Smooth Transitions: An Examination of Succession Planning and Leadership Continuity among Directors and Associate Directors of the Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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Far too many organizations fall short of the strategic task of succession planning. The absence of satisfactory solutions in this area stifles the ability of an organization to achieve its mission and vision. Lack of planning in this area also contributes to a negative impact on overall morale, staff performance, and effectiveness as these turnovers ensue. The purpose of this thesis project is to explore the perceived absence of intentional succession planning and leadership transitioning among director and associate director-level leadership positions within the Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists.

In this project, surveys and one-on-one interviews are conducted among employee leaders in the workforce to assess the perception of turnover among these critical positions, along with the perceived implications of these transitions on mission and vision achievement at the local level. Also surveyed are human resources personnel from a sample of surrounding conferences to explore the prevalence or lack of prevalence of strategic succession planning among Seventh-day Adventist Conferences.

The desired outcome will be the creation of a succession planning document, supported by precedent literature and scripture, which will aid and assist conference administration and hiring managers in filling vacant roles in. Best practices for strategic succession planning will be followed and referenced. Additional conferences may use this resource in filling vacancies and in achieving their stated missions and visions.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Foremost among the critical tasks of an effective leader is the planning of his or her successor. At the inauguration of Jesus Christ’s public ministry, He spent time in the selection of His successors (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:12-16). Scripture records that twelve were appointed who would be trained and mentored for the leadership of this new movement well after His ascension. Christ recognized that his earthly leadership was soon to end, and was intentional to select successors with the intent to develop them for present and future service.

History bears evidence of the success of such succession planning. Both the Old and New Testaments are replete with examples of leadership successions (Num. 27; Josh. 1; 1 Tim. 1) as they reveal a wealth of insights into God’s pattern of working through successive generations. Consider the scriptural picture of Joshua succeeding the prophet Moses, or Elisha who followed the beloved Elijah. One of the most important things leaders do is to prepare for their succession.\(^1\) Ministry organizations that fail to plan in such a way find themselves departing from biblical patterns while also leading to their extinction.

Henry Fayol, the French pioneer of management history and widely proclaimed father of management, was among the first in the modern age to recognize and document the universal organizational need for succession planning.\(^2\) His work in the mid to late 1800s and early 1900s introduced in a more formal way the functions and principles of management. Fayol studied and wrote extensively on the elements necessary to organize and manage a significant business or

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\(^2\) Ibid.
corporation. Among the foundational aspects of the management practices proposed by Fayol, his primary one focused on the need to ensure the stability of tenure of personnel.

Effective leaders throughout the centuries have developed and implemented succession plans for their organizations. As Henry and Richard Blackaby suggest, spiritual leaders are always investing in the next generation of leaders. Astute leaders are keenly aware that the continued survival of their organizations depends on having the right people in the right places at the right time. Organizations that do not take steps to plan for future talent at all levels will face inevitable disruptions and even potential disasters when key employees leave.

Succession planning entails a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement. Planning processes are most effective when driven by a written, organization-wide statement of purpose and policy. William Rothwell, professor of workforce education and development at Penn State University, suggests that the basic tenants of the succession planning process articulate a foundation for:

- Communicating career paths to each individual in an organization
- Establishing development and training plans
- Establishing career paths and individual job moves
- Communicating upward and laterally concerning the management organization
- Creating a more comprehensive human resources planning system

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6 Ibid. 8

7 Ibid. 8

8 Ibid. 9
Many leaders and organizations today give little to no thought to the succession of their leadership. When it comes to adequate preparation for continuity, little is done. When faced with a sudden transition, they soon realize that much of their work will have been in vain unless there is a capable successor to safeguard their legacy and to move policies and mission forward.\(^9\) One of the greatest acts of negligence on the part of a leader is their failure to prepare or nurture their successors.\(^10\) As organizations face ever-increasing challenges given the nature of today’s unstable environment, effective planning can be a valuable resource for maintaining stability and continuity.

Executive succession planning represents significant challenges for most nonprofits.\(^11\) Nonprofits generally face time and financial constraints, inadequate staffing, lack of administration and coordination abilities, and lower interests on the part of executive directors. To minimize the associated chaos with changes in leadership, business leaders are recommending a shift from succession being a taboo topic to a fact of life that makes things easier for an outgoing executive, board, and an organization.\(^12\)

Nonprofit organizations undergoing leadership transitions are at vulnerable points in their lifecycles.\(^13\) In light of this, organizations need to prepare for this eventuality. By ignoring the


\(^{10}\) Jim Henderson, *The Value of Succession Planning*, 1.

\(^{11}\) Joseph Santora, et. al. “Nonprofit Executive Succession Planning and Organizational Sustainability: A Preliminary Comparative Study in Australia, Brazil, Israel, Italy, Russia, and the United States,” *Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship* 20, no. 4 (October 2015): 68. DOI https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Gil_Bozer/publication/274383733

\(^{12}\) Ibid. 68

\(^{13}\) Taken from Jennifer Chandler, “Why is Succession Planning Taboo?” article written for the National Council of Nonprofits February 18, 2015 https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/thought-leadership/why-succession-planning-taboo
issue of succession planning, nonprofits are ignoring severe risks to the future stability of their organization and abdicating their fiduciary obligation to take care of the nonprofit. More and more, nonprofit and faith-based organizations are recognizing the value and benefits of having such plans as it relates to continuity and mission alignment.

**Ministry Context**

The Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) is the regional headquarters of the worldwide SDA church serving Virginia, Washington D.C., and two counties in Maryland, namely Montgomery and Prince Georges. Initially organized in 1877 as the Virginia Conference, it merged with the District of Columbia Conference in 1924 to form the Potomac Conference. Today over 36,000 members are worshipping in over 150 diverse congregations for English-speaking, Spanish, Brazilian, Chinese, Filipino, French, Ghanaian, Korean, Mizo, Ethiopian, and Southern Asian members.

The Potomac Conference is one of the fifty-seven conferences spread throughout the United States, Canada, and the islands of Guam and Micronesia. Executive leadership for each conference comprises a president, two to four vice-presidents depending upon the size, and a host of area-specific directors and associate directors who provide guidance, resourcing, and assistance to each of the churches, schools, and ministry centers in the territory.

Within the Potomac Conference office are twenty-two directors/associate directors who serve a variety of ministry areas, including the following:

- Pastoral Ministries (2)

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15 Taken from Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists website entitled “Potomac.” November 2016. http://www.columbiaunion.org/entities/conferences/potomac
• Evangelism/Church Planting (1)
• Education/Instructional Strategies (3)
• Youth and Young Adult Ministries (1)
• Children’s Ministries (1)
• Communications (2)
• Hispanic/Multi-Ethnic Ministries (1)
• Planned Giving and Stewardship (1)
• Human Resources (2)
• Treasury/Payroll (3)
• Auditing Services (2)
• Information Technology (1)
• Camp Ministries (2)

Experienced denominational church leaders hold these positions. Leaders generally come from other conferences or local churches or schools around the division. Every five years, the Executive Committee, which is the governing body of the conference, elects these leaders.

In the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, all tithes received from the local congregations and mission groups are sent directly to the conference treasury, which serves as the storehouse (Mal. 3:10). In addition to a myriad of mission-oriented uses, the world church uses these monies to fund personnel such as conference administrative leaders, local church pastors, Bible teachers, subsidies distributed throughout each of the schools, and the various administrative positions and mission initiatives in the main office. Remaining tithe received is re-distributed back to the local churches through supplemental staffing, and executive resourcing.

The mission of the Potomac Conference is to grow healthy, disciple-making churches. The role of each of the directors and associate directors is vital to the achievement of this mission. These key administrative leaders are instrumental in spearheading and organizing

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16 Taken from General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists official webpage entitled “Use of Tithe” October 14, 1985, https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/-/use-of-tithe/
efforts and initiatives to advance the great commission within the conference territory. They also train, support, and resource the 650+ employees serving in over 150 diverse congregations and nearly two dozen schools.

The human resources (HR) director and department play a critical role as it relates to organizational effectiveness, performance, and mission achievement. People are the greatest asset in any organization, and the fact that the employees are the critical element in a firm’s success has become conventional wisdom. The HR department oversees and supports the needs of the entire workforce, including the administrative office staff. Also, HR partners with the administration to perform the following tasks:

- Manage the functions of job design (descriptions and duties)
- Training and Development – Handles the training and development needs of staff within the organization via in-house or contracted services.
- Performance Management – Leading out in annual and bi-annual staff assessments and evaluations.
- Compensation – Serving as part of the payroll team to ensure employees are paid accurately and on time, with the correct deductions made.
- Benefits – Overseeing and managing the Adventist Retirement Plan, healthcare, disability programs, employee assistance, wellness programs, FMLA, and the like
- Enforcement of employment and labor laws such as equal employment opportunity, fair labor standards, benefits and wages, and work hour requirements (in consultation with risk management attorneys). Also, developing and interpreting the employee handbook, which explains all conference policies and procedures.
- Investigates harassment and discrimination complaints, ensuring the organization remains compliant with the United States Department of Labor regulations
- Manage employee relations – Promoting communication and fairness within the conference, through facilitating mediations and managing the conciliation process
- Recruitment and Selection of Personnel – Overseeing the hiring and recruitment within the organization, administering skills assessments, and assisting the right employees in finding the right positions.

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The Potomac Conference, as with many other conferences, struggles with high turnover among its leaders. More than twenty directors and associate directors have either resigned, relocated, requested a transfer, retired, or have otherwise terminated from their positions between 2014 and 2019. These transitions in the majority of cases have been sudden, often with less than two months' notice given. In fact, over this same timeframe, the conference has seen three HR directors and two of nearly each of the remaining directors/associate directors. Several of these critical positions have remained vacant for six months to over a year.

Employee turnover is one of the most challenging issues in business, creating high levels of insecurity in the workforce!\(^{18}\) The higher the level of turnover, the more significant the negative impact on career commitment.\(^{19}\) Other areas impacted by high turnover include the following:

- Low employee morale
- Lowered engagement
- Lower revenue among for-profit organizations
- High Cost – Interview expenses, training, onboarding
- Diminished service quality
- Cynicism to new ideas
- Untrained workforce – brain drain\(^{20}\)

The Potomac Conference experiences four significant challenges concerning its high employee turnover. First, there are several new projects and initiatives, with very few being following through to fruition. Newly hired directors and associate directors join the team eager to make a difference and an impact. They create mission-oriented ideas and new projects and


initiatives result. Once launched and the workforce gets on board. Very soon after that, it seems the conference sends out communication giving notice of the director’s transition and all project momentum ceases.

An example of one such initiative was a conference-wide evangelistic thrust. For over a year, the associate director overseeing evangelism went from pulpit to pulpit, inspiring the pastoral leadership and the laity to engage in a year-long community-oriented friendship evangelism campaign. The associate director identified several new church planting locations with the intent to establish local plants in those locations over the next five years. The conference communications team set up a website soliciting donors and pledges toward the initiative, which generated a great deal of funding. The intent was for the effort to launch during the following year to run throughout the entire year. Conference leadership provided a great deal of time for lengthy presentations during executive committee and Worker’s Meetings.

On the one hand, inspiration within many congregations to win souls for the Kingdom increased. On the other hand, the associate director took a call to another conference toward the end of that reaping year. During the transition, momentum toward this initiative ceased, the website closed down. After sixteen months, the hiring team filled the vacant position and the new associate director began to gear up for another new initiative.

Second, the workforce experiences diminished rapport and trust of leadership. At the onset of their arrival, new directors and associate directors initiate engagement with the employees, only to leave before relationships have had sufficient time to establish fully. This action results in a negative impact on both employee engagement and morale.²¹

Research has confirmed that employee turnover directly impacts employee job satisfaction and feelings of trust toward one another and the organization. More significant implications were discovered for employees working in the private sector versus those in the public sector. Managers need to manage better and monitor job satisfaction among their employees and their perceptions of overall organizational performance.

Third, the conference as a whole experiences a sort of organizational brain drain as transitions take place. Those with the experience and expertise in their subject matter take their knowledge and best practices with them as they transition, leaving new employees to start from scratch. Little is left in the way of process documentation and systems transfer, which would allow new leaders to build on a solid foundation and for departments to experience continuity.

Brain drain is one of the more detrimental implications of organizational decline, according to the Journal of Organizational Behavior. While typically examined at the global level, researchers are highlighting the need to look at the notion at the organizational level more closely. At this level, “brain” focuses on the skills, competencies, or personal attributes that are considered marketable corporate assets, and “drain” refers to a substantial exit of such talent from the workforce. As employees depart, highly needed and valuable organizational assets go out the door leaving competency and other gaps in the overall operation.


Finally, the conference incurs significant costs resulting from its turnover. There is the cost of productivity as fewer employees must cover the duties and responsibilities of the exiting employee.\textsuperscript{24} Then there is the cost of recruitment via multiple on-location and in-person interviews, house-hunting trips, turned down offers, the increasing costs of moving, and the various unforeseen costs such as unamortized expenses from previous moves per the working policies of the SDA church in North America. It should be noted that as disgruntled employees transition, filling vacant positions becomes more and more of a challenge.

**Problem Presented**

The problem this project will address is that of a perceived lack of intentional succession planning and leadership transitioning among the director and associate-level leadership positions within the Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists. Far too many nonprofit organizations fall short of the strategic task of succession planning.\textsuperscript{25} Insufficient solutions in this area can potentially stifle the organization's ability to achieve its mission and vision, while also contributing to a negative impact on overall morale, staff performance, and effectiveness as leaders' transition and turnover ensues.\textsuperscript{26}

Of the fifty-seven conferences within the North American Division (NAD) of SDA, there is neither a standardized employee hiring process, nor is there an established system to inspire employee engagement and longevity in employment. Each utilizes its own unique set of


recognized criteria and benchmarks concerning employee relations. The researcher desires to approach change in the ministry setting by comparing the researcher's environment to similar ministry settings to move the researcher's environment toward identifiable benchmarks gleaned from other ministry settings, and through the creation of a guiding document.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry study is to provide a systematic approach to developing a succession plan for director and associate director positions within the Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists. This approach can be used to assist in generating a pipeline of talent from which to fill positions as they become vacant. In the researcher's role as director of human resources, this succession planning document and procedures will aid in filling critical ministry leadership positions in a faster and more intentional way.

Succession planning is defined as the intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional-leader to another and is vital for strategic success. The growing economic and social significance of the nonprofit sector highlights the need for executive planning, particularly in light of the predicted shortages of experienced leaders in these areas. The area of human resources is all about coordinating people to achieve organizational goals. HR professionals are to be on the front lines of these growing challenges, offering research-based, data-driven solutions, and best practices to serve their organizations and to assist them as they navigate into the future.


Participants in this study will be departmental directors, associate directors, pastors, educators, and human resources personnel from a sample of other SDA conferences within North America. The study will take place primarily in the Potomac Conference headquarters office, with additional surveys distributed via email. The researcher wants to focus the research on this problem because it is believed that leadership transitions impact organizational goals and the achieving of the mission. The researcher desires to provide a document that will better align human capital with desired organizational outcomes.

**Basic Assumptions**

The premise of this study assumes that there is no model for the intentional succession planning of leadership utilized by executive leadership. A more appropriate foundation is that there is a perceived lack of succession planning. The researcher intends to determine the validity of this notion. The researcher also approaches this study with the assumption that the high-level of turnover is unintentional. The findings will shed further light as to whether these transitions were intentionally encouraged to achieve mission rather than evidence of falling short of this achievement.

The researcher assumes honesty and truthfulness in the responses of the participants, and that the sample surveyed will be representative of the employees of the conference. It is anticipated that the instrument to be used will produce reliable responses and that the participants will fully understand the questions asked on the survey. The researcher assumes administrative honesty as they address organizational priorities. The researcher will also preserve anonymity and confidentiality, with participants made aware that they are volunteers who may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative implications.
An additional assumption is that turnover will continue to be present at this level of organization. The structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is such that the career path of an employee begins in the local context, then moves to the associate director and director level of a conference. From there, employees move to become administrators (vice-presidents or presidents) of the same or another conference. From the conference level, employees move to the Union-level, with the Union defined as a cluster of conferences. From the Union, employees move on to serve at the division-level before heading to the world headquarters. With the rate of retirement and attrition increasing, the researcher assumes that employees will continue to transition from these key leadership positions as they advance to higher levels of service.

**Definitions**

Throughout this project, the following terms will be utilized and are defined as follows:

*Conference:* One of several administrative sub-units established to serve as the local headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Each has a name referring to its regional location and comprises the membership of the churches/mission groups within its territory.

*Executive Committee:* The highest decision-making body at the local conference level of operation. Responsible for making all hires as recommended by the Personnel sub-committee.

*Human Resources (HR):* The division within an organization concerned with personnel – namely managing the functions of job design, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, managerial relations, and recruitment.

*North American Division (NAD):* The NAD is the administrative territory of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination covering the United States, Canada, Guam, and the Micronesian islands.
**SDA**: Seventh-day Adventist Church – Protestant Christian denomination founded in 1863, which is distinguished by its observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), and emphasis on the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ.

**Succession Planning**: The intentional process of the transfer of leadership, power, and authority from one directional-leader to another.

**Limitations**

The focus of this study will be to examine the high rate of turnover among departmental directors and associate directors of the Potomac Conference headquarters office and to develop a model for succession planning to assist with these leadership transitions. Limitations in this study include the sample size, particularly as it relates to surveying personnel in other conferences. Administrators of these conferences would not authorize a random sampling of their workforce. Also, those pastors and educators who return their surveys may not indeed be a random sample. A majority of those who wish to register their opinions may encourage like-minded colleagues to participate, thereby skewing the results. Additionally, there is a lack of prior research on this topic within my specific organization from which to glean former insights.

**Delimitations**

By way of delimitations, the researcher will intentionally not include support staff, locally funded, or other administrative personnel changes into this study. Similarly, transitions among pastors and educators within the local churches and schools, and managers and employees at the retail Christian Book Store will not be considered in this study due to limitations of time, personnel, and accessibility. The research population will also be limited to
allow the researcher to explore in a more focused way the implications of change among leaders with regional responsibilities and the impact of these changes on achieving the mission.

Additional delimitations include topics such as employee engagement and performance management. Though often associated with organizational succession planning, the researcher does not explore either of these topics in any great depth in this study. Instead, the researcher is concerned with post-transition behaviors and implications. Both employee engagement and performance management focus on the prevention of these changes, offering suggestions and opportunities to increase longevity among employees. The researcher did not consider for review confidential and other exiting employee data and records due to the sensitive nature of such documents. Surveys were structured using a Likert Scale rather than being open-ended for pastors and educators, while they will be open-ended for all other participants.

Finally, of the fifty-seven total SDA conferences, only the nine conferences closest to the size and scope of the Potomac Conference are engaged in this study. The researcher is not considering those conferences which are much smaller or significantly more abundant in size, membership, and administrative leadership.

**Thesis Statement**

Through the thoughtful analysis and implementation of this project, the creation of a successful model and document for succession planning for director/associate-level positions within the Potomac Conference Corporation of SDA will result.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Succession management as a function and discipline has evolved over the last few decades. The changing economy and dynamic business requirements have forced organizations to place greater importance on succession planning and to broaden the scope of the function. With the right understanding that every leader is at best an interim, the earlier planning begins, the more likely organizations are to succeed.29

There is an urgent cry for organizations, particularly nonprofits and churches, to be intentional concerning succession planning. A significant departure is predicted for nonprofit leaders in the coming years as Baby Boomers in crucial leadership positions will be entering retirement.30 Studies suggest that seventy-seven million baby boomers are expected to retire over the next decade.31 According to a Pew Research report, 10,000 of these same Baby Boomers will turn 65 every day over the next two decades.32 The rate of imminent retirements will challenge organizations because the number of vacant positions will surpass the number of qualified candidates available to fill them.33

29 Vanderbloemen and Bird, 30-31.

30 Santora and Bozer, How Nonprofit Organizations can Ensure Stability and Sustainability, 1.

31 Jerry David, “The Impact of Emotional Intelligence and Coaching on Senior Leadership Transitions at the Local Church Level.” (DMin diss., Regent University, 2016).


In July of 2015, 128 CEOs left their posts, marking the highest turnover among CEOs in eighteen months.\textsuperscript{34} Despite this urgent need, wisdom around succession remains one of the most significant needs of organizations today\textsuperscript{35}, with fifty-one percent of nonprofits citing not having formal succession plans in place for critical executive-level leadership positions.\textsuperscript{36}

William Vanderbloemen, in his book on pastoral succession planning, writes that the single most important thing a pastor or leader can do is to pass the baton well, creating an urgency to be very diligent in training and preparing leaders.\textsuperscript{37} Inevitably, every organization faces transitions in leadership. Studies show that those who best navigate the changes will be best positioned to achieve steadier roads along the way. Those who drop the baton will, in turn, lose the race.\textsuperscript{38} A well-designed and coordinated succession plan that is integrated with leadership development can enable administrators to avoid reliance on a replacement that is merely focused on finding a new version of the departed colleague.\textsuperscript{39} Succession planning is a deliberate and systematic effort to identify and develop potential leaders within an organization.\textsuperscript{40} It answers the question of who will lead the organization in the next three, five, or


\textsuperscript{35} Vanderbloemen and Bird, 32.


\textsuperscript{37} Vanderbloemen and Bird, 11.


even ten years. Having a defined and well-processed plan to fill leadership roles will yield fruitful results. As in the governmental system of the United States of America, the populous agree that the peaceful transition of power from one leader to the next is an essential characteristic of democratic government and a vital measure of its success.\(^{41}\) Leaving this critical decision to chance will greatly diminish an organization's ability to achieve its mission and vision objectives.

A variety of factors cause transitions in leadership. Factors include those which are within an organization’s control and those that are outside of their control. Transition factors are wide-ranging and can include the following, each with their implications:

- Graduations
- Promotions
- Forced Resignations
- Health Problems
- Disability
- Situational Crises
- Retirements
- Moral Failures
- Death\(^{42}\)

In some instances, employees leave not because they have a problem with the company or their jobs; instead, it is a matter of life unfolding. In other cases, employees have significant challenges and see transition as their only option. Attrition tends to be higher in companies located in transient cities and in organizations that hire older employees.\(^{43}\) Additional employee


\(^{42}\) Vanderbloemen, Next: Pastoral Succession that Works, 7.

transition factors include performance-related or other terminations, securing and accepting a better job, factors relating to job satisfaction such as an employee feeling stuck in their current role with no room for growth, receive little to no affirmation or recognition, or leave due to reasons surrounding a hostile or discriminatory work environment.\textsuperscript{44}

One national survey of over 3000 nonprofit executives found that sixty-seven percent reported intentions to exit within five years, yet had not given any manner of notice.\textsuperscript{45} Organizations without transition plans are at the highest risk of becoming victims of the unexpected.

Leaders do not always recognize change in the environment or the need for them to behave differently. During times of transition, leaders will often cling to the past or continue business as usual.\textsuperscript{46} The journey of leadership is rarely steady. At each change, leaders must be prepared to adopt new behaviors to succeed.

Succession plans are often not viewed as a priority because organizations have other issues they are dealing with, such as recruiting the talent they need for the present.\textsuperscript{47} Others find themselves short of the requisite time needed to develop such a plan. Even with the advantages that succession planning offers, active participation to deploy this strategy appears to be low among most business organizations.\textsuperscript{48}

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\textsuperscript{44} Taken from Lisa McQuerrey, “Employee turnover vs. attrition,” Small Business Chronicle. June 29, 2018. \url{https://smallbusiness.chron.com/employee-turnover-vs-attribution-15846.html}
\textsuperscript{45} McKee and Froelich, Executive Succession Planning, 65.
\textsuperscript{47} Gurchiek, “Don’t leave succession planning to chance,” 1.
\end{flushright}
In a 2018 article of *Training Industry*, author Julie Benezet shares three reasons why companies may lack a plan. First, companies may not have a plan because they allow client and employee demands to consume their day. Leaders too often find themselves victims of the “urgent important,” and the “urgent non-important” and precious time slips away as author Stephen Covey states regarding his time management matrix.\(^49\) Little time remains for the strategic task of succession planning.

Second, if the senior executive does not want new leadership, then no succession plan will work. Often there is a natural yet unhealthy merging of the leader’s identity with the leadership role, and preparing to give it away can be a challenge. One of the challenges to succession planning identified most frequently is the insecurity on the part of those currently in the leadership positions within an organization.\(^50\) In other instances, executives may have established a legacy and fear a successor will change it. To be successful, senior executives must recognize the value and necessity of developing a succession plan and see the overarching importance to the organization as a priority.

A third reason why a company may lack a plan is that leaders intentionally choose to avoid and to ignore the messiness of developing a succession plan. Management successions introduce uncertainty about future operations and financial policies for stakeholders.\(^51\)

\(^{49}\) Stephen R. Covey, *The seven habits of highly effective people: restoring the character ethic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).


can require serious time and money, not to mention uncomfortable conversations.\textsuperscript{52} More often than not, leadership defers preparation until some critical point.\textsuperscript{53} Ignoring this necessity allows many leaders to function in a false sense of security while unwittingly placing themselves in danger of sudden and swift change.

Several additional factors inhibit organizations from tackling this necessary task. The sensitive aspect of retirement and retirement preparation ranks high on the list.\textsuperscript{54} Deciding when to retire may be one of the most important decisions an individual makes during his or her lifetime. Retirement raises issues about loss of status and power. “But while financial and health concerns are a major part of the retirement decision, there are other factors that enter into this decision that are unrelated to an individual’s financial and health status,” says Melissa Knoll, research analyst with the Office of Retirement Policy at the Social Security Administration.\textsuperscript{55} Stepping down can bring with it emotions similar to the grief caused by separation from the day-to-day life of a business.\textsuperscript{56} For this reason, leaders tend to avoid the necessary task of succession planning.

On the other end of the spectrum are young leaders. A common mistake made by many private business owners is to delay their exit planning because they believe that they are too


\textsuperscript{54} Vanderbloemen and Bird, 12.

\textsuperscript{55} Taken from Social Security Administration \url{https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v71n4/v71n4p15.html}

\textsuperscript{56} Paula Drury, “Passing the Baton: Successful Succession Planning in a Family Business,” Human Resources Management International Digest, Vol. 24, 3 (May 2016): 35-37. DOI \url{https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-02-2016-0016}
young, or that they are immune to personal disaster. As a result, they do not plan well enough in advance, nor do they possess a sense of urgency in the development of such plans.

Finally, planning is inhibited due to the notoriously thin management ranks from which to develop internal candidates, and the trauma experienced when leadership transitions unsuccessfully. It is a struggle to develop pipelines of talent when the pipeline is dry, or when no pipeline exists as nonprofits work with less than needed budgets. Add to this an unsuccessful leadership transition, and it can be challenging to recover.

More and more organizations are tossing aside the strategic planning process and are trending toward looking externally for a charismatic corporate savior to lead their companies. As a result, in these instances, CEO selections are tending to be less analytical and less rigorous. A study from the Harvard Business Review found that twenty-thirty percent of boards now replace outgoing CEOs with external hires helping to fuel “the cult of the outsider,” leaving promising internal, and less charismatic candidates overlooked. While the prospect of a charismatic savior is enticing, companies must keep in mind that selecting the most qualified and well-prepared candidates for leadership positions is a critical decision with a longstanding impact on current and future activities of the organization. Responsible and effective leaders take the time to invest wisely in the future of their institutions by establishing transparent succession

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processes sufficient to uphold a commitment to their values and beliefs for generations to come.62

Succession planning is a subject guaranteed to generate questions as everyone wants to know how to get it right.63 This strategic planning is a vital part of the development of an organization, one that refreshes people and renews vision.”64 There are several benefits to developing a successful succession strategy. The first benefit includes reduced costs. A study from the Harvard Business Review suggested that it takes between six months to a year to break even in terms of costs and productivity of those recruited to crucial positions.65 Without a succession strategy in place, companies run the risk of spending valuable resources recruiting or promoting leaders who turn out to be the wrong fit and ultimately must be replaced. Succession plans minimize costs through strategic responses and intentional leadership replacement via pipelines of skilled and developed talent ready to fill in the gaps.

A second benefit is that of continuity. By establishing a firm succession strategy roadmap that both identifies leadership positions and the potential candidates who might fill them, companies can better anticipate the impact of sudden changes as vacancies occur while allowing the business to continue to operate smoothly.66 Times of potential confusion and chaos will be


steadied through continuity, which is defined as the unbroken and consistent existence or operation over some time. Dori Meinert of the Society of Human Resources Management writes that to help ensure successful transitions, HR departments should:

- Ask leaders to identify future needs
- Identify possible future leaders
- Keep it simple
- Develop an action plan
- Start small
- Be transparent
- Update the plan regularly

Carefully crafted plans will not only aid in preparing for the future, but it will also help companies to engage and retain top performers in the present. Amid the twofold pressures of pending retirements and the increasing value of intellectual capital and knowledge, it is more necessary than ever before for organizations to plan for leadership continuity and employee advancement.

A third benefit includes providing a strong talent pipeline, which leadership can leverage when the need arises. A talent pipeline, also known as a recruiting pool, is designed to give an organization a continuous supply of high-quality and interested internal and external recruiting prospects from which to choose. It is strategic because it has a long-term talent-supply focus, which translates into critical jobs being filled faster and with higher quality and more interested prospects. This aids in providing a structure for lateral movement without the risk of positions

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becoming vacant, preserving intellectual property, and increasing productivity and commitment to performance, which in turn increases retention.\textsuperscript{69}

John Sullivan, HR thought leader who specializes in providing high-business-impact talent management solutions, offers twelve business benefits from having a recruiting talent pipeline of which his top seven are listed below:

- **You will hire better-performing new hires** – Given the additional time (and diminished time pressure) to find, vet, and accurately assess candidates, recruiters will end up with a large number of high-quality prospects.

- **You’ll hire exceptional talent that you couldn’t with standard recruiting** – Maximizing on the candidate experience and extended two-way communications allowing greater customization.

- **You can identify developing talent early** – Because there is no rush, recruiters can identify prospects who are still developing but who have a promising trajectory.

- **Higher offer acceptance/retention rates among new hires** – Since decisions are not needing to be made immediately, prospects have more time to learn about the company, and there are fewer surprises once they arrive.

- **Lower salary costs** – The stretched out talent pipeline approach reduces competition and bidding, thereby lowering salaries while maintaining quality.

- **Critical open positions filled more rapidly** – Large volumes of talent in your inventory have already been pre-identified and vetted.

- **You will provide your organization with a competitive advantage**\textsuperscript{70}

When key positions become vacant, and the vacancy is not filled for an extended period, organizations are faced with many negative implications. Loss of time and productivity are paramount among the list as individuals are pulled away to interview candidates or train people.

\textsuperscript{69} Harrell, Succession planning, 2.

\textsuperscript{70} Taken from John Sullivan, “The Many Benefits from a Talent Pipeline and How it Improves Quality of Hire,” ERE Recruiting Intelligence May 16, 2016 https://www.ere.net/the-many-benefits-from-a-talent-pipeline-and-how-it-improves-quality-of-hire/
on the job. Lack of leadership continuity and increased senior leadership turnover may also lead to decreased organizational performance. Also, there is the risk of unrealized revenue as key deliverables are not completed. Perhaps the most significant risk in succession planning is failing to engage in the process at all.

The literature highlighted the pervasiveness of a lack of succession planning throughout non-profit organizations and churches while also showing the sobering implications for such a deficiency. Churches and organizations are left in leadership tailspins while also experiencing loss in momentum and membership, and new search committees made up of volunteers who have never hired anyone to take the lead when unplanned transitions occur.

Breaks in momentum negatively impact morale, create employee disruption, and heighten employee turnover. The literature seemed to determine that the culture has a better chance of continuing when an organization plans carefully for leadership succession though studies show that most nonprofits fall short of this critical strategic task.

Transitioning is a thorough process and should not be approached casually. Coaching, mentorship, and ongoing support are encouraged to assist in facilitating the succession process. Coaching should become part of the culture and fabric of an organization, with the establishment

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72 Gurchiek, “Don’t leave succession planning to chance,” 1.

73 Vanderbloemen and Bird, 12.


75 Santora and Bozer, “How Nonprofit Organizations can Ensure Stability,” 1
of coaching circles serving as powerful mechanisms for mentorship, learning, and growth.\textsuperscript{76} Candidates with leadership aptitude who might become potential successors should be identified early and given meaningful responsibilities within the organization.\textsuperscript{77} Active mentorship and coaching opportunities provide candidates with the skills, knowledge, and experiences they can benefit from as they receive grooming for future positions.\textsuperscript{78}

Some sectors, such as the health care industry, utilize what they call professional development educators who serve as leadership succession coaches. These educators serve a critical role and assist in the development of succession programs, implementation, and evaluation. Individuals with extraordinary passion and capacity for transformational change are not easily discovered, and so the role of these educators is to assess the workforce for those with the highest potential and develop them to take on future roles in the company.\textsuperscript{79}

Four factors determine how difficult a transition of power will be to facilitate: scale, timing, familiarity, and frequency.\textsuperscript{80} Large-scale change such as mergers or acquisitions require much more time and planning to promote smoothly. Sudden transitions are even more delicate to navigate. It was found that people were more accepting of changes in leadership when the new leader is someone with whom they are familiar. Frequent turnover can have a significant and lasting negative impact on a workforce as instability permeates the organization.


\textsuperscript{77} Vester, \textit{First Succession}, 32

\textsuperscript{78} Valentine, “Maintaining Organizational Culture through Leadership Succession Planning,” 130-135.


\textsuperscript{80} Mannathikuzhiyil, “How to Manage Internal Transitions of Power,” 1.
General agreement exists on the importance of succession planning; however, there is less agreement on how that plan or the process should look. Researchers in the area of CEO succession planning suggest such plans be board-driven, collaborative processes that are openly communicated. These processes must be continuous and include identifying and evaluating critical leadership criteria and competencies. Specific goals must be outlined, and post-succession assessment is paramount.\(^{81}\)

Best practices for succession planning include following these five steps. First, it is beneficial for an organization to conduct an evaluation of key positions while clarifying strategic goals and determining the scope of the succession plan. This evaluation includes identifying critical positions that need to have a succession plan. All positions are not created equally; therefore, critical positions must have a plan for transition.

The second step incorporates the intentional identification of key talent within the organization by conducting a talent review. A talented employee is one who is a leader at present, and who demonstrates the potential for future promotion in the future. The evaluation process is a strategic balance between performance and potential.\(^{82}\) Important questions to consider include who are the leaders who are on the radar of managers and executives? Who has leadership potential? Who are the critical employees? The answers to these questions help to prime the pump as the names of qualified and potential candidates emerge.


The third step involves the assessment of key talent. For each person on the leadership radar, leaders must assess the primary development needs for the candidate to be ready to serve at that next level or position. Are there any potential candidates who are prepared for promotional opportunities within three or six months, and if so, what competencies need to be gained in the process? If there is already a performance management process, the feedback can be used to ascertain current job performance.

The fourth step involves the actual generation of the development plans for each of the candidates who emerged. This step consists of creating a roadmap to critical positions with supporting, structured development plans. These development plans are then given to supervisors of the various areas for implementation. Building relationships and investing time and energy into the professional growth and development of employees can reap immeasurable benefits for everyone involved while providing exceptional value to the organization. It should be noted that a high level of training does not necessarily mean a high level of expertise. Knowledge transfer is affected by the behavior of the participant, perceived value of the knowledge, the methods of sharing, and the willingness of the receiver.

The incorporation of workforce development programs is a significant strategy healthy organizations utilize to promote and to safeguard a culture continuing education. These development programs focus on the continued growth of employees who already work in an


organization. Efforts ensure that existing employees clearly understand organizational goals and will have the necessary skills to perform at high levels. Through intentional programs, cross-training, leadership training, and mentorship, corporate leaders develop pools of more qualified candidates for future management and critical leadership positions.\textsuperscript{85}

The fifth step involves monitoring and conducting a review of the development plan for the candidates. This includes an annual or semi-annual review status check with management.\textsuperscript{86}

As milestones are reached, the plans are updated to reflect the changes.

Succession planning is like a relay race. During a relay race, the baton passes from one runner to the next. Business professor Bruno Dyck shares that the relay race model of succession suggests that there are positive relationships between four factors and successful organizational performance. The four elements are vital in understanding the dynamics of the succession planning process and include the following:

- **Sequencing:** Focuses on the context and design of the selection process and where the organization currently stands in the organizational life cycle
- **Timing:** Focuses on the environment and the resulting impact as a result of the succession and overlap between the incumbent and successor
- **Baton Passing Technique:** Focuses on the details of how succession will be achieved; considering leadership style and differences among incumbent and successor


\textsuperscript{86} Taken from Shellie Haroski, “The importance of succession planning and best practices,” \url{https://www.masc.sc/SiteCollectionDocuments/Human%20Resources/Succession%20Planning.pdf}
• Communication: Focuses on providing cooperation, respectful and clear communication between the incumbent and successor, interpersonal relations, and the relationship between the successor and incumbent.  

Some assert that a well-designed leadership succession plan allows the incumbent the opportunity to overlap with the successor for some time during the transition. This overlap helps maximize continuity of service as well as provides an environment for a better acceptance of the new leader.  

A recurring topic as it relates to succession, particularly CEO and executive succession, is when to fill roles externally versus internally. Some suggest that internal successors will likely have a more significant positive impact on firm performance than an outsider as they would be able to leverage organizational knowledge and a strong network. Outsiders will need at least six months to several years to develop such understanding, and until then would be vulnerable to impatience, dissatisfaction, and opposition. Others seem to suggest that an outsider is more likely to have a more positive impact, mainly when the firm is not performing well. “Generally speaking, outside successors are recommended when a significant change is needed,” says David Berke from the Center for Creative Leadership, “as it is believed the outsider can bring a fresh perspective unencumbered by old political alliances and strategic and operational approaches.”


that are out of touch.”

Post-succession assessments will shed greater light on this while providing insights on a case-by-case basis from which to draw themes.

Succession planning is important and is an urgent necessity in all organizations; in fact, it is said that leadership succession is perhaps one of the most crucial events in the life of an organization because of the substantive and symbolic importance of the leadership position.

It is critical to the growth and success of an organization while also providing an opportunity to develop the next generation of leaders. Well-designed succession programs ensure that smooth transitions are happening among senior leadership positions, and also at other levels in the organization in order to maintain continuity in business operations.

Although the trend of mass retirements is not a surprise to many organizations, the impending retirement of mature workers make it more essential than ever for institutions to put future-focused strategies in place to achieve effective leadership transition and sustainability within their organizations. However, when it comes to churches there is no uniform approach.

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91 https://web-b-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=d9cbfa8-154f-4d6f-b15d-3a2f40e2a547%-40pdc-v-sessmgr03


Andy Homer writes in his book, Leaders in Transition, “I have observed with amazement and disappointment the trauma, frustration, disruption, and instability that church congregations face in the wake of pastoral transitions." \(^{95}\) Charles Swindoll once said publically that pastors do not retire hoping to preach until they die. \(^{96}\) In contrast, another pastor, Leith Anderson, started planning his succession early in his ministry. Upon his retirement he stepped away from the process “trusting in God and confident in his church leadership to minister to the needs of the next generation.” \(^{97}\) Organizational leaders are encouraged to be transparent, to formulate a team, and to be intentional while also methodical in dealing with change. \(^{98}\)

Despite its widespread acclaim throughout literature, there are those who believe succession planning is unnecessary. In 2017 a survey was conducted by the Aberdeen Group in which over 500 executives at leading companies were asked about their workforce management insights. In the resulting report executives were said to have given the following four reasons as to why they are not proponents of succession planning.

First, they were confident that the ambitious employees they hire are absorbing everything they can from supervisors and that knowledge will prepare them for the future. Second, hierarchies in organizations are gradually flattening in an effort to break down social, title-based barriers to decision-making and communication. Third, millennials and those of Generation Z prefer fluidity and opportunity rather than rigid career plans. Finally, because of

\(^{95}\) Andy Homer, “Leaders In Transition: A Guide to Leadership Succession in the Church and Other Faith-Based Organizations,” (Bloomington, WestBow Press), 2016.

\(^{96}\) Vanderbloemen and Bird, 20.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{98}\) Mannathikuzhiyil, “How to manage internal transitions of power,” 1.
the speed with which businesses must operate, they must be light and agile in their operations – able to adapt quickly. Succession plans do not assist in facilitating this adaptability.99

The scriptures offer no uniform blueprint, cookie-cutter template, or step-by-step approach that outlines a specific path for a seamless succession.100 Instead, there seemed to be in the New Testament a succession of tradition and task, rather than of an office. In the Old Testament, a famous person's power or greatness lived on in an heir or successor after the famous person died.101 Often this power was passed along to one’s son, but this was by no means a template. Examples of leadership transitions from Moses to Joshua, Aaron to Eliezer, Saul to David, Elijah to Elisha, Jesus to the disciples, and the disciples onward do not reflect a consistent process of transition through the Biblical account as both God and man handed down leadership.102

Multiple sources and authors outlined what they felt to be the best practices regarding the planning process. William Rothwell, among many others, advocates for a systematic implementation of a deliberate strategy.103 In the Journal of Nurse Management, author Mary Beth Griffith writes that succession planning should incorporate the identification, recruitment, retention, development, coaching, and mentoring of potential leaders early on.104 Leaders must


100 Vanderbloemen and Bird, 10


102 Vanderbloemen and Bird, 25.

103 Rothwell, Effective Succession Planning, 15

acknowledge and confront the issue of succession head-on rather than bury their head in the sand and must commit to a leadership development planning strategy.\textsuperscript{105}

Non-profit and church organizations will be of primary focus for this project due to the denominationally based context of the researcher. Multiple themes emerged upon review of the literature including the urgency and necessity of successfully managing leadership transitions, the vital need for mentorship, ongoing support, and coaching, implications for lack of planning, and best practices concerning succession planning.

In conclusion, while leaders recognize the need to have a succession planning program, too many are practicing less than ideal programs.\textsuperscript{106} As the economy continues to change, organizations and churches cannot ignore the issue of succession planning. Nor can they simply wait for the emergence of a charismatic savior to deliver them. With the predictable forecast of the baby boomer's vacancy from the workforce and the ongoing risk of sudden, unforeseeable transitions, those organizations who pass the batons the best will be those who are the most successful in achieving their missions and visions, and in healthily sustaining the forward movement of their organizations.

\textbf{Theological Framework}

\textbf{Strong and Weak Succession}

Leadership transitions have taken place for as long as there have been leaders. The responsibility for carrying the vision and values of God’s divine purposes throughout the progression of biblical history involved the transference from one generation of leaders to the

\textsuperscript{105} Santora and Bozer, \textit{How Nonprofit Organizations Can Ensure Stability and Sustainability through Succession Planning}, 1.

next. The transferring process between leaders of each generation is best referred to as succession. ¹⁰⁷ Such successions are replete in both Old and New Testament Scripture. God is active in preparing leaders for the inevitabilities of transition even before successors realize they are being prepared for a transition.¹⁰⁸ Yet the execution of succession takes a myriad of forms.

In ancient and Mediterranean texts, succession does not require that the successor fully replace the predecessor. In some texts, the successor replaces the predecessor so fully that it is almost as if the predecessor has returned to office or come back to life (strong succession), while in other texts the predecessor passes on to the successor a task, limited authority, knowledge, or tradition, etc. without a significant element of replacement (weak succession).¹⁰⁹

The varying degrees of replacement can be seen in light of the illustration of two poles. At one end there is what is referred to as weak succession, while at the other end is strong succession. Examples of strong succession include the transition of leadership between the prophet Elijah to Elisha (1 Kings 19 – 2 Kings 2). An example of weak succession include King David’s sons serving as chief officials at the side of the King (1 Chron. 18:17) where they held limited, and delegated authority.¹¹⁰ Scripture illustrates that there is no singular model or plan to create a smooth succession.¹¹¹ From start to finish, leadership hand-offs take place in a variety of ways.


¹⁰⁸ Vanderbloemen and Bird, 29.


¹¹¹ Vanderbloemen and Bird, 25.
Scripture on Retirement and Succession

Numbers records the term retirement one time. The author writes, “Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘this is what applies to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting. But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work anymore. They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep an obligation, but they themselves shall do no work,” (Num. 8:23-26).

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon laments of leaving the work of his labors to the one to come after him. He writes, “Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun…For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it,” (Ecc. 2:18-21).

The identity of a leader is often adjusted as he or she prepares for succession. In the book of Deuteronomy, the identity of Moses changes at Mount Pisgah. The author records, “Go to the top of Pisgah and look to the west, north, south, and east, and see it with your own eyes, for you will not cross this Jordan. But commission Joshua and encourage and strengthen him, for he will cross over ahead of the people and enable them to inherit this land that you will see,” (Deut. 3:27-29). Moses went up the mountain as the leader of the people. He came down the mountain with the primary task of preparing Joshua for the time when he would no longer be with them. It is as though God confronted him with the need to implement a succession plan.

Finally, David, at the end of his life, offered up a prayer to God. In it, he thanks God for the multitude of provisions, wealth, and blessings he had received over his life. 1 Chronicles
documents the following as David prays over his people and for his son, “Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep this desire forever in the thoughts of the hearts of your people, and confirm their hearts toward you. Give my son Solomon a whole heart to keep and to carry out all your commands, your decrees, your statues, and to build the temple for which I have made provision,” (1 Chron. 29:18-19).

Succession and the Trinity

The doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is one God, but three co-eternal persons — the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit — as one God in three Divine persons. Each of these persons was and remain active in world affairs and the salvation of man. While working in perfect unity, each person of the Trinity played a leading role through scripture.

The book of Genesis introduces the Trinity, where it reads, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless, and darkness covered the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God hovered over the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2). The apostle John shines further light on this, where he writes of Jesus as the Word at the beginning of his New Testament epistle. He writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him were all things made” (John 1:1-3a). Scripture affirms that these three co-eternal persons existed from the very beginning and were present at the creation of the world.

The scriptures describe God as just, holy, merciful, and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness. As the story of the Old Testament unfolds, the reader finds God the Father exercising patient love in his dealings with Adam and the fallen race. God continues to show his gracious patience in the calling and guiding of His special people through Abraham, the patriarchs, and the prophets. It is God the Father who washed the world of its sins
through the flood, who called Abraham to sacrifice his Isaac, who fed his people the manna from heaven in the wilderness, and who fought their many battles as they conquered the Promised Land. But God’s plan was not complete. Many of the actions of the Old Testament were foreshadows of God, the Son, who was to come to reveal the love of God in the flesh.

God the Father to God the Son

In many ways, the New Testament begins the succession or transition of leadership from God the Father to God the Son. Galatians 4:4 reads that “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons.” The New Testament begins with the revelation of Jesus, God the Son, the Messiah, as the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, starting with the very first prophecy of Genesis 3:15. Jesus told his disciples and the multitudes that followed him throughout his ministry on earth that he was not here on his own or for his purposes. Instead, it was His Father who sent him (Matthew 10:40; Mark 9:37; John 13:20). Those who received Him and his Kingdom were also receiving his Father, for Jesus and His Father are one (John 10:30).

Jesus came to reveal the character of the Father and was God with us. He perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. He manifested God’s power through his healing ministry among the people, through the casting out of evil spirits, raising the dead, and even commanding the wind and the waves. God, the Son, suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins. He was raised to life according to His Word on the third day. Toward the end of his three and a half year ministry, he told the disciples, “but very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Helper (Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7).
God the Son to God the Holy Spirit

Jesus commissioned his disciples at His ascension to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Jesus promised them that He would send the Helper to give them power. The disciples are gathered in one place as the book of Acts begins. Suddenly the sound of a rushing wind came from heaven and filled the whole house (Acts 2). In response to this, Peter addresses the multitudes and declares that what the people had witnessed was a fulfillment of the prophet Joel, affirmed by Jesus, that in the last day, God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17). The Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of scripture filled Christ’s life with power, draws and convicts people of sin, and of those who respond, he renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Spirit extends spiritual gifts to his church and empowers it to bear witness of Christ.

Successions in scripture often reflect the complete replacement of one leader with another. The succession in the leadership of the Trinity, however, bears evidence of transitioning where leadership passes seamlessly from one member of the Godhead to the next. At the same time, the replaced leader remains active to continue the missional movement in a fully supportive way.

Old Testament – Moses to Joshua

The most notable model of leadership transition from the Old Testament is from Moses, the prophet of the Lord, to Joshua son of Nun (Num. 27; Josh. 1). Numbers 27:16, 17 records Moses praying to the Lord to “please appoint a new man as leader for the community…so that the community of the Lord will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” In response to this prayer the Lord replied that Moses was to take Joshua, and to lay his hands on him.
A further exploration of scripture reveals that the Lord had been preparing Joshua to lead for quite some time. In fact, forty years before Moses’ death, God had begun to prepare Joshua for the task of leading His people. Joshua is mentioned for the first time in Exodus 17:9 where he is selected by Moses to lead the Israelite army into battle against the army of Amalek. He is again mentioned in Exodus 24:13 where he is referred to as Moses’ “assistant” as they climb the mountain of God, with Moses serving as Joshua’s mentor. In Exodus 33:11, it is written that “Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Afterward Moses would return to the camp, but the young man who assisted him, Joshua son of Nun, would remain behind in the Tent of Meeting.”

In addition to his military development, Joshua was exposed to God’s direct dealings with Moses, thus enhancing his spiritual development and fitness for leadership. Joshua was present when the Lord sent His Spirit upon seventy leaders (Num. 11:17), and was chosen by Moses to be one of the twelve spies sent to spy out the land (Num. 13:8). After Joshua had both developed and proven his character, and experienced God, the Lord was ready to ordain him to even greater leadership.

At the death of Moses, Joshua succeeded him as the leader of the people of Israel. Under his leadership the people crossed the Jordan River, and for the next seven years successfully led the people in battle, defeating kings and conquering the cities comprising the Promised Land. Joshua oversaw the process of dividing land among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joshua’s succession was successful for a number of reasons. The first reason was that Joshua was willing to step up to the plate. Once he had the assurance that God was with him (Joshua 1:1-6) he moved forward with strength and courage, while also relying on the model and example set before him by Moses. Second, Joshua was a leader who was willing to follow. He
was instructed to obey all of the law Moses gave to the people and to not turn aside from it (Joshua 1:7). Joshua followed the pathway set before him and was rewarded with the blessings and favor of God.

A third reason Joshua’s leadership was successful was the fact that the people were willing to follow him (Joshua 1:16). Following his discourse to them, the people replied that as they had obeyed Moses, so they would obey him. They respected him having witnessed him being mentored under Moses. Finally, Joshua was willing to lead the way (Joshua 3:6-8). As the Lord began to exalt him in the eyes of the people, Joshua led the way as God instructed.\footnote{Taken from Dale Roach, “Eight Leadership Characteristics of Joshua.” https://likeateam.com/8-leadership-characteristics-of-joshua/}

Saul to David

Rules of leadership succession varied throughout the ancient Near East. It should be noted that kingship in ancient Israel was not originally hereditary.\footnote{Taken from Professor Julye Bidmead “Royal Succession.” https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/ask-a-scholar/royal-succession} Leaders and judges of ancient times were selected at the discretion of God to lead under the theocracy. In response to Israel’s demand for a king, God chooses Saul to serve as the first king of Israel (1 Samuel 9-10).\footnote{McFall, Leslie. “The Chronology of Saul and David.” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society vol. 53, 3 (2010). 476. https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/53/53-3/McFall_JETS_53-3_pp_475-533.pdf} God soon rejects Saul’s leadership (1 Samuel 15) and instructs the prophet Samuel to anoint David who was the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons.

Saul intended to kill David in order to deny him the opportunity to become the future king of Israel desiring, rather, that he remain or his son Jonathan succeed his throne (1 Samuel
For years Saul actively resisted the plans and succession selection of God; however, David had already been anointed as king in a private ceremony by the prophet Samuel years prior to his public coronation.

David had been anointed king at age seventeen, but sat on the throne at age thirty, some thirteen years later. As a teenager, a prophet of God had come and had anointed him with sacred oil. During the years in between this event and his taking the throne, David was trained by God during some extremely difficult circumstances. Through it all, he learned how to handle crises, how to love his enemies, how to honor authority, do justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God. David’s success as Israel’s greatest king for forty years (1 Kings 14:11) was particularly due to his training during those thirteen years of preparation.

Saul’s succession planning is an example of a failed plan. Although a man of intelligence, Saul’s leadership did not take long to begin a downward spiral. He made rash decisions and promises (1 Sam. 14:24), was overly influenced by the opinion of others (1 Sam. 13:8-9), he disobeyed the commands of God (1 Sam. 15:24), and his struggle with ego and pride robbed him from living out his destiny and from leading through a successful leadership transition (1 Samuel 15:12).

Saul was granted a myriad of opportunities to mentor David into leadership. Rather than guiding him along and taking him under his wing, Saul gave in to his own insecurities and severed the relationship he could have had with young David. He led as though he would be the


King of Israel forever. Leaders of today can learn quite a few lessons from Saul’s failed leadership and transition plan.

David to Solomon

Ancient Israel like many societies struggled with the challenge of succession. Hereditary kingship began in a more direct way after David’s death when Solomon his son succeeded him on the throne. The story of Solomon’s ascension to David’s throne epitomizes the struggles in handling the issue of the transfer of power.

The succession account begins with the reader being told that David is old and advanced in years while in private conversation with his servants (1 Kings 1:2). Though old and feeble, unaware of the events unfolding around him, David becomes decisive. Of his nineteen sons, Solomon was chosen to become David’s successor (1 Chron. 23:1). God later confirmed this selection with David (1 Chron. 28:6) although Solomon was not David’s first-born son.

David took great pains to outline for his son careful instructions for his leadership, including the plans of the Lord to build the temple. In David’s preparation of Solomon, though brief, three elements of succession planning can be seen. First, he provided the necessary resources for Solomon. In 1 Chronicles 22:15 David arranged for “all kinds of artisans” and had developed relationships with to work for Solomon after his death. Second, he imparted

\[\text{References:\n}\]


knowledge and relationships to Solomon. David began to include Solomon in the leadership structures and rituals of the kingdom shortly before his death (1 Kings 1:28-40). Third, he transferred power decisively to Solomon. Solomon was subsequently anointed as king over Israel (1 Chron. 29:22).

Josiah

Josiah, the youngest king of Judah, was only eight years old when he ascended the throne. According to the Scriptures, his father, Amon, was a sinful king and an idolater (2 Kings 21:19-20). Unlike his own father, Manasseh, who repented at the end of his life, Amon continued with his evil rule which led to captivity and his own assassination.

Little if any preparation was offered to Josiah prior to his ascension to the throne. In spite of a father who was evil, scripture records that he was obedient to the Lord (2 Kings 22:2). Josiah was instrumental in bringing reform to the Kingdom of Judah. In his mid to late teen years, King Josiah went throughout the kingdom destroying the idols and high places erected by his father. He assigned men to repair the temple, while bringing the hearts of the people back to following the Lord (1 Kings 22; 23).

Witnessing bad leadership can serve as a practical model of how not to lead. As was in the case of Josiah, though not supplied with a positive template or plan to follow he led with moral courage even at a young age by obeying God and in doing what was right. He followed in the way of the Davidic dynasty.121

Elijah to Elisha

A second notable example of succession planning and leadership transitioning in the Old Testament occurred between the prophets Elijah to Elisha. Elijah was a prophet who lived in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Ahab. During his cave discourse with the discouraged Elijah, God instructs Elijah to “anoint Jehu grandson of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and to anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from the town of Abel-meholah to replace you as my prophet.” These instructions come about seven years before the end of Elijah’s ministry.

Elisha matured under Elijah’s mentorship. He was present during Elijah’s confrontation with Jezebel and King Ahab (1 Kings 21:1-29), as fire was called down from heaven (2 Kings 1:1-12), and as Elijah rebuked the son of King Ahab for seeking counsel from false gods (2 Kings 1:13-17).

While on their journey to Bethel toward the Jordan River, Elijah instructed Elisha to stay to pray. Each time Elisha refused to leave the side of his master. He remained determined to follow him. Scripture records that upon requesting a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, a chariot of fire descended from heaven and swept Elijah up off of the ground taking him toward heaven.

New Testament – Jesus to His Disciples

From the onset of His earthly ministry Jesus appointed twelve individuals to accompany and to be mentored by him in the way (Mark 3:14). In Matthew 16, Jesus changes one of his disciples, Peter’s name from Simon to Peter, and in a symbolic act accompanying succession Jesus responds: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church…I will give to you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.
And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18-19). Jesus continues to share with the disciples what will soon take place. With his journey soon leading him to the cross, he passes this authority and message to his successors so that the mission will continue. This is further affirmed in his commission to them on the mountain where they are charged to “go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 20:19-20).

Jesus continuously invested in the preparation of His disciples, so that they may be able to continue with His work but also to pass it along to future generations. Some suggest that there were two phases in Jesus’ ministry – his development of teams, and his appointment of successors. Scripture describes that although He had many followers, He selected twelve with whom He spent significantly more time and to whom He devoted more teaching. Even among these twelve, He had a more focused relationship with Peter, James, and John. He designed a collaborative leadership approach for the apostles with Peter as the general spokesperson which was based on gifting and character. As additional, more formalized roles in the church were added, representatives were selected based on aspects such as faith, doctrine, and character.

122 Stepp, *Succession in the NT world*, 167.


Paul to Timothy

The early Christian church formed during a time of enormous change and tremendous pressure.\textsuperscript{126} To sustain the movement, it was vital to select, train, and to prepare successors to facilitate the leadership and needs of the church. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul writes of how Jesus entrusted the gospel to him, thereby passing along to him apostolic functioning. Of this encounter he writes: “For the gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am sure that he is able to guard me until the Day what has been entrusted to me,” (1 Tim. 1:11-12).

Paul then speaks of entrusting the commandment to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3; 1:18). Affirming the mentoring which has hitherto taken place, Paul challenges Timothy to “rekindle the gift of God that is within you” (1 Tim. 1:6), “hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me – guarding the good treasure,” (1 Tim. 1:13-14), “to entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well what you have heard,” (1 Tim. 4:9-13). Although Timothy never becomes an apostle, he is admonished to continue on the work of the church. Paul writes that Christian leaders should be like a farmer, workman, or a vessel who is continually being formed and working diligently (2 Tim. 2).\textsuperscript{127}

Three core constructs of the early church might be deduced from a careful evaluation of succession planning and leadership transition in scripture. The first would be to select leaders with the right experience. The second to select leaders with the right character. Finally, the third

\textsuperscript{126} Hollinger, \textit{Leadership Development}, 157.

would be to select leaders with the right competencies for the job. Coupled with these core constructs must be the continued training, developing, and nurturing of these future leaders.

**Theoretical Framework**

Succession is a natural part of life and leadership. Planning for such transitions is important in order to minimize organizational exposure. Contemporary succession planning involves a progressive, generational approach to ensure organizational stability and leadership development.\(^{128}\) Succession plans help organizations develop and retain key talent, increase engagement, diversify the pool of potential leaders, and mitigate risk with respect to key positions in leadership and operations.\(^{129}\)

Changes in leadership result from a number of reasons including death, disability, health challenges, new assignments, moral failures, and retirement. It is incumbent upon leadership teams in this modern age to develop and to implement effective plans for leadership transitions within their organizations. By developing pools of talent, organizations can ensure continuity and stability.

Christ initiated the process of succession planning for the Christian church, following the Old Testament pattern, by intentionally selecting and developing the apostles who later selected and developed others in leadership. This process, which was critical to the success of the early church, is vital to all sustainable organizations.\(^{130}\) Though differences exist between the early

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\(^{130}\) Hollinger, *Leadership Development*, 158.
church and modern organizations, important lessons can be learned from the approach to succession used in Scripture.

Succession planning is now a requirement for nearly all publicly traded companies. Facing a season when no one knows who is in charge is just too risky to not have a plan.\textsuperscript{131} Yet, with the unique nuances of each season of change, plans and details must be tailored to each situation while also bathed in prayer and the acknowledgement of God’s leading.

Models among churches and other non-profit administrative teams span the gamut. On one side of the spectrum are organizations with little to no plan at all. At the other end are those which have well-developed succession plans in place. Nonprofits that are serious about their own sustainability will also be serious about planning for smooth and thoughtful transitions of leadership.

Wendy Lazarus and Laurie Lipper, co-founders and co-presidents of The Children’s Partnership (TCP), a California-based national children’s advocacy organization serving underserved children, offer several approaches to leadership transition gleaned from their experience in their nonprofit organization:

1. Fully unpacking the decision – With leadership transitions being a delicate process, contracting with third-party consultants are viable options to assist in assessing the landscape and to help turn those results into a concrete action plan.

2. Make the transition a launch pad – Spend time with the search firm and board engaging in discussions surrounding the identification of a new leader who would fit the description emphasizing the mission and future of the organization.

\textsuperscript{131} Vanderbloemen and Bird, \textit{Next Succession Planning that Works}, 8.
3. Set the right tone – Focus on the importance of the organization’s work and the need for a new generation of leaders. Recognize that attitudes and behaviors of leaders would inform the attitudes and behaviors of the board, staff, and colleagues. Keep all affected parties focused on the mission.

4. Engage the Staff – Solicit their thoughts and input at various parts in the transition. Communication is key.¹³²

William Rothwell establishes a range of criterion for systematic succession planning and management. Considerations include the following:

- Assessment of present requirements
- Assessment of future requirements
- Appraisal of individual performance
- Assessment of an individual’s future potential
- Establishing individual development plans
- Establishing competency models for targeted groups
- Evaluating the succession planning program
- Providing a statement of values to govern the effort
- Consideration for experience and capability¹³³

Checklists are often used to assist organizations build successful succession planning models. Aly Sterling in his five-step model for successful succession planning suggests beginning each plan by assessing what vacancies your nonprofit succession plan will address. Targeted plans should be created which address different kinds of possible vacancies to include executive directors, presidents, high-level staff, and board members. Two additional plans should be created to address both emergency and planned departures.¹³⁴

¹³² Taken from Laurie Lipper and Wendy Lazarus, “Six Strategies for Nonprofit Leadership Transition: How to successfully hand off your organization to the next generation,” https://ssir.org/articles/entry/six_strategies_for_nonprofit_leadership_transition?utm_source=Enews&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=SSIR_Now&utm_content=Title

¹³³ Rothwell, Effective Succession Planning, 14.
Second, it is important for organizations to align an internal vision for the succession plan. Consultants can guide the conversation among the newly gathered committee. After engaging with the committee, the consultant can help to align the ideas and plans for the future with the vision in mind.

Sterling recommends cultivating internal talent for future transitions. Meshing well with the organization’s established culture is crucial to a well-managed transition. Those hired externally may face pushback from long-serving individuals, not to mention the awkwardness as the new individual establishes their leadership within the culture.

Next, organizations should outline the executive search phase. Although internally cultivated candidates are ideal, organizations will still need to open the process to find external talent who may bring something new to the nonprofit. This phase consists of setting time aside to open the search process, to potentially bring on an interim leader, to recruit and to interview potential candidates, and to select the new hire.

The final stage consists of transitioning the individual into their role. The onboarding process will ensue and should take about three to six months. This time is necessary to ensure the success of the new individual to their new position.135

Dan Reiland, Executive Pastor at the 12Stone Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia and former partner with John Maxwell offers that faith-based nonprofit organizations also give the Holy Spirit room to move. Planning committees may need to make slight adjustments to timelines, financial plans, or ministry agreements during and after the transition.136

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135 Taken from Aly Sterling, Nonprofit Succession Planning Checklist in 5 Simple Steps.

process must be bathed in prayer and allowed to breathe! Reiland writes, “When a plan fails, we have learned that it is rarely the fault of the current senior pastor (or leader). It is equally unusual that the new senior pastor has caused the breakdown. It is the gap between the two that causes the issue…”\textsuperscript{137}

According to Reiland, there are three primary reasons why succession plans fail. The first is that of a power struggle. In addition to the known challenges of ego, pride, or desire to control, leaders who are passionate about their work can also be find themselves caught in a battle of authority. There must be a willingness to lean into mutual voluntary submission, which is the first step to overcome power struggles.

The second reason plans fail is due to a breakdown in relationships. Trust and insecurity are typically not too distant from relationship breakdowns, in addition to poor and toxic communication. Forgiveness, reconciliation, and positive, proactive communication are all antidotes to these types of breakdowns.

The final reason plans fail are due to unmet expectations. While the variations of this scenario are many, the challenge comes when parties involved do not feel they are getting what they want. This often plays hand in hand with power struggles and impacts relationships in a negative way.\textsuperscript{138}

\textsuperscript{137} Taken from Dan Reiland, “The Pastor’s Coach: 4 Guidelines for a Successful Succession Plan,” https://danreiland.com/4-guidelines-for-a-successful-succession-plan/

\textsuperscript{138} Taken from Dan Reiland, 4 Guidelines for a Succession Succession Plan. https://danreiland.com/4-guidelines-for-a-successful-succession-plan/
Chapter 3

Methodology

The researcher sought to address the research question, which was to explore a perceived lack of succession planning and leadership transitioning among director and associate director positions. The researcher began by identifying the development and implementation of a succession planning document to be the desired outcome. The creation of this document is for use by the hiring team as a beneficial and tailor-made resource to aid during employee transitions, to assist in providing a ready-made talent list, and to provide a systematic approach to succession planning among these critical roles. Through a variety of methods, the researcher endeavored to engage a sample of the workforce to solicit feedback regarding the research question.

Intervention Design

The researcher needed to accomplish several tasks for the successful completion of the research project. Each assignment required intentionality and focus to receive an outcome that would aptly address the research problem. The researcher generated a task list to focus and to keep to a desired timeline.

As the project started, permission request letters were created to give to the local conference president and to select administrators from other conferences chosen to be a part of the research project. The letters were to solicit permission from the organizations to research their local areas. Follow-up letters were pre-drafted to issue out in such cases where there was no reply to the initial request.

Next, the researcher drafted email recruitment notices and participant consent documents. The consent forms were sufficiently detailed as provided in the templates via the Institutional
Research Board (IRB) to inform would-be participants of the purpose and intent of the study, procedures for completing the survey or interview depending on the position of the participant, and outlined all risks, benefits, compensation, and confidentiality. Through consent forms, participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study and given information on how to withdraw from the study should they feel the need to do so along the way. Correspondence information was provided in the case where participants had additional questions for either the researcher or the faculty mentor of the researcher.

Surveys and in-person interviews were selected to be the two methods of data gathering. The researcher created two sets of surveys, one for pastors and teachers within the local conference, and the other for human resources personnel in other conferences, along with a set of interview questions to be reviewed with directors and associates currently serving in the conference. SurveyMonkey dot com was the online resource used to create the surveys.

A student account at SurveyMonkey dot com was selected as a primary resource due to the researcher's prior use of it, its ease of survey creation and distribution, and its built-in capabilities of compiling, tabulating, and preserving data results. Surveys were completely anonymous; however, the survey asked participants in the conference to share whether they were a pastor or an educator. Surveys for human resources personnel in other conferences were entirely anonymous as there was only one classification of employee receiving the survey.

In-person interviews were created for directors and associates within the local conference. The intent was to gather more role-specific information from these positions, and the researcher felt an anonymous survey to be insufficient to gather the content desired. Survey and interview data received informed and provided valuable input to assist in the exploration of the research question and the creation of the overall succession planning document. Sixty-five
individuals were anticipated to participate in the study through survey and or interview. No compensation was provided to participants taking part in the research by way of pay, food, or gift cards. Additional forms, applications, and submissions were necessary for the researcher to complete as part of the Institutional Research Board requirements for approval. The baseline for measuring change was the creation of a succession planning resource, and through utilizing the resource to begin the process of filling a vacant position within the organization.

The Potomac Conference employs five types of employees: office administrative employees and support staff, pastors, educators, Christian Bookstore retail workers, and locally funded employees. Locally funded employees are full employees of the conference, yet hired and funded by the local church and school operating boards. Sample locally funded employee positions include church musicians (excluding those who serve in those roles as independent contractors), church secretaries, and local maintenance personnel. Of these five types or main employee classifications, pastors, and educators were selected to participate as their roles are most impacted by transitions among directors and associates. Also, they were selected because organizationally, they report directly to those directors and associate directors in the administrative office.

Survey questions solicited employee feedback regarding the following areas:

- Perceptions on the frequency of director/associate director transitions
- The impact and implications on director/associate director transitions as it relates to overall impact, mission achievement at both the local (field) level, and for the conference as a whole.
- Perceptions of the implications of director/associate director transitions on the morale of the workforce.
- The impact of director/associate director transitions on local church members, constituents, stakeholders, local boards, and parents of students
- The opportunities and impact of continuity among directors/associate directors on local churches and schools
- Personal reflections on specific ways changes in directors/associate directors have impacted them

The researcher sent out surveys to a random sample of pastors and educators. To ensure the population was random, every three employees were designated from each of the two categories of employees from a master list serve. Included in each of the emails were a short greeting, a consent form, a web link, and a disclaimer that clicking on the web link grants the participants' consent to participate. Surveys were created to take no more than fifteen minutes. When added to the online resources, SurveyMonkey dot com provided time estimates that it anticipated participants would take to complete the survey based upon the number of questions, and type of feedback solicited.

The second survey was sent to the human resources leaders of ten Seventh-day Adventist Conferences close in size to the Potomac Conference. Those conferences included: Chesapeake Conference, South Atlantic Conference, Southern California Conference, Central California Conference, Northern California Conference, Rocky Mountain Conference, Carolina Conference, Georgia-Cumberland Conference, Texas Conference, and the Allegheny East Conference, all within the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. Emails were sent using the same process as was used in sending to pastors and educators. Survey questions solicited the following areas of feedback with the intent to explore whether there were a
standardized hiring practice or strategic process for hiring directors and associates among other large Seventh-day Adventist Conferences within North America:

- What is their role/position in the conference
- How many employees their conference serves
- Whether their conference had a standard procedure for hiring, including a document or guiding policies
- Critical steps for the hiring process of directors and associates
- The amount of time which elapses from director and associate's exit to their new hire
- Which department oversees its conference's strategic succession planning document
- Whether it was common practice or their conference to recruit or promote from within or from in-house talent.

As has been stated, the researcher determined it to be appropriate to solicit feedback from current directors and associate directors as it relates to transitions and succession planning. It was determined that more in-depth information was desired from these positions, and so rather than distribute an anonymous online survey, the researcher scheduled in-person interviews. Perceptions and feedback were used for two purposes: The first was to provide a framework to inform the research question, while the second was to provide valuable insights into the various positions from which to generate updated job descriptions, departmental profiles, and supplemental resource documents. Questions in the interview included the following:

- How long the director/associate director has held their current position, and if known, how long their predecessor held the position
- What is the level of critical knowledge/education/experience required for the position
- What behaviors and skills are required to do their position well
• What, if any, training programs are available for leaders in their department
• Essential resources, specific tools, equipment, computer programs used to do their jobs
• Primary cycles or seasonal activities for their roles, along with systems used to complete them.

Interviews were designed to take thirty-minutes or less. To schedule the interviews, the researcher placed a sign-up sheet and a notice in the shared space of the main office, and the workrooms on the upper and lower floors of the office building. Also, the researcher announced the interview request during the monthly all-staff meeting soliciting willing participants to schedule to sit for an in-person interview.

With the surveys and interview questions having laid the groundwork, next, the necessary tasks to produce the four sections of the succession planning document were outlined. A list of these four sections is as follows:

*Succession Planning Document:*

1. Section 1 – Pre-Planning
   a. Succession planning defined
   b. Conference mission and vision statement
   c. Organizational flowchart
   d. Job descriptions for each director and associate director position

2. Section 2 – Transition Types
   a. Defined/planned departures
   b. Unplanned departures
   c. Emergency/sudden departures (ex. sudden termination/resignation, health emergency)
3. Section 3 – Departmental Profiles

   a. The researcher created departmental profiles using the information from director interviews along with current, up-to-date job descriptions.

   b. The profiles outline essential functions, vendors, and cycles of operation, which were compiled into a sort of systems manual for each area.

4. Section 4 – Candidate Development Plans

   a. Development planning worksheet templates were included to assist in generating talent pipelines from which to select already prepared candidates to fill vacancies.

   b. The researcher also provided suggested activities and training opportunities.

   Preparation for the pre-planning portion of the document began with the task of outlining a succinct definition and explanation of succession planning from the research. This definition provided a clear understanding of the purpose and the function of strategic succession planning within an organization. A solid imperative was given for the use of such planning on the achievement of mission and vision objectives.

   Next, the mission and vision objectives of the Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists were written out. This information was gathered from the updated conference website and crosschecked through internal documents such as the employee handbook. The mission and vision were stated at the document outset to keep hiring managers focused on why the organization exists, and on the desired view of the organization in the future.

   The next step in the preparation of the pre-planning portion was to include a copy of the organizational flow chart. This chart shows the structure of the organization and the relationships and relative ranks of its parts and positions. It visually conveys the internal structure and in some cases details the roles, responsibilities, and relationships within an entity. The flowchart was included for planning purposes. As hiring managers seek to fill director and associate director roles, the intent is for this document to allow them to understand better how the role of that
director fits into the organization's overall scheme, allowing them to manage growth or transition more effectively.

The final task of the pre-planning portion was to gather and to update job descriptions for each director and associate director. Inherent in each description is an understanding of how the specific position contributes to the overall mission and vision of the organization. The researcher compiled current descriptions from the human resource database, and then updated them as was necessary based upon the results of the in-person interviews with current directors and associates.

To begin section two of the document, the researcher focused on outlining the different types of employee transitions. Three were addressed in particular which were viewed as the most frequently experienced in the Potomac Conference – defined or planned departures, unplanned departures, and emergency or sudden departures. When properly managed, organizations can continue toward achieving mission and vision with minimal negative impact.

Next there was the task of defining the three types of transitions. The three types are defined departures, which include planned transitions that are for a future time, retirements, or promotions to take place in the future months. These transitions offer the organization the best opportunity to plan and to prepare for succession. Then there are unplanned departures which include transitions such as an employee unexpectedly being offered a promotion or opportunity elsewhere, or finding themselves in a personal situation where they need to move or relocate. Finally there are emergency or sudden transitions which include sudden terminations or resignations or health emergencies, necessitating an immediate employee transition. Emergency departures by their nature are distinct from being merely unplanned departures in that there is little to no notice given, and the transition happens within twenty-four to forty-eight hours.
Unplanned departures are when the organization is not expecting the transition, yet receives the requisite notice time for a more smooth transition, typically two to four weeks of notice. As it relates to each of these, best practices are offered to most appropriately deal with these types of transitions based upon research.

In preparation for section four of the planning document, the researcher gathered relevant information to create departmental profiles. These profiles provide hiring managers pertinent information about each of the individual departments of the conference while providing a future purpose in that of aiding in new employee transitions. These profiles outline the essential functions of the department, critical vendors utilized, as well as cycles of operation.

The final section involves the incorporation of candidate development plans. All hiring managers need to have at their ready a list of qualified candidates from inside the organization, commonly referred to as pipelines of talent, from which to select duly prepared candidates to fill vacancies. These development plan templates are provided and include the names of qualified candidates, any training and development opportunities they have taken part in, and the date of completion for the training or certification. The development planning documents also include space that lists suggested activities and training opportunities for candidates showing potential, yet deficient in requisite competencies. Additional planning resources, including the nine-box grid from the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), which assesses potential candidates from low to high potential and under to outstanding performance, are included in the appendix.

All activities were designed to take place in the main headquarters office of the conference, with surveys to be issued online. The one-on-one interviews were conducted in the offices of each participant or the office of the researcher. No travel was involved.
The researcher sent out surveys via email and kept the portal open for the period of thirty days or a little over four weeks. Copies of the informed consent and confidentiality statements are in the appendices. No visual aids were involved in this research project. Director and associate director interviews were recorded on a recording device, with participants signing consent forms authorizing the recording. There was no training provided to instruct how to interact as usual in a recorded interview situation. Surveymonkey dot com compiled survey data. At the same time, data from the interview was transcribed into a notebook and subsequently analyzed. All tasks from beginning to end took place within sixteen weeks with a breakdown of activities as follows:

- Pre-work – 4 weeks
- Interview/Survey/Data-Gathering – 4 weeks
- Synthesis of Data – 4 weeks
- Draft of Document – 4 weeks

**Implementation of the Intervention Design**

The intervention design began with completion of the pre-work. The pre-work included fine-tuning all necessary documents, consent forms, permission, and reply forms, follow-up request forms, and the additional resources such as the Nine-Box Grid, all surveys, and interview questions required for approval from the Institutional Research Board. Once approved, requisite approval forms were issued out via email to the president of the Potomac Conference, and to the administrators overseeing the human resources functioning in the other conferences. Administrators were provided with the standard pre-generated reply letters to aid in a quick turnaround.

A student account on SurveyMonkey dot com was initiated after approval was received to begin the survey drafting process. The researcher entered survey questions into the system,
taking into consideration suggestions from the website for increased participation and completion. The suggestions offered were regarding how best to solicit participant feedback, whether with a simple yes or no answer or through variations of the Likert Scale and short answers.

Surveys were randomly sent out to conference pastors and teachers, and to the human resources personnel of other conferences after conducting a final look over both surveys. Contact information for human resources personnel from other conferences was secured from a search of online websites for these conferences. Along with sending out the emails, attached consent forms were sent outlining the scope of the research. An additional note informed participants that clicking on the SurveyMonkey dot com link authorized their consent to participate in the research.

With the surveys sent out, a notice was posted regarding the in-person interviews among directors and associate directors at the conference. The researcher obtained permission to make an announcement during the regularly scheduled staff meeting to solicit individuals to join in, and began to add the names of willing participants to a master schedule. Because many of the directors and associates work mainly outside of the main office headquarters, dates were sometimes scheduled weeks into the future. Throughout the four weeks the researcher regularly monitored SurveyMonkey dot com to view the survey results coming in.

Each of the interviews began with a summary of the purpose of the study and the issuing out a physical consent form. The consent forms informed participants that interviews would be recorded and that signing the form gave their consent. Once the participants signed the forms, the recording device began, and the researcher went through the list, asking the questions as outlined above. The recording device stopped as interviews concluded. The researcher once again thanked
the participant for their time and input and exited out of their office. All interviews, with the exception of two, were conducted in the office of the director or associate director. The remaining two interviews took place in the office of the researcher.

Interspersed between conducting the in-person interviews, necessary documents were gathered to provide support to the final succession planning document. The researcher defined mission as a formal summary of the aims and values of a company or organization, with vision defined as a declaration of an organization’s objectives, intended to guide its internal decision-making. Updated forms of these statements were found on the conference webpage at pcsda dot org under the tab entitled “About Us," and also from internal documents such as the employee handbook. Next, the researcher procured an organizational flowchart, which was also gathered from internal documents and updated in consultation with conference administration. Job descriptions were taken from the human resources database.

To begin the next section, blank departmental profile sheets were obtained and printed out. The intent was to complete them as information from the interviews became available. The researcher pre-populated the job description and other pertinent information onto the profile sheets. As the interviews came to an end, the remaining aspects were added to each of the profile sheets. Finally, new candidate development profiles were printed, which the researcher pre-populated with training opportunities for a few of the positions to serve as a sort of database from which to compile the profile sheets.

As previously stated, few resources were required to conduct this interview and included only a computer and a notepad. The recording device attached to the laptop computer and the researcher typed additional notes onto a Microsoft Word document. There were no visual aids, posters, videos, projectors needed, or guest speakers necessary. The type of data collected was
information regarding the profile of each department in the conference, and perceptions, and personal feedback regarding transitions. The recording device used to record interviews came from Amazon.com. There were no additional observers. The SurveyMonkey dot com resource offered a number of options as it related to survey data analysis.

Careful notes and thoughts were written in the notebook throughout the project as the implementation of the intervention proceeded. All adjustments to the data-gathering process were outlined to crosscheck the accuracy of the data/information obtained. As data collection and analysis ends, a full report of the results was drafted.

The intervention that the researcher used to address the problem was the development of a succession planning document. The proper use of such documents offers organizations the most significant opportunities for continuity as they pursue mission objectives.\textsuperscript{139} This document was created to be used by the hiring team as a beneficial and tailor-made resource during employee transitions.

Four sections comprise the succession planning document outlining four phases of a successful succession plan. The first section is the pre-planning phase, where succession planning is defined, and where the researcher provides an outline of the mission and vision of the organization in detail. Additional resources provided in this section are the official organizational flowchart, and the job descriptions for each of the director and associate-level positions within the organization.

Section two deals with best practices regarding the various types of transitions employees’ experience. Not all employee transitions are the same. This section looks in detail at

the three most common, including defined/planned departures, unplanned departures, and emergency/sudden departures.

The interview questions solicited the level of critical knowledge, skills needed, or other such designations (for example, what, if any, certifications for treasury, payroll or human resource positions) are needed. Questions uncovered whether or not there are personnel on-site with the same knowledge/skills, whether or not there are current training programs in place, and whether documentation and procedural information or process binders exist for individual departments. The researcher sent out surveys to a sample of conferences similar in size that solicited best practices regarding hire processes and procedures.

Section three deals with job profiles. Profiles were developed for each director and associate-level position to include the amount of experience and education required, technical and professional knowledge required, desired behaviors, and skills required (for example, problem-solving, strategic planning, and relationship building).

The final section deals with development plans and includes a profile and development planning sheet for potential candidates to fill each of the director/associate-level positions. The nine-box grid\textsuperscript{140} is provided to assist in generating candidate names. Profile sheets include the following essential pieces of information:

- List of the knowledge, experience, skills, and behaviors required for the position.
- The desired level, actual level, competency gap, and plan to increase this competency for each of the proposed candidates.
- A list of all learning activities, goals, dates, comments, and status notes for candidates
- Cross-training activities and opportunities

\textsuperscript{140} Day, \textit{Developing Leadership Talent}, 9.
A full appendix follows, which includes all survey, and interview templates, as well as all profile and development planning sheet templates.

Participants in this research project include the following individuals:

- Twelve of the twenty-two director/associate directors (overseeing the areas of pastoral ministries, education, youth, and young adult ministries, children's ministries, communications, Hispanic/multi-ethnic ministries, planned giving and stewardship, human resources, treasury, auditing, information technology, and camp ministries),
- Pastors and educators,
- And human resource representatives from nine similar-sized Seventh-day Adventist conferences within North America.
Chapter 4

Results

After the sixteen weeks, the researcher created a succession planning document to assist in supporting hiring managers with filling critical positions in reduced time. The researcher did not measure the amount of time it took to fill a recently vacated position during the implementation phase; however, a completed succession document was available for use by the Vice-President for Administration to fill the recently vacated position. As a result, a list of five qualified candidates was already available to fill a recently vacated associate director position.

Surveys

In total, fifty-seven participants completed the survey for pastors and teachers. Of the total participants, fifty-three percent self-identified as pastors, while the remaining forty-seven percent identified as educators (see figure 1).

![Figure 1. Survey question number one Source: SurveyMonkey.com](image)

The results revealed a nearly even split among the participants. This was found to be of value so as to provide the researcher with a more complete picture of employee perceptions rather than
having the results lean more heavily on the perceptions of one over the other. The findings of the initial survey yielded reasonably expected results.

To the second question on whether or not it was perceived that directors and associate directors transition often, fifty-six percent of those surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement with, thirty-five percent neither agreeing or nor disagreeing (see figure 2).

![Figure 2. Survey question number two](source: Surveymonkey.com)

Statements provided at the end of the survey aid in quantifying the inconclusive response from participants, most notably being that many of those surveyed do not know, nor have regular dealings with directors and associate directors in the main office.

Question three provided evidence that affirmed the perceptions of the researcher in that sixty-seven percent of participants surveyed felt that transitions among directors and associate directors have an impact on the local level. Twenty-eight percent felt that there was no impact on the local level as these transitions occur (see figure 3).
The responses to question four revealed a variety of perceptions regarding whether or not changes at the conference level hindered the local site from achieving its mission. Thirty-five percent of participants suggested they neither agree nor disagree that those changes have an impact on the achievement of local mission (see figure 4).

Q4 Changes in directors/associate directors hinder my local site from achieving its mission.

The next question was a personal one. The researcher perceives that participant replies were individualized based on how participants themselves respond to change. For example, if an
employee as a leader relies heavily on the conference to drive and support local mission, then the changes in conference leadership will impact the local site. Whereas if the leader functions more independently from the directives or hands on guidance of conference leadership, mission at the local level will likely not be impacted. Statements expressed by participants in the final question also aid to quantify the thoughts of the researcher.

It should be noted that an additional forty-four percent of participants expressed that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the notion that achieving local mission would be impacted as a result of changes at the top. The researcher perceives this speaks to the independent nature and operations of the pastors and educators.

When asked whether changes in the director and or associate positions hinder the entire conference from achieving its overall mission, there was mixed feedback. Thirty-four percent either agreed or strongly agreed, and thirty-three percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining thirty-five percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (see figure 5).

Q5 Changes in directors/associate directors hinder the entire conference from achieving its overall mission.

Figure 5. Survey question number five
Source: Surveymonkey.com
Employees face a choice in how they respond in the presence of change. The data seems to suggest that most simply move forward, believing that they work most importantly for God and His kingdom, and the conference in a secondary way. One of the survey participants explicitly expressed this sentiment in the last, open-ended question on personal impact reflections.

Results of the next question once again reflected a relative split among survey participants. Thirty-two percent either agreed or strongly agreed that director and associate transitions negatively impact the morale of the workforce, while thirty-one percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed that there was a negative impact. The remaining thirty-seven percent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (see figure 6).

Q6 Changes in directors/associate directors negatively impact the morale of the workforce.

![Figure 6. Survey question number six](image)
*Source: Surveymonkey.com*

Survey participant feedback showed a divide when asked about the impact of leadership changes at the conference level on local church members, constituents, stakeholders, local boards, or parents of students if in the school context. Roughly thirty-eight percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, and roughly twenty-eight percent agreed or strongly agreed that there was a less than positive impact (see figure 7).
A reflection of the researcher was that though only twenty-eight percent of participants sensed a less than positive impact, the level of that impact could create a host of additional problems conference-wide. The size of the entity negatively impacted could also create significant issues that impact the entire conference. For example, if the recently transitioned director was a beloved director, widely trusted and supported by stakeholders, his or her removal or transition from their position could cause members to respond by withholding the returning of their tithes, which come to the local conference. In this way, overall funding could diminish, which then affects all sites and entities.

The next question of the pastors and educators survey asked whether continuity of directors and associates in the conference would have a positive impact on local churches and schools. To this, sixty-five percent of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that there would
be (see figure 8). This data affirms the view of the researcher, and the imperative to seek
continuity through a strategic succession planning document.

Q8 Continuity among directors and associate directors in the conference would have a
positive impact on local churches and schools.

Figure 8. Survey question number eight
Source: Surveymonkey.com

The final item on the survey allowed the employees to express their feedback on any
specific ways changes of directors and or associate directors in the conference office have
impacted them. Seventy-nine percent of participants wrote in answer to this question. From the
feedback emerged three broad categories: strong impact perceived, slight impact perceived, little
impact perceived. Table 1 below reflects the sentiments given:
Table 1. Individual Survey Results Where Strong Impact Was Perceived

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes create a breakdown of mission</th>
<th>Changes do not allow time for the group to build and plan together. Must continue to start over from scratch.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diminishes timely responses (when there are needs in the local field)</td>
<td>Difficult to maintain a sense of mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors and Associates need at least a year to understand the Potomac Conference, its mission, and personnel before they can begin to affect change or to provide adequately needed support.</td>
<td>In the field, it creates a sense of uncertainty for a while until the new leader gets their footing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going specifically without educational associates has impacted teachers because they don't have someone to whom they can voice their concerns.</td>
<td>With the changes, rapport and trust must develop all over again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption in implementation of strategic planning initiatives results in lost efforts and wasted training.</td>
<td>A slowdown in the achievement of mission and vision results from frequent transitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in getting items done</td>
<td>Stability and clear mission and vision implementation are impacted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent transitions of great educational associates have hurt the schools negatively.</td>
<td>New directors make demands and place new expectations without first getting to know the needs at the local level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is challenging to keep track of whom to contact during the changes.</td>
<td>Oversight and development of rapport are both impacted; it takes time to get up to speed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The office needs better communication and education of the local sites during transitions – whom to contact in the interim.</td>
<td>Loss of good pastoral ministries director has severely impacted the pastoral field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The changes ultimately hinder the work of Christ on every level</td>
<td>Morale and confidence of the church is affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in mission emphases – feels like we are chasing a moving target</td>
<td>Consistency and expectations differ with each change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The overall direction tends to change with each new leader.</td>
<td>It can be challenging to operate at optimal performance when not knowing what to expect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mission and the focus of the people change.</td>
<td>New leaders try to change methods that are already working without asking those with experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New leaders take longer to make decisions and to get up to speed when the decisions locally often need to be made quickly.</td>
<td>It is frustrating when new leaders try to change methods that are already working without asking those who have experience working in this territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The field employees are unsure whom to send questions to during transitions, or with whom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A number of themes emerged in this first category of feedback. The collective voice seems to first suggest frustration with regard to communication of and during leadership transitions. It seems the perception is that changes often occur without notice, and the conference provides little communication through the ranks. In addition, employees are not provided clear guidance on who to address their concerns to during these transitions.

A second emerging theme is the perceived disruption of the forward movement toward mission and vision objectives. Rather than to build upon formed relationships, and mutually shared ideals and plans, employees are made to seemingly begin from scratch as each of the new leaders cast new visions. This recurring cycle of beginning and ending leads to lower employee morale, while increasing uncertainty among the field.

A final theme to emerge was that of the challenges created at the local level as new leaders are perceived to lean in one of two ways. The first is to act and to make decisions too slowly with local situations in need of more immediate replies. It is not uncommon for a director or associate to transition in a time when multiple fires are burning at the same time, leaving local leaders without the requisite level of authority to wait until new leadership arrives. The other temptation for newly arriving directors and associates is to act and to react too forcefully, bringing with them a set of practices and assumptions without taking time to consult with the old boots on the ground before making a decision.

In the second set of responses (Table 2), the researcher perceived the slight indifference from employees to stem from one of three areas: The first coming from not knowing the
directors and associates or not understanding their roles in the conference. The second from a general understanding that change happens in leadership. These individuals seem to be focused on their duties and feel fully capable of continuing in the absence of conference representatives.

The third area of perceived indifference comes from those who seem to have experienced favorable outcomes when unhealthy directors or associates have transitioned in the past. They see the benefits that can occur with change.

Table 2. Survey Results with Slight/Indifferent Impact Perceived

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I've been around a long time – I tend to do what works for my students and me because I know leadership is going to change at some point.</th>
<th>I depend on God’s leading more than from directors and associates. I work for Him, not them.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don’t even know who our directors/associates are (sad face)</td>
<td>It depends on the individual transitioning or changing. If they were one who was well-respected and trusted, reliable, and efficient, it would have a negative impact on the local level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The change could have a positive impact if the director or associate had a negative perception among the employees.</td>
<td>There would be no considerable impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The field needs a person that can lead employees through challenging situations because weak intervention can divide schools.</td>
<td>Only education-related changes impact my school – other positions make no difference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity in pastoral and education positions is helpful, but most others have limited impact.</td>
<td>Transition is hard, but worth it if roles would become more representative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As with all changes, it takes time to make connections; otherwise, no negative impact.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Surveymonkey.com*

Of the third category of responses (Table 3), the researcher also perceived feedback stemmed from three possible options. The first is that the leaders are potentially new to the conference and have not yet experienced an abundance of transitions, or have felt hopeful as new leaders arrive. It is plausible that they are the new leader themselves. The second is the
understanding that while people come and go, the one overarching mission has not changed. The researcher can affirm that the stated mission and vision of the conference has not changed over the past fourteen years. The same president has also led the conference for the past fourteen years. The third option is that employees experience little to no impact due to an apathetic response. This conclusion was perceives from two responses that read, “no one is ever around long enough to build relationships with the employees,” and “directors and associates provide no value and as such, most don’t perceive a direct impact by their work when they transition.”

Table 3. Survey Results with Little/No Impact Perceived

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Makes no difference at the local level</th>
<th>New leaders bring a positive impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No negative impact as of yet</td>
<td>Not much impact – all have one mission that carries from person to person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President has remained the same – I have felt no change in overall mission and vision.</td>
<td>Although employees experience different leadership styles when changes occur, the goal is still the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one is ever around long enough to build relationships with the employees.</td>
<td>No impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors and associates provide no value, and as such, most don't perceive a direct impact by their work when they transition.</td>
<td>Most don't even know the names of the conference officials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Surveymonkey.com*

Upon synthesizing the responses of this first survey, the researcher took note of the following reflections. First, it would have been helpful to know how long each of the respondents has been employees of the Potomac Conference. This knowledge would have allowed the researcher to compare sentiments of newer employees with, say, less than three years in Potomac, with those who have been in the conference for more and much longer. Does optimism of new leadership fade with time? Do employees grow cynical through the years as
they experience multiple transitions? Do they accept the reality of change, and merely adapt their local mission to function with or without institutional guidance?

The second reflection focused on the opportunities for directors and associates to serve better. There is an adage that asks the question if your church disappeared from the community, would anyone notice it? If data shows that dozens of transitions have taken place over the last ten years, and employees feel slightly little to no impact, then why do the director positions exist? Perhaps there are opportunities for more efficient uses of the overall budget or significant restructuring if many of the directors and associates are not perceived to be making a real impact.

The survey sent to human resources personnel of the additional nine conferences yielded the following results (see Figure 9):

![Figure 9](image)

**Figure 9. HR personnel survey question number one**  
*Source: Surveymonkey.com*

Eighty-seven percent of participants self-identified as human resources directors. The remaining twelve percent were either human resources assistants or generalists. Answers to this survey directly from the departmental directors were found to be of most benefit as the researcher felt they would hold a complete understanding of the functioning within their department.
The conferences polled were similar in size to the Potomac Conference. At present the Potomac Conference serves 650 employees. The data suggests that fifty percent of human resource leaders polled were from conferences with 800 or more. Twelve and a half percent of leaders polled also had between 601-700 employees, twenty-five percent were a bit smaller at 501-600 employees, and another twelve and a half percent were even smaller at 401-500 employees. None of the conferences polled had fewer than 400 employees (see figure 10).

Q2 How many employees (Conference and Locally Funded) do you service?

Figure 10. HR personnel survey question number two
Source: Survey Monkey.com
The data received suggested the full range of time elapsing from the director and associate director exit to new hire. Fifty percent of the conferences polled experienced a total transition time ranging from zero to three months. Another twenty-five percent experienced gaps in the replacement of these positions for over a year. The remaining twelve and a half percent experienced either four to six months or seven to nine months to fill (see figure 11).

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 11. HR personnel survey question number three**
*Source: Surveymonkey.com*

In this next question, the researcher sought to discover whether talent pipelines were being developed within conferences. Seventy-five percent of conferences polled tapped in-house talent for promotions to director and associate director positions. The remaining twenty-five percent expressed that they often used in-house talent (see Figure 12).
A key question of this project was whether conferences had a standardized hiring practice and/or voted procedures used for hiring directors and associate directors. Of the conferences polled, seventy-five percent said they did have one or both. Twelve and a half percent of the remaining conferences either said no, they do not have such a practice or procedures, or whether or not they did was unknown (see figure 13).

Figure 12. HR personnel survey question number four
*Source:* Surveymonkey.com

Q4 How often does your conference hire directors/associate directors from in-house talent?

Figure 13. HR personnel survey question number five
*Source:* Surveymonkey.com
The final question of the human resources leaders was which department within their local conference housed their conference hiring or succession planning strategy. Table 4 shows participant responses.

Table 4: Departments that House the Conference Hiring Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Resources (six conferences)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depends on which position is vacant – either the president's office or HR typically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretariat (or VP for Administration)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Surveymonkey.com*

Based on the feedback provided, human resources departments are empowered to take the lead in filling vacancies within these conferences.

The researcher had the following reflections subsequent to reviewing the survey results. To begin, the question of whether or not a correlation exists between conference size and the time of replacement of director and associate positions remained inconclusive. Were smaller conferences able to fill vacancies faster than their larger counterparts? Was this due to the possession of an overarching strategy, or was the strategy even necessary?

Upon further analyzing of the respondent feedback through a tool on Surveymonkey dot com, the feedback revealed that all but one of the seventy-five percent of conferences which had a hiring plan were able to fill vacant positions within zero to three months. The remaining conference who had a hiring plan still had positions vacant over a year later. The researcher perceives an opportunity for that remaining conference to address inadequacies in their stated policy.

Another reflection was the question of how conferences determined when and when not to fill vacant positions from within. It could be argued that a conference would defer to outside
personnel in the absence of qualified personnel internally, or perhaps that it is healthy to bring in outside perspectives. Would having a trained and prepared pipeline of talent remove the need to solicit assistance from outside of the conference? These are some of the unknowns on which the researcher reflected.

**Director and Associate Director Interviews**

Conducting the personnel one-on-one interviews was an enjoyable experience. The interview feedback revealed valuable insights into the various departments. In all, the researcher interviewed the following eleven departmental directors and associates: Information technology, human resources, communications, ministerial, auditing, camp ministries, youth, and young adult ministries, trust services and planned giving, treasury, education, and maintenance and facilities management. Of the eleven, the average amount of time a director or associate held in their position was two point four years. Six of the eleven had held their positions for two or fewer years. Since conducting the interviews, two of the eleven participants (both associate directors) have transitioned from the conference. Additional information gleaned from the one-on-one interviews was added to the employee job descriptions and the departmental profiles, which are both a part of the succession planning document.

**Conclusion**

As a result of addressing the research problem, the researcher gleaned an abundance of feedback from participants from which to create a succession planning document. Insights expressed by pastors and educators affirmed the need for increased continuity among the director and associate directors of the local conference. Human resource personnel from other conferences provided evidence that no standardized planning process exists among the sisterhood of conferences within the North American Division of SDA. Director and associate
director interviews provided helpful information from which the researcher updated job
descriptions and departmental profile sheets for the succession document. The intervention plan
yielded expected results. There was no divergence identified due to poor design or faulty
implementation.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Several conclusions were reached upon the completion of this project. First, the researcher concluded that no concrete, strategic succession planning document existed for hiring managers to use to fill director and associate director positions within the Potomac Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Second, hiring procedures did exist, yet the procedures did not include any intentional, identifiable plans for succession. Third, the researcher found no standardized succession processes exist among the other conferences in the North American Division of SDA. The perception of the researcher that each conference used their own conference-specific processes was true. Fourth, the researcher asserts that the implementation of the new succession planning document will assist the Potomac Conference in maintaining momentum toward the mission as it relates to the filling of vacant positions.

The results of this research project are in line with information gleaned from previous studies and the published work analyzed in the literature review. The literature review highlighted the widespread lack of succession planning particularly among non-profits and church organizations resulting in loss of mission momentum, time, money, and membership. The literature review was replete with imperatives for organizations to have and to implement succession plans. Both Old and New Testament Scripture affirmed and supported the notion of planning for leadership succession. The researcher found the Potomac Conference to be an additional example of a non-profit, church organization without an established succession plan.

As the research project ended, the researcher suggests that research regarding this problem should continue in three distinct areas: Employee engagement, training and
development, and comprehensive succession planning. These topics go hand in hand with
succession planning and employee transitions, although not addressed specifically in this project.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) suggests that employee
engagement is the extent to which employees feel passionate about their jobs and are committed
to the organization. It explores the extra efforts employees put into their work above and beyond
their listed duties. While the individual engagement of an employee is a choice, there are quite a
number of opportunities employers and organizations can take advantage of to increase the
overall engagement of the workforce. Engaged employees are less likely to consider
transitioning, particularly as they feel committed to the mission and vision.

The researcher posits that the longevity of employment coupled with intentional engagement
efforts will yield desired outcomes as it relates to achieving mission and vision objectives and in
securing employee retention. Increased retention means less transitions overall.

The second area research should continue to explore is that of the intentional and ongoing
training and development of the workforce. Training programs allow employers to strengthen the
skills that each employee needs to improve, while development programs bring all employees to
a higher level so all employees have similar skills and knowledge. According to SHRM, training
and development are shown to reduce weak links within the organization who rely heavily on
others to complete basic work tasks. As the workforce grows stronger, pipelines of competent
and qualified talent are increased. Additional research can explore the links between these areas
on succession planning and transitioning.

The third area research should continue to explore is comprehensive succession planning
for the entire organization to also include administrators and pastors. In this study, the researcher
explored transitions among directors and associate directors of a mid to large-sized conference
office headquarters. An opportunity would be for research to continue to explore transitions among the president and remaining four vice-president administrators of the conference. Individuals in these positions are frequently promoted up the ranks to either union or division-level leadership. Continued study would reveal the implications of changes at the top level on local levels where this study only focused on changes at the middle management level.

Strategic planning among pastors, particularly those of larger congregations, is an additional opportunity. Further research can explore implications when larger, and even smaller, congregations go without pastoral leadership for extended periods of time and the resulting implications on the conference level at large. Do these transitions impact the overall health of the church? A strategic plan for smooth pastoral transitions at the local level would be an outcome.

Through conducting and implementing this project the researcher learned several critical lessons. First is the inevitability of change within an organization. As was stated in the literature review, all employees are interims to a large degree. Organizations naturally evolve over time; very few remain the same for the duration of their existence. Those organizations who do not intentionally plan and prepare for change are unintentionally planning and preparing for failure. Succession planning is critical if an organization desires to withstand the test of time, while minimizing the abundance of potential pitfalls that can occur during leadership transitions.

The second lesson learned is to let the research and the data lead the way. Too often assumptions drive thoughts and feelings. The researcher selected a topic to which there were strong feelings associated. Conducting and implementing this project challenged the researcher to suspend conclusions, and to allow the process to run its course; to ask questions, and to listen prudently to feedback provided. Through meticulous process design, implementation, and analysis, and overall engagement in this project, more certain conclusions emerged which were
founded in scripture, literature, and affirmed by a wide sample of project participants. These valuable skills augmented by professionalism, time management, multi-tasking, online research techniques, and effective communication support the researcher in the journey of being a life-long learner.

Finally, the importance of organization as it relates to implementation of the research project. Outcomes and conclusions are only as good as the relevant data used to draw them. Being organized enabled the researcher to focus more on desired outcomes while also increasing productivity and reducing stress.

The succession planning document created can be applied to many other settings, including other conferences in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and even church structures outside of the SDA Church. The document can also be adapted to suit both small and large conferences, and also local churches to assist during pastoral transitions. As Baby Boomers continue to retire, it would do conferences well to begin the process of strategic planning to fill leadership positions. A continued opportunity would be for Union Conferences and the North American Division of SDA to also adopt a succession planning strategy working alongside the numerous conferences to groom and to develop leaders to fill leadership positions with national oversight. The mission of the church would be enhanced through a strategic strategy of this magnitude.

Non-profit organizations including the Potomac Conference still have a long way to go as it relates to the area of succession. As they navigate through the uncertain waters of change that lie ahead, it is imperative for a plan to be instituted and for employees to begin to be developed and groomed for leadership.
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Appendix

A – Personnel Development Plan
B – Nine-Box Grid
C – Pastor/Educator Survey
D – Conference Survey
E – Departmental Interview Questionnaire
F – Succession Planning Documents
A. Personnel Development Planning Sheet

**Position:** [fill in position]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status:</th>
<th>Critical Vacancy</th>
<th>Impending Vacancy</th>
<th>Potential Vacancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This document is to be completed for potential employee candidates that can be prepared for director/associate director positions and will include the information listed under the columns below. An example has been provided. The document will be updated regularly with any notes or status updates.

**Employee Name:** ________________________________  **Date:** _____________

Knowledge, Skills, Abilities Required: (See Job Description)

Ex. 5 Years progressive HR experience; Experienced in Recruitment and Employee Benefits. MBA Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Level</th>
<th>Actual Level</th>
<th>Plan of Action to Increase Competency</th>
<th>Learning Activities/Goals</th>
<th>Comments – Status</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MBA, SHRM Certification</td>
<td>BA in Business; 3 years’ HR experience</td>
<td>Begin HR Certification Study Course Part Time; Cross-Training in 5 Areas</td>
<td>Completed Section 1 of 7</td>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cross Training in Employee Benefits</td>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Completed Section 2 of 7</td>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attended SHRM Certification Prep. Course</td>
<td>December 2019</td>
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Notes:__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________
B. 9-Box Grid*

This resource will be used as a succession planning tool. Directors and Associates will identify potential leaders within their departments and rate them by placing their names in one of the nine boxes. Employee development planning sheets will be provided for individuals with names in boxes 1 – 3 and added to the final succession document.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Under Performance</th>
<th>Effective Performance</th>
<th>Outstanding Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Potential</strong></td>
<td>Box 5: Seasoned professional capable of expanded role, but may be experiencing problems that require coaching and mentoring.</td>
<td>Box 2: Does extremely well at current job with potential to do more; give stretch assignments to help prepare for next level.</td>
<td>Box 1: Consistently performs well in a variety of assignments; superstar employee. Big picture thinker; problem solver; self-motivated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium Potential</strong></td>
<td>Box 8: With coaching, could progress within level; focus on stretch goals for this employee.</td>
<td>Box 6: May be considered for job enlargement at the same level, but may need coaching in several areas, including people management.</td>
<td>Box 3: Current role may still provide opportunity for growth/development; focused on tactical; focus should be on helping improve strategic thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Potential</strong></td>
<td>Box 9: May be a candidate for reassignment, reclassification to a lower level or to exit the organization.</td>
<td>Box 7: Effective performer, but may have reached career potential; try to coach employee on becoming more innovative, focus on lateral thinking.</td>
<td>Box 4: Experienced high performer but has reached limit of career potential. Still a valuable employee and can be encouraged to development communications and delegation skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*from the Society for Human Resource Management. Utilized to evaluate an organization’s current talent and identifying potential leaders.
C. Pastor/Educator Survey Questions

1. Directors and Associate Directors in the conference office transition or change often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Transitions among director and associate directors in the conference have no impact on the local level.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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3. Changes in directors and associate directors hinder my local site from achieving its mission.

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<th>Agree</th>
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4. Changes in directors and associate directors hinder the entire conference from achieving its overall mission.

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5. Changes in directors and associate directors negatively impact on the morale of the workforce.

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<th>Agree</th>
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</table>
6. My church members, constituents, stakeholders, local board, and/or parents of my students are affected by changes in directors and/or associate directors at the conference level in less than positive ways.

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree
Nor Agree

7. Continuity among directors and associate directors in the conference would have a positive impact on local churches and schools.

1  2  3  4  5
Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neither Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree
Nor Agree

8. In what specific way(s) have changes in directors and associate directors in the conference office impacted you at the local level?
D. Conference Hiring Practices Survey

*Distributed via SurveyMonkey*

1. What is your position in your conference?

2. How many employees (conference and locally-funded) do you service:
   a. 401 – 500
   b. 501 – 600
   c. 601 – 700
   d. 701 – 800
   e. 801+

3. What, if any, document, policy, procedures does your conference follow for its hiring?

4. Outline the key steps of your hiring process for directors and associate directors.

5. On average, how much time elapses from employee exit to new hire of director/associate director positions?
   a. 1-3 months
   b. 4-6 months
   c. 7-9 months
   d. 10-12 months
   e. 12+ months

6. Which department houses your conference’s strategic succession planning document?

7. How often does your conference hire directors/associate directors from in-house talent?
   a. Very often
   b. Often
   c. Sometimes
   d. Not Often
   e. Never
E. Director/Associate Interview Questions

*Questions to be asked via in-person interview*

1. How long have you held your current position?

2. How long did your predecessor hold the position?

3. What level of critical knowledge/skill/experience is needed for this position (certifications, etc.)? Behaviors and skills required? (problem solving, strategic planning, relationship building, etc.)

4. What training programs are available for leaders in this department?

5. What skills or knowledge do you possess that may be considered unique or difficult to replace?

6. What are the key resources that you use to do your job?

7. Where do others often seek your expertise?

8. What kind of specific tools, equipment, computer programs, etc. do you use to do your job?

9. Share any historical knowledge that might help avoid the repeat of a major error in the future?

10. Outline any major “cycles” or seasonal activities and systems utilized to complete them.
F. Succession Planning Documents

Defined-Planned Departures:
Permanent departures where directors and/or associates offer a defined end date, and provide the requisite notice of four weeks or more. Includes retirements and other planned transitions.

- **Step 1: Authorizations**
  Authorized Vice-President/Designee charged with initiating and implementation of the plan

- **Step 2: Succession Committee – Designation of succession planning committee. Assign roles and responsibilities.**

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- **Step 3: Departmental Evaluation – Review of job description and departmental functions. Identify opportunities for efficiency and mission alignment. Qualities desired in future candidate**

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Step 4: Priority Functions – Interim Assignments*

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<th>Key Departmental Functions</th>
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Step 5: Communication Plan. Detailed steps for information dissemination along with timeline for key events.

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Step 6: Projects List – Transitioning director or associate to report major projects to wrap up

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<th>Major Projects/Outstanding Work Log:</th>
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Step 7: Cross Training List*

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Step 8: Candidate Recommendations – Using candidate profiles and Nine-Box Grid, identify three – five candidates to fill position.

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Step 9: Initiate recruiting, hiring, and transitioning processes

Step 10: New employee onboarding; succession committee dissolves

*To include input from the departmental director even if he or she is the one transitioning.*
Unplanned/Unexpected Departures:

Permanent departures where directors and/or associates provide notice of two weeks or less, often due to unplanned or unexpected reasons. Includes promotions or transfers to other conferences, and personal or health reasons.

☐ Step 1: Authorizations

Authorized Vice-President/Designee charged with initiating and implementation of the plan

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☐ Step 4: Projects List – Transitioning director or associate to create report major projects

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**Recommendations**

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**Step 9: Initiate recruiting, hiring, and transitioning processes**

**Step 10: New employee onboarding; succession committee dissolves**

*To include input from the departmental director even if he or she is the one transitioning.*
Emergency/Sudden Departures:

Emergency departures are where directors and/or associates transition immediately, offering less than forty-eight hours of notice. Includes sudden terminations, resignations, and other health emergencies.

☐ Step 1: Authorizations

Authorized Vice-President/Designee charged with initiating and implementation of the plan

☐ Step 2: Succession Committee – Designation of emergency succession planning committee. Assign roles and responsibilities of key personnel. *To include departmental director during associate transition, or associate during director transition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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</tbody>
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☐ Step 3: Emergency Communication Plan. Generate necessary statements along with detailed steps for information dissemination and timeline for key events. Both internal and external messages to be created.

<table>
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Step 4: Priority Functions – Assign Interim Coverage in consultation with departmental staff

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</table>

Step 5: Projects List – Generate report of major projects to continue/wrap up. Associate to assist during director transition; director to assist during associate transition.

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<thead>
<tr>
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Step 8: Initiate recruiting, hiring, and transitioning processes

Step 9: New employee onboarding; succession committee dissolves
August 7, 2019

Fred-Richard T Warfield
IRB Exemption 3804.080719: Smooth Transitions: An Examination of Succession Planning and Leadership Continuity among Directors and Associate Directors of the Potomac Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists

Dear Fred-Richard T Warfield,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2)(ii), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46.101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office