession planning barriers. Barton (2017) observed that rigid institutional cultures and traditions of the academy create barriers to succession planning. The observations of employees 4 and 5 are consistent with the literature, but are also unique descriptions such as “good old boy politics” are uncommon within the literature.

Further supporting the development of this theme, the research participants unanimously perceived that institutional employees have not known and do not currently know what to do when employees depart the researched institution. Employee 5 reflected, “there were so many people who did not know where they belonged anymore and what they were supposed to do.” This unanimous perception coincided with Washington’s (2016) and Mallard’s (2015) research in which it was observed that an inability to successfully respond to employee departures indicates the presence of succession planning deficiencies. As such, the perceptions provided by the research participants further assisted in answering sub-research question 3. In light of the conceptual framework associated with this study, human capital theory, employees should understand what to do when other employees depart the institution when they are properly invested in through succession planning and development programs (Dillard, 2017; LeCounte et al., 2017). Thus, the succession planning deficiencies perceived by employees likely indicate a gap in employee investment through a formalized succession planning program.

The lack of a succession planning program has impeded the institution’s ability to

successfully move forward and respond to change.

Research participants unanimously perceived the non-existence of a succession planning program as contributory to the researched institution's inability to successfully respond to change, move forward, and grow. From the perspective of the research participants, employee departures, and specifically the departures of employees filling key institutional positions negatively impacted growth and responses to change due to the lack of a formal succession planning program. Employees 1, 2, and 5 specifically mentioned the lack of a succession planning program contributed to the institution becoming stagnant. When asked about the impact of succession planning deficiencies, employee 5 observed, "we became stagnant, we were not offering new programs, making changes, or adding new courses." The participants unanimously perceived that the lack of a succession planning program inhibited knowledge transfer, role transitions, and planning thus impeding growth and responses to change. Employee 1 stated, "organizational knowledge is gone when that person leaves." Finally, employees 1, 2, 4, and 5 specifically indicated the lack of a succession planning program contributed to perceptions the institution did not know where it was going.

Beck (2017), Geroy et al. (2017), and Long et al. (2013) presented scholarly research indicating the importance of succession planning in moving institutions forward and responding to change. Leuzinger and Rowe (2017) also displayed research demonstrating the importance of succession planning in moving academic institutions forward strategically. As such, the perceptions provided by the research participants within this study coincide with the literature. Succession planning was identified as an essential element in successfully responding to change

and in moving forward. The lack of a succession planning program thus impeded abilities to grow, move forward, and respond to change.

Human capital theorists view employees as essential to an organization's ability to advance, respond to change, and develop a sustainable competitive advantage (Buta, 2015). This theme coincides with the conceptual framework of this study as employee departures combined with succession planning deficiencies would, when viewed from the lens of the conceptual framework, impede growth and institutional ability to move forward (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). Finally, the employee perceptions leading to the development of this theme assisted in researching, and answering, the research question sub-research question 2 which asks, how has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected the institution's ability to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner? The perceptions provided by the research participants clearly suggest growth and strategic impediments due to the lack of a formal succession planning program.

Employees perceived the lack of a formal succession planning program as having a negative impact on the institution's ability to serve its stakeholders.

Succession planning deficiencies have, from the unanimous perspectives of the research participants, negatively impacted students, employees, and community members. The negative impact, according to the research participants, is largely the result knowledge gaps, poor transitions, a lack of employee investment, a lack of consistent leadership, instability, and inability to respond to change. Vacancies in key positions, according to the research participant's, impeded the institution's ability to serve its stakeholders. These perceptions assisted in answering and understanding the research question and sub-research questions 1 and 2. Organizations suffer, according to human capital theory, when employees are not properly invested in, developed, and

trained (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017; LeCounte et al., 2017). Succession planning assists organizations in serving stakeholders by providing consistency, sustainability, and opportunities for development (Arita et al., 2016; Cragun & Wright, 2017). In addition, succession planning is considered to be an employee investment activity (Cragun & Wright, 2017). The conceptual framework thus supports the perceived negative stakeholder impact associated with the lack of succession planning within the research institution. Organizations and institutions, according to human capital theory, are unable to fully serve stakeholders without investing in and developing their human resources.

Students.

Succession planning deficiencies have negatively impacted students within the researched institution. Of particular note was the unanimous consensus amongst the research participants that the lack of a formal succession planning program harms the student experience. Employees 1, 2, and 4 elaborated and attributed the negative impact to misinformation, overworked employees, and instability related to position vacancies. In addition, employees 1 and 2 suggested succession-planning deficiencies negatively impact student enrollment. Employee 2 stated, “I keep talking about employees needing resources, but we’re the resources for the student. Succession planning impacts the student to the point where it can make or break the enrollment experience and if they come back.” Students need their employee resources and deficient resources will negatively impact their experiences.

The perspectives provided by the research participants supported Kumar and Kota’s (2017) research displaying a correlation between succession planning deficiencies and disruptions to the student experience. Employee 1 attributed a decline in student retention to succession planning deficiencies. Hutto (2017) presented research displaying a correlation between succession

planning and student retention. Human capital and resources are responsible for implementing student programs and services. As such, position vacancies have the potential to negatively impact student services including enrollment and retention.

Employees.

Employees experienced an increased workload, poor morale, and feelings of uncertainty due to the lack of a formal succession planning program within the researched institution. These experiences were unanimously reported by the research participants. In addition, employees 1 and 4 reported experiencing feelings of anxiety and employees 1, 3, and 4 reported increased stress. These reports were attributed to the lack of succession planning within the institution. When asked about the impact of succession planning deficiencies, employee 4 stated, “with that much unrest, your deans are feeling it, if your deans are feeling it your department heads are feeling it, if your department heads are feeling it, your faculty are feeling it.” The stress, uncertainty, and anxiety associated with succession planning deficiencies created a negative trickle-down effect within institutional departments and contributed to a negative experience for employees.

The research participants unanimously perceived succession planning deficiencies as responsible, at least in part, for their difficult professional experiences. Jiang et al. (2017) presented research demonstrating the correlation between succession planning and employee morale. Oppon et al. (2016) suggested succession planning deficiencies create feelings of uncertainty and anxiety amongst organizational employees. Instability and uncertainty can hinder an institution’s ability to move forward, fulfill its mission, and to be successful (Darvish & Temelie, 2014; Holland, 2016). Unique to this study was the unanimous perception of succession

planning deficiencies leading to an increased workload. The literature and collected data clearly indicates succession planning deficiencies can lead to a negative employment experience.

Community members.

The research participants perceived succession planning deficiencies as having a negative impact on the researched institution's community. According to employees 1, 3, 4, and 5, succession planning deficiencies impeded the institution's ability to respond to business, industry, and workforce needs. According to employee 1, as a result of succession planning deficiencies, "we have lost a lot of customers and we have lost a lot of confidence. Some customers stayed, but confidence was lost as to whether we could actually deliver what we were talking about." Employees 3 and 5 attributed these impediments to succession planning deficiencies stunting the institution's growth. Employee 5 predicted that had succession planning been in place, "the college would've doubled in size." Succession planning deficiencies were thus perceived as contributory to missed opportunities for institutional growth.

Employee 4 attributed the impediments to deficiencies creating human capital limitations that led to a decrease in the number of students the institution could serve. Students were turned away from specific programs and, as such, the institution was unable to keep up with local workforce demands. Community colleges, according to Richards (2016), play an important role in developing a qualified workforce and in responding to the needs of local communities. Succession planning deficiencies can directly impede an institution's ability to develop a talented workforce, respond to changing economic conditions, and meet community needs (Beck, 2017; Richards, 2016; Morest, 2013). The negative community impact reported within the literature was, from the perspectives of the research participants, experienced by the researched institution's community.

Implementing a succession planning program would have a positive strategic impact on the researched institution.

Succession planning programs have the potential to assist higher education institutions in serving their stakeholders, moving forward, responding to community needs, and in fulfilling their missions (Kumar & Kota, 2017; Washington, 2016). As such, the literature supports the assertion that succession planning, when implemented properly, can have a positive strategic impact within higher education (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). Research participants unanimously perceived there to be a need to develop and implement a succession planning program within the researched institution. In addition, and consistent with the literature, the participants unanimously believed the implementation of a succession planning program would have a positive strategic impact within the researched institution. Employee 3 viewed succession planning as beneficial because, “in order for the institution to be successful, we want to be able to continuously offer services to everybody.” Succession planning, according to employee 3, would enable the institution to be successful through continuous services to stakeholders.

Succession planning, when viewed through the lens of the conceptual framework, is perceived as being a worthwhile investment in the institution’s employees (Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). This perception is consistent with the conceptual framework, human capital theory, because the theory views employee development programs, including succession planning, as essential to organizational success (Buta, 2015). The perceived strategic impact of succession planning is also consistent with the human capital theory principle that talented employees enable organizations to fulfill their missions and strategies (Buta, 2015). Finally, the perceptions assisted in answering the research question associated with this study as well as sub-research question 2.

Research participants unanimously perceived the implementation of a succession planning program as being beneficial because the program would assist the institution in fulfilling its mission and would also lead to cross-training throughout the institution. Employees 1, 2, and 5 believed succession planning would lead to employee buy-in and employees 1, 2, and 3 believed succession planning would increase employee confidence throughout the institution. According to employee 5, succession planning would be beneficial because, “when a person feels they are a part of something that’s moving forward they are a little more willing to give of themselves.” Succession planning may, according to employee 5, improve the commitment of institutional employees by allowing them to be a part of something that is moving forward. In addition, employees 1, 2, and 5 believed succession planning would lead to sustainability and consistency through an improved understanding of employee roles and responsibilities.

Cavanaugh (2017) suggested succession planning improves employee buy-in and Santora and Bozer (2015) indicated succession planning has a direct impact on employee confidence. Unique to this study when compared to the review of the literature was the unanimous perception of institutional cross-training being associated with the implementation of succession planning program. Improved understanding of roles and responsibilities through succession planning was also unique to this study, however, the use of succession planning to improve sustainability and consistency is prevalent throughout the literature.

Shared governance.

Barton (2017) and Richards (2016) identified the tradition of shared governance as a significant barrier to succession planning within higher education. Shared governance was not mentioned as a barrier within this study. On the contrary, succession planning was perceived by

employees 2 and 3 as being beneficial to the principle of shared governance. Specifically, employees 2 and 3 mentioned succession planning as a tool to improve the effectiveness of institutional committees by providing training, continuity, and improved understanding. Employee 3 stated that succession planning would assist others in “knowing what your voice means on those committees.” The perceptions provided by employees 2 and 3 may assist institutions in overcoming the shared governance barrier identified within the literature. Members of the academy can utilize succession planning to ensure the long-term success of committees associated with shared governance.

Interims.

Higher education institutions, particularly public institutions, are often required to implement a search process to fill vacant positions. Calareso (2013) suggested succession planning is still relevant to these institutions because interim appointments can be made to fill vacant positions until a permanent successor is appointed. Employees 1, 2, and 4 perceived interims as being beneficial because the appointments would provide a sense of continuity and leadership throughout the institution. Employee 1 stated, “Interims are important because you need that leadership.” According to employee 2, interims are beneficial because, “when you have no one to go to I think it’s much worse. I personally would rather have someone to go to than no one.”

The participants agreed that interims are not an ideal long-term solution, however, they do assist the institution in moving forward rather than become stagnant when a position is vacated. In addition, the participants believed succession planning could be utilized to prepare employees to serve as successful interims. Succession planning is relevant to institutions with position search requirements because, at minimum, individuals can be prepared to serve as an interim appointment.

Interims, when prepared, have the potential to provide stable leadership and assist in filling a void left by employee departures.

Key positions.

Research participants were asked to identify key positions within the researched institution. Each participant was provided with, and understood, the definition of a key position as utilized within this study. For the purpose of this study, a key position was defined as positions that have a high degree of influence over an institution's success, ability to achieve goals, programs and services, and ability to operate in a sustainable manner (Madichie & Nyakang, 2016; Stewart, 2016). Key positions must be the central focus of succession planning programs found within modern organizations, and institutions, if they are to be successful (Gandhi & Kumar, 2014). Institutions risk underperforming and compromising their strategic impact when succession plans for key positions do not exist (Morris & Laipple, 2015). As such, the key positions identified by the research participants were relevant to this theme because the development of succession plans for the institution's key positions would contribute to the positive strategic impact of succession planning perceived by the research participants.

Each research participant was able to identify key positions within the researched institution. Employees 1, 2, 3, and 5 identified the Chancellor (President), Vice Chancellors (Vice Presidents), Associate Vice Chancellors (Associate Vice Presidents), Deans, and Directors as key positions. Employees 1 and 5 also included academic department heads, or supervisors, within their initial responses. This combined perception was consistent with previous scholarly research identifying leadership positions as key institutional positions (Bills et al., 2017). When asked, employees 1, 2, and 5 mentioned front-line employees were also key positions because they are the

face of the college and directly serve students. Employee 4 perceived all employees as being key because they each play a role in moving the institution forward. Employee 4 stated, “I don’t know if there is any position here that would not be considered a key position.” When asked about front-line employees, employee 3 did not perceive them as being key because their supervisors, who were identified as key, define their roles. The identification of front-line employees as being key by all but one research participant was surprising and unique when compared to the scholarly literature.

Summary of the findings.

Four primary themes were developed by analyzing the collected data and the themes were generally consistent with the scholarly and professional literature.

(1) Participants perceived succession planning to be nonexistent within the researched institution. Employees perceived the following two themes as being the direct result of the first theme.

(2) The nonexistence of succession planning hindered, from the perspectives of the research participants, the institution’s ability to move forward and respond to change.

(3) Succession planning deficiencies, from the perspectives of the research participants, impeded the institution’s ability to fulfill its mission and serve its stakeholders.

(4) Research participants viewed succession planning as an important strategic tool and as an investment activity.

The consensus amongst the research participants was succession planning would enhance investment activities in human resources and the investment activities enhance the institution.

Accordingly, research participants believed the implementation of a succession planning program would have a positive strategic impact on the researched institution.

Themes were developed by analyzing the data collected through participant interviews, the researcher's field notes, and the scholarly and professional literature. Data saturation was achieved within the data collection process because no new information was collected in light of the research question associated with this study. Of particular importance was the review of themes through the lens of the conceptual framework, human capital theory. The information provided by research participant, as well as the generated themes, consistently coincided with the principle of investing in human capital as an avenue for growth and success. Finally, the themes were generally consistent with the scholarly and professional literature.

Applications to Professional Practice

This section demonstrates the applicability of this study's findings to the professional arena. Specifically, this section will discuss the applicability of the findings to the business arena, the professional practice of human resources, and to the field of higher education. In addition, this section addresses this study's biblical implications. Succession planning was found to enhance investment activities, professional development, abilities to serve stakeholders, and abilities to successfully implement strategic priorities. As such, the findings are directly applicable to businesses, higher education institutions, and human resource professionals.

Business.

The findings associated with this study are directly applicable to the field of business. Succession planning concepts and strategies are generally accepted as relevant to the field of business (Estedadi & Hamidi, 2015). Organizations must attract, develop, and retain talented

employees if they hope to create and maintain sustainable competitive advantages (Gilbert, 2017; Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). Succession planning assists organizations in developing and retaining talented employees (Gilbert, 2017; Kariuki & Ochiri, 2017). As such, succession planning strategies directly impact the effectiveness of organizations, as well as their competitive capabilities (Frigo & Ubelhart, 2016). Succession plans, when properly implemented, enhance employee skills that in turn, lead to the enhancement of organizations.

Succession planning deficiencies were found to have had a negative strategic impact on the researched institution. Research participants mentioned feeling unprepared to serve within various roles, or to assume various responsibilities. Succession planning deficiencies, according to the findings, contributed to an inability of the institution to move forward and respond to change. Delayed responses to change and stakeholder needs have the potential to contribute to an organization's failure (Boocock, 2015). Accordingly, succession planning should be viewed as an important tool organizations can utilize to prepare employees to excel, develop employees, and move the organization forward. Institutional effectiveness was impeded by the lack of succession planning and it is likely that organizational effectiveness would also be impeded by a lack of succession planning.

The results of this study confirm the strategic importance of succession planning within the business arena. In addition, the results should encourage businesses to develop, implement, evaluate, and enhance succession planning programs and strategies. The necessity and relevance of succession planning programs were confirmed within this study. Organizations possessing succession planning deficiencies should be inspired to take corrective actions and implement improvements. The results of this study can be utilized by decision-makers to obtain buy-in for

succession planning programs with various stakeholders. Finally, organizations can utilize the findings associated with this study to improve competitive capabilities and sustainability through succession planning.

Human resources.

The professional practice of human resources is directly concerned with its namesake, attracting, developing, and retaining human resources (Froelich et al., 2011). Succession planning is generally accepted as a strategy that can be utilized to develop and retain talented human resources (Froelich et al., 2011). In addition, human resource professionals are uniquely qualified to assist in the development of succession planning strategies (Leuzinger et al., 2016). Professionals serving within the field of human resources have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to serve as strategic succession planning advocates and advisors (Leuzinger et al., 2016). Accordingly, succession planning is applicable to the practice of human resources and human resources practitioners must be concerned with the development and implementation of succession planning programs.

The findings associated with this study included a unanimous perception that the development and implementation of a succession planning would have a positive strategic impact on the researched institution. As such, the findings are applicable to the field of human resources because of its identified role in developing effective succession planning programs. Human resources professionals should be advocates for the development of succession planning programs and can utilize the results of this study to understand the strategic importance of succession planning.

Research participants identified cross-training as a significant benefit associated with succession planning. In addition, research participants felt succession planning would improve developmental activities and knowledge transfer throughout the researched institution. Training and development programs are often designed and implemented by human resource professionals (Leuzinger et al., 2016). The results of this study are applicable to human resources professionals because their involvement in the succession planning process could lead to the development of strategic cross-training and employee development programs. Finally, the results of this study enhance the ability of human resource professionals to obtain the buy-in of decision-makers for the development and enhancement of succession planning programs

Higher education.

Higher education institutions within the United States are faced with an impending personnel crisis (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). Recent studies indicate that a significant number of individuals currently filling key institutional roles plan to retire within the next several years (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). The projected mass exodus from attrition will result in vacancies within key institutional roles with responsibilities for implementing the programs and services provided by higher education institutions (Beck, 2017; Grossman, 2014; McMaster, 2012; Richards, 2016). Educational leaders report feeling unprepared to navigate this imminent crisis, yet succession plans are generally accepted as a tool that can be utilized to prepare employees to fill key positions once they become vacant (Jackson, 2017; Richards, 2016). As such, succession planning concepts and strategies are directly applicable to higher education.

The findings associated with this study demonstrated the strategic importance of succession planning within higher education. In addition, strategic consequences associated with succession planning deficiencies were displayed. The research participants perceived there to be a significant succession planning deficiency within the researched institution. This deficiency, from the perspectives of the research participants, impeded the institution's abilities to grow, respond to change, and provide services to their stakeholders. Higher education institutions currently possessing succession planning deficiencies should view the findings of this study as a warning and as a call to action. Institutional leaders can utilize the findings to obtain support for assessing the strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within their institutions. Research participants believed succession planning would have a positive strategic impact on the institution. As such, this study is applicable to higher education because it highlights a tool institutions can utilize to improve strategic capabilities and services to stakeholders. Finally, the findings are applicable to higher education because they highlight the role of succession planning in responding to the impending departures of experienced institutional employees.

Biblical implications.

Succession planning in the form of discipleship is a practice grounded in the infallible word of God. The Holy Scriptures display both the importance of succession planning, as well as a mandate for believers to practice discipleship (1st & 2nd Timothy, English Standard Version). Christians and believers in the Holy Scriptures should thus be staunch advocates of succession planning within their perspective industries. God's perfect design and plan for the world is outlined within the Bible (Van Duzer, 2010). As such, it can be deduced that since succession planning is prevalent throughout the Bible, succession planning must be a component of God's

plan for humankind (Hollinger, 2013). The results of this study have biblical implications because they demonstrated pitfalls associated with succession planning deficiencies. Stepping away from God's perfect plan can have negative implications as displayed by the negative impact succession planning deficiencies had on the researched institution. Believers must invest in others and equip others with the tools needed to succeed them and to be successful within their industries (Hollinger, 2013). Participants believed the implementation of a formal succession planning program would have positive implications because of the investment, training, and development activities associated with succession planning. God's plan is perfect and people are designed to invest in and disciple others. Succession planning and discipleship are important not only to the field of business, but in all aspects of human life (Hollinger, 2013).

Humans are made in the image of God and are thus, according to Van Duzer (2010), inherently relational. Succession planning and discipleship are activities in which the development and cultivation of relationships serve as a foundation. Humans are able to satisfy, in part, their inherent desires to have meaningful relationships with other humans. In addition, according to Van Duzer (2010), humans are inherently creative, and businesses are in a unique position to provide humans with opportunities to participate in meaningful and creative work. Succession planning provides opportunities for individuals to develop and enhance their creative abilities. The results of this study suggested cross-training is a perceived benefit of succession planning. Cross-training provides opportunities for individuals to build relationships, work as a team, and enhance personal and creative abilities. Humans are also able to find meaning in their work as they are groomed for advanced positions and personally and professionally developed. Employees learn new skills through succession planning and are groomed to advance within their careers. Succession planning

and the results of this study are directly applicable to biblical principles and have biblical implications through the reinforcement of the importance of discipleship, training, and investing in others.

Recommendations for Action

The results of this study have the potential to impact the abilities of higher education institutions to effectively fulfill their missions and serve their stakeholders in a consistent and sustainable manner. This study demonstrated the negative strategic impacts associated with succession planning deficiencies within a specific higher education institution. In addition, this study displayed a desire for the researched institution to implement a formal succession planning program, as well as the potential positive strategic impacts associated with the implementation of a succession planning program. In light of this study's results, two recommendations for action have been identified. The first recommendation for action is specific to the researched higher education institution while the second recommendation is applicable to higher education institutions throughout the United States. Specific to the researched institution, it is recommended that the institution design and implement a formal succession planning program. The second recommendation is for individual higher education institutions to examine the potential strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within their institutions.

Design and implement a succession planning program.

Succession planning deficiencies within the researched institution impeded the institution's abilities to serve stakeholders, fulfill its mission, respond to change, and move forward strategically and effectively. Research participants unanimously agreed that a succession planning program did not exist within the institution. In addition, the participants unanimously recommended the

implementation of a succession planning program within the researched institution. The recommendation provided by the research participants was consistent with the scholarly and professional literature. Succession planning, according to the literature, is an important strategic tool (Grossman, 2014; Richards, 2016). As such, the researched institution should design and implement a succession planning program.

Rothwell (2010) provided steps organizations should take when attempting to develop and implement a new succession planning program. These steps can be utilized by the researched institution to implement this recommendation and a succession planning program. The first step is for decision makers to commit to the succession planning process (Rothwell, 2010). Leaders should assess current problems and needs, write and enforce a policy, benchmark successful succession planning programs, and provide training (Rothwell, 2010). The second step is to assess work and people requirements to include identifying key positions, roles, and responsibilities (Rothwell, 2010). Key positions within the researched institution were identified by the research participants and are included within the findings section of this study. Step three is to appraise individual performance including the creation of a talent pool (Rothwell, 2010). Creating a talent pool allows organizations to create a talent inventory and understand the capabilities of their human resources (Rothwell, 2010).

The remaining steps require organizations and the researched institution to focus on and consider the future. Step four is to assess future people and work requirements in order to ensure the organization is equipped to respond to change and future strategic needs (Rothwell, 2010). The fifth step is to assess the future potential of human resources and to develop plans for future professional growth (Rothwell, 2010). Step six is to close the development gap by creating a talent

pipeline by cultivating and developing talented employees to meet future needs (Rothwell, 2010). Finally, step seven requires continuous improvements to the program through evaluation and assessment (Rothwell, 2010). The researched institution can utilize these steps as a foundation to developing and implementing a succession planning program.

Examine the strategic impact of succession planning.

Individual higher education institutions should examine the strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within their perspective institutions. Institutions and organizations often possess unique strategic needs (Oppong et al., 2016). As such, the strategic impact of succession planning can be successfully examined at the individual institutional level (Oppong et al., 2016). Institutional leaders should seek to understand the relevancy of succession planning and how succession planning would impact institutional abilities to fulfill their missions and serve their stakeholders.

Higher education leaders seeking to implement this recommendation should examine the perspectives of institutional employees. This study provides an example of a method institutional leaders could employ to explore the perspectives of their employees. Employee perspectives assist decision makers in understanding the strategic impact of succession planning (Jiang et al., 2017; Huang & Miao, 2016). Institutional leaders should utilize the data obtained through employee perspectives to evaluate current succession planning initiatives, identify succession planning needs, and identify strategic gaps. The data could also be utilized to support the development of non-existent succession planning programs, or to enhance current succession planning programs. Upon examining employee perspectives, institutions may discover succession planning deficiencies. Should deficiencies exist, or should a formal succession planning program not exist, institutions

could utilize the steps found in the first recommendation to assist in developing a succession planning program.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study, as well as the associated results, contributed to the limited body of existing literature pertaining to succession planning within higher education institutions. Further scholarly and professional research related to succession planning within higher education is recommended. Accordingly, this section includes recommendations for further study that could enhance the literature, and assist in the advancement of succession planning programs within the higher education arena.

Initial recommendations for further study pertain to the scope of this study. This study researched succession planning within a single higher education institution located within the southeastern United States. As such, this study's scope was not only limited in regards to a single location, but also limited geographically. It is recommended that this study be broadened to include multiple higher education institutions. This study could be replicated as a single site case study within different higher education institutions, or be replicated as a multi-site case study inclusive of multiple institutions. In addition, it is recommended that this study be replicated within various United States geographical regions. Finally, future studies could be broadened to examine not only the perceptions of employees, but also the succession planning knowledge possessed by employees. For example, future researchers could examine if employees can define succession planning on their own accord and succession planning concepts individuals understand.

Expanding this study to include multiple higher education institutions will provide different data and results that can be utilized to further explore the strategic impact of succession planning

within higher education. The inclusion of multiple higher education institutions may also result in the development of consistent themes and trends that could lead to the generalization of results within the higher education arena. Exploring the impact of succession planning within multiple geographical regions could further enhance the development of consistent themes and trends. Geographical regions often include unique cultures and stakeholder expectations that could lead to differing perspectives pertaining to the strategic impact of succession planning. Examples of United States geographical regions that should be included in future succession planning studies include, but are not limited to the northeast, the midwest, and the west.

Recommendations for further study were also inspired by the data collected from this study's research participants. Employees 2, 3, and 4 mentioned the ineffective use of employee notice periods as contributory to institutional instability and successful transitions. As such, the employees believed the ineffective use of notice periods contributed to succession planning deficiencies. Notice periods refer to the amount of time employees provide employers prior to vacating their position and organization. The relationship between the effective and ineffective use of employee notice periods, institutional instability, and successful transitions should be examined. In addition, the impact of employee notice periods on succession planning programs and initiatives should be examined. Employees 2 and 3 believed succession planning could assist in preparing employees to take over responsibilities for positions that cease to exist. Succession planning studies largely focus on preparing employees to fill specific vacant positions, however, the research participants mentioned a need to understand how to move forward successfully when positions are not only vacant, but are cut and cease to exist. Future studies should explore the potential impact

of succession planning on preparing employees to successfully assume responsibilities from positions that were cut and eliminated within organizations.

A statement provided by employee 2 inspired the next recommendation for further study. Employee 2 stated, “faculty and staff are their [the students’] resources, so when those positions are vacant, or when there is no knowledge, or lack of knowledge rather, within those positions we then become less of a valid resource for the students.” Institutional employees serve as student resources and play a direct role in student success within higher education institutions. Student success is a major initiative within higher education and plays an essential role in institution’s assisting students in meeting their career and educational goals (Beck, 2017). Future studies should examine the impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, on student success programs and initiatives within higher education.

Finally, future studies should be conducted to research the willingness of employees to participate in succession planning. Employee motivation may be a barrier to succession planning, including a lack of motivation to share job responsibilities as identified by research participants within this study. In order to conduct this study, future researchers may want to consider John Kotter’s organizational change theory. Specifically, Kotter established the importance of creating a sense of urgency in order to motivate employees and successfully navigate change (Burke, 2017). Researchers may want to explore how a sense of urgency to participate in succession planning can be inspired, or if a sense of urgency would motivate employees to participate in succession planning. Future studies could also examine the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors and employee willingness or urgency to participate and engage in succession planning activities.

Reflections

This section displays the researcher's reflections pertaining to this research study. These reflections relate to the researcher's preconceived ideas, the researcher's personal biases, and the impact of the research process on the researcher's thinking. The researcher's reflections pertaining to the biblical principles associated with this study are also included within this section. According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015), the reflections section is essential to a scholarly qualitative research study because the section provides an opportunity to address one of the most substantial threats to research quality, biases, and preconceptions.

Due to the researcher's experience serving within the business arena and multiple higher education institutions, the researcher possessed personal biases and preconceptions pertaining to succession planning. The researcher had participated in a succession planning process and directly experienced benefits associated with succession planning. As such, the researcher held a positive bias toward succession planning and a preconception that succession planning is beneficial. Accordingly, the researcher's bias and preconception had the potential to influence participant responses and steer conversations in a manner supportive of the researcher's bias and preconception. The researcher was also employed by the researched institution and, as such, possessed knowledge and insight that would otherwise be unavailable to a researcher without experience serving within the researched institution. This unique insight may have also allowed the researcher to steer the conversation and influence participant responses.

Steps were undertaken by the researcher to mitigate the impact and influence of preconceptions and biases. First, the researcher had limited interaction with research participants throughout the interview process. The researcher's role was limited to asking a consistent set of

open-ended interview questions. Follow-up questions were only asked if a participant response prompted a follow-up question. Participants were guaranteed within the consent form that their participation, including their answers, would not impact their employment experience within the researched institution. As such, the researcher addressed the potential to steer conversations and influence participant responses. Upon reflecting on the data collection process, the researcher does not believe preconceptions and personal biases steered conversations and influenced participant responses.

The researcher experienced a substantial change in thinking as a result of this study. Prior to this study, the researcher accepted succession planning as a human capital development strategy. While the researcher continues to accept succession planning as a strategy, the researcher now views succession planning as a tool organizations and institutions can use to help others. Participant responses indicated that succession planning programs would assist stakeholders in obtaining gainful employment, increase morale, and contribute to economic development. As such, the researcher now views succession planning as a strategic tool to improve lives and help individuals and communities thrive. Additionally, the researcher now believes succession planning deficiencies have the potential to professionally and emotionally harm employees. Accordingly, the researcher now believes empathy is required when thinking about succession planning programs.

Discipleship is a common theme and practice found within the Holy Scriptures. The practice calls individuals to invest in others, mentor others, and prepare others to succeed them. Succession planning principals and ideals thus directly coincide with discipleship and with examples found within scripture. When reflecting upon biblical principles it is evident that humans

are equipped with an inherent desire to be invested in, and in turn, invest in others. Succession planning provides an avenue for humans to fulfil their desires to learn from and invest in others.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning within a community college located in the southeastern United States. This purpose was established to research, understand, and resolve the identified business problem associated with this study. The problem identified within this study was perceptions of employees pertaining to succession planning, or the lack thereof, serving within a southeastern United States community college are unknown, thus leading to an inability to assess the strategic importance of succession planning within the institution. Employee perceptions pertaining to succession planning were collected via participant interviews and were analyzed to identify themes within the collected data. Triangulation was utilized to analyze the collected data and key words were clustered to establish themes.

Four themes were identified within the data and each theme contributed to the fulfillment of the purpose of this study as well as to resolving the research question. First, research participants perceived succession planning to be non-existent within the researched institution. Second, participants perceived the lack of succession planning as contributory to the institution's inability to respond to change and move forward. Third, participants believed succession planning deficiencies impeded the researched institution's ability to effectively serve its stakeholders. Lastly, participants perceived the development of a succession planning program would have a positive strategic impact within the researched institution.

This study contributed to the closure of multiple gaps within the scholarly and professional literature. Gaps frequently exist within succession planning research due to the importance of examining succession planning within individual organizations and institutions. As such, this study contributed to the closure of this gap by researching succession planning within one unique institution. The literature identified sparse research pertaining to succession planning within higher education as a gap. This study assisted in closing this gap by researching succession planning within a higher education institution.

Higher education institutions throughout the United States improve lives and enhance communities through invaluable programs and services. Institutions assist individuals in reaching their academic and professional goals, contribute to the development of a qualified workforce, and partner with various stakeholders to improve economic conditions. As experienced employees prepare to depart the educational arena, an imminent personnel crisis threatens to impede the ability of higher education institutions to provide these important programs and services. Succession planning was identified as a strategy institutions can utilize to move forward and effectively serve their stakeholders despite the projected departure of experienced employees. Institutions must consider the use of succession planning as they strive to serve stakeholders and meet the changing needs of their communities.

Most, if not all humans have an inherent desire to leave a legacy. Experienced professionals, managers, and leaders are presented with opportunities to satisfy this desire, and leave legacies, on a routine basis within organizations and educational institutions. Legacies can be left by investing in employees, mentoring employees, and equipping employees with the knowledge and abilities needed to successfully fill vacancies in key positions. Succession plans

and succession strategies formalize this desire and provide avenues to invest in employees in a manner consistent with the strategic objectives of organizations and institutions. In the movie *Black Panther*, the main character was advised that a man who has not prepared his children to succeed him has failed, at least in part, as a father (Feige & Coogler, 2018). The same advice can apply to the fields of business and higher education. Leaders who have not prepared team members to succeed them have failed, at least in part, as a leader. Higher education institutions must encourage their employees to invest in one another, participate in succession planning, and leave a legacy of sustainable and effective service to their communities.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 13, 2018

Matthew A. Swanson

IRB Approval 3175.031318: The Strategic Impact of Succession Planning within Higher Education: A Phenomenological Case Study

Dear Matthew A. Swanson,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

The Graduate School

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Appendix B: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

The Strategic Impact of Succession Planning within Higher Education:
A Phenomenological Case Study
Matthew A. Swanson
Liberty University
School of Business

You are invited to be in a research study examining the perceptions and experiences of employees pertaining to the impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, on institutional abilities to implement strategic priorities in a consistent and effective manner. You were selected as a possible participant because you have served as a full-time employee of the researched institution, the site of the case study, for at least one year. In addition, you indicated that you have experienced, or witnessed, succession planning, and its associated impact, within the institution. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Matthew Swanson, a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to examine employee perceptions pertaining to the strategic impact of succession planning, or lack thereof, within a higher education institution located within the southeastern United States.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a 60 minute in-person semi-structured interview with open-ended questions designed to understand your perspective pertaining to the impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, on the researched institution's abilities to implement strategies, and fulfill its mission, in a consistent and effective manner. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Personally identifiable information to include your name and position title will not be published and will be kept confidential.
2. Review the completed verbatim interview transcript for accuracy and to ensure that your perspective is accurately reflected. This process will take approximately 30 minutes and personally identifiable information, including your name and position title, will not be published.
3. Attest to the accuracy of the transcript, or, if necessary, provide a clarification statement. This process will take approximately 15-45 minutes and your statement will be included within the research. Personally identifiable information, including your name and position title, will not be published.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include the potential for the institution to enhance its impact on the community by assisting in the improvement of strategic capabilities. In addition, the information may assist higher education institutions in enhancing their services to stakeholders to include students, employees, businesses, and community members through succession planning initiatives.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies, or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data. I will share the results of this study with the institution upon request, however, the results will not include personally identifiable information.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym that they will be referred to in an effort to protect confidentiality. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation and participant names and/or position titles will not be included in the published findings.
- Data will be stored on a private password locked computer, and/or in a lockable drawer within a private residence, and may be used in future research. Three years from the date of the study's completion all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher, or by a private transcription service. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher, private transcription service, and, upon request, the doctoral program director and committee members, will have access to these recordings. The recordings will be transferred to a secure private computer from a digital recorder. The researcher's notes will be stored in a private residence inside of a lockable drawer. Three years from the date of the study's completion the data, and digital recorder, will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, the researched institution, or me. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Matthew Swanson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at matt.swanson14@gmail.com. You may also contact the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. Colleen McLaughlin at cmclaughlin@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL
INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS
DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Appendix C: Recruitment Template

Dear []:

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to examine how succession planning, or the lack thereof, has affected an institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategies in a consistent manner and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you meet the four criteria listed below, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a recorded in-person interview. In addition, you will be asked to review the verbatim interview transcript to ensure the transcript reflects an accurate depiction of your answers and experience. It should take approximately 1.5 hours for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To express your interest in participating, please respond to this email confirming your interest, as well as confirming that you meet all of the following criteria:

1. One-year, or more, of service as a full-time employee within the researched institution.
2. Experience serving within the institution while at least one key institutional position was vacant.
3. Experience with succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution.
4. Possess a willingness to share your perspectives and experiences in an honest and detailed manner.

I will contact you via email within five days of your response to schedule an interview should you be selected to serve.

A consent document is attached to this message. Please review, and sign, the consent document and return it to me prior to our interview should you be scheduled to participate. You may return the consent document by scanning and emailing the signed document to me at matt.swanson14@gmail.com, or by mailing it to the address listed below. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Matthew A. Swanson
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Matthew A. Swanson

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Please help me verify our ability to proceed forward with this interview by answering the following questions:
 - a. Have you turned in a signed consent form?
 - b. Did you have questions prior to the official start of our interview? If so, did I answer your questions in a satisfactory manner?
 - c. Do you agree to review the verbatim transcript of our interview and to complete the transcript review form?
 - d. Do you understand the definitions of succession planning and key positions as defined within this study?
2. Please help me confirm your qualifications for participating in this study by answering the following questions:
 - e. Are you currently serving as a full-time employee of the researched institution? If so, have you served full-time for at least one year?
 - f. Have you personally experienced, or witnessed, succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution?
 - g. Have you served within the institution while at least one key institutional position was vacant? If so, and without naming specific titles, would you consider the key position, or positions, to be classified as a faculty member, academic department supervisor, staff member, or administrator?
 - h. Do you agree to share your perspectives and experiences in an honest and detailed manner?
3. Please describe in detail situations in which you witnessed, or experienced, succession planning within the institution.
4. Please describe in detail situations in which you experienced the strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution.
5. How has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategic priorities consistently and effectively from your perspective?

6. Please identify, from your perspective, your institution's key positions using only position titles. What role do these positions play in the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategic priorities consistently and effectively? How has, or would, succession planning enhance, or influence, this role from your perspective?
7. How has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected your personal professional experience with the institution?
8. How has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected, from your perspective, the institution's abilities to serve its stakeholders including students, employees, and community members?
9. What specific behaviors, or activities, do you feel succession planning, or the lack thereof, has influenced within the institution?

Appendix E: Interview Documentation Sheet Template

Matthew A. Swanson- Principal Investigator and Interviewer
Doctoral Dissertation Data Collection- Participant Interviews
Interview Protocol: Interview Documentation Sheet

Participant Interview Documentation Sheet

Interview with (Participant Pseudonym): **EMPLOYEE *****

Date and Time:

Setting/Location:

Signed Consent Form: YES NO

Participant Questions:

Did the *interviewee* ask questions? YES NO

Did the *interviewer* answer the interviewee's questions? YES NO

Biographical Information

Summary of the interview context:

Summary of the *interviewee's* initial demeanor:

Summary of how the interviewee satisfied the established eligibility criteria below:

5. One-year, or more, of service as a full-time employee of the researched institution.
6. Experience serving within the institution while at least one key institutional position was vacant.
7. Experience with succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution.
8. Possessed a willingness to share perspectives and experiences in an honest and detailed manner.

Appendix F: Field Notes Template

Matthew A. Swanson- Principal Investigator and Interviewer
Doctoral Dissertation Data Collection- Field Notes

Participant Interview Field Notes

EMPLOYEE ***

10. Please help me verify our ability to proceed forward with this interview by answering the following questions:
 - i. Have you submitted a signed consent form?
 - j. Did you have questions prior to the official start of our interview? If so, did I answer your questions in a satisfactory manner?
 - k. Do you agree to review the verbatim transcript of our interview and to complete the transcript review form?
 - l. Do you understand the definitions of succession planning and key positions as defined within this study?
11. Please help me confirm your qualifications for participating in this study by answering the following questions:
 - a. Are you currently serving as a full-time employee of the researched institution? If so, have you served full-time for at least one year?
 - b. Have you personally experienced, or witnessed, succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution?
 - c. Have you served within the institution while at least one key institutional position was vacant? If so, and without naming specific titles, would you consider the key position, or positions, to be classified as a faculty member, academic department supervisor, staff member, or administrator?
 - d. Do you agree to share your perspectives and experiences in an honest and detailed manner?
12. Please describe in detail situations in which you witnessed, or experienced, succession planning within the institution.

13. Please describe in detail situations in which you experienced the strategic impact of succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution.

14. How has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategic priorities consistently and effectively from your perspective?

15. Please identify, from your perspective, your institution's key positions using only position titles. What role do these positions play in the institution's abilities to implement its mission and strategic priorities consistently and effectively? How has, or would, succession planning enhance, or influence, this role from your perspective?

16. How has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected your personal professional experience with the institution?

17. How has succession planning, or the lack thereof, affected, from your perspective, the institution's abilities to serve its stakeholders including students, employees, and community members?

18. What specific behaviors, or activities, do you feel succession planning, or the lack thereof, has influenced within the institution?

Researcher's (Interviewer's) Thoughts and Observations:

[illegible]

The Researcher's (Interviewer's) Feelings Regarding the Interview:

The Researcher's (Interviewer's) Final Participant Observation:

The Researcher's (Interviewer's) Final Thoughts:

Appendix G: Interview Definitions Handout

Matthew A. Swanson

Doctoral Dissertation- Definitions Provided to Research Participants

Definitions

Succession planning; a systematic and continuous effort to support institutional stability through the identification and development of the right employees to fill the right key positions at the right time.

Key positions; positions that have a high degree of influence over an institution's success, ability to achieve goals, programs and services, and ability to operate in a sustainable manner.

Appendix H: Transcript Review Form

Interview Transcript Review Form

*Employee Perceptions of Succession Planning Within Higher Education:
A Qualitative Case Study*

Information and Instructions: You have received this form because you participated in a semi-structured interview associated with Matthew Swanson's doctoral study entitled, "Employee Perceptions of Succession Planning Within Higher Education: A Qualitative Case Study". This form is designed to assist in verifying the accuracy of your interview's verbatim transcript. Please review the transcript carefully, select one of the options below, date, and sign using your assigned pseudonym in lieu of your name. The lined space is provided for you to provide clarifying remarks, or additional information, should you feel the transcript does not reflect the entirety of your experience with succession planning, or the lack thereof, within the institution. Should you need additional space please attach a separate sheet to this form and include your pseudonym signature, and date, in the upper right hand corner. ***Upon completion, data will be derived from this form and included within the study, however, this form will not be published.*** Please email completed forms to matt.swanson14@gmail.com within one week of receiving this form and interview transcript.

PLEASE SELECT ONLY ONE OPTION:

- ☐ I have received, and reviewed, a verbatim copy of my interview transcript and attest that the transcript is accurate, portrays my personal perceptions of the phenomenon (succession planning), and accurately portrays my personal experience with the phenomenon (succession planning).

OR

- ☐ I have received, and reviewed, a verbatim copy of my interview transcript and wish to add the clarifying remarks and/or the information found below. The inclusion of the remarks will allow me to attest that the transcript is accurate, portrays my personal perceptions of the phenomenon (succession planning), and accurately portrays my personal experience with the phenomenon (succession planning).

Pseudonym

Pseudonym Signature

Date

Clarifying Remarks and Additional Information (if necessary):
