CASE STUDY OF LIBERTY UNIVERSITY’S SUCCESSION PLAN FROM FOUNDER TO SECOND-GENERATION LEADER

by
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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to explore the leadership succession and transition that occurred at Liberty University from founder to the second-generation leader in 2007. In order to gather knowledge about the key stakeholders, this qualitative case study was conducted, and this researcher utilized interviews and focus group interviews with individuals who had a firsthand account of the leadership succession. Also, documents related to the succession were analyzed. The information obtained from these data collection methods were analyzed and categorized by themes related to leadership succession. The results from this case study revealed a specific method and process of succession chosen by the university and its founder. It was clear that the founder of the university had engaged in intentional and specific mentoring and training of his successor. The findings revealed that the familial status of the two leaders resulted in an additional layer of mentoring and commitment. Also, it was found that there was a period of success for the institution, which was due in part to a seamless transition of leadership.

Keywords: leadership, succession, transition, founder, second-generation leader
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and children.

Faith, you have supported me in all my endeavors, especially this one. My journey as a life long student has finally reached an end. Thank you for your belief in me. Your unwavering support of completing this work was the fuel I needed. You taught me to finish what I started. I thank God that we have built a life together.

To my children, Steven, Zachary, Megan, Jonathan, and Mia, I am grateful to God that each one of you is a part of my life. To be your father is a tremendous honor. Thank you for your encouragement and support through this journey. I look forward to watching each of you achieve your dreams.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who sustained me through this process.

To my family, Mom, Billy, Melissa, Laurie, and Tony, I am the person I am today because of your support, love and encouragement through the years. Thank you for always believing in me.

To my chair, Dr. Ellen Lowrie Black, thank you for focusing this study and providing constant feedback. Your support from the beginning has inspired me to complete this work. I want to thank you for encouraging me along the way. It was divine guidance that brought us together for this study.

To my committee, Dr. Charles Schneider and Dr. Jeffrey Potts, thank you for your willingness to serve. Your input and feedback helped propel this study to completion.

To Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, thank you for your direction from the very beginning of this study. Your thorough review and feedback of the concept, proposal and final edition of this study helped bring it to completion.

And finally, to Jerry Falwell Jr., thank you for allowing this study and participating in the research. I count it an honor to have documented the transition of leadership that occurred between you and your father.
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List of Abbreviations

American Council on Education (ACE)
Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB)
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)
General Electric (GE)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Liberty University (LU)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The baby boom retirement wave has arrived. Areas such as social security and healthcare are frequently the two biggest concerns when it comes to this generation, as they reach the age of retirement (Winston & Barnes, 2007). However, the members of the United States workforce is heading for the largest transition in its history. Staff of the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) estimated that more than 4 million baby boomers will reach retirement age by 2020. This current exodus will affect all sections of society, including education. According to Stripling (2011), there is a wave of retirements coming to education and their replacements might be hard to find. Colleges and universities will not only face an aging pool of professors, they also will see a decrease in senior leadership and administrators over the next decade. This includes positions such as chancellor, president, provosts, and other cabinet level positions (Heller & d'Ambrosio, 2008). Hammond (2013) estimated that 92% of university presidents in the U.S. are between their late 50s to late 70s. As the leadership need rises, institutional staff will need to prepare the future leaders of academic establishments to fill the pending gap. Leaders need a plan that will help them understand how leadership succession planning and transitions occurs.

Background

As colleges and university boards continue to face the pending demand for senior leadership, exacerbated by a baby-boomer generation as it approaches retirement, an understanding of the process of succession could assist to ensure continuity of mission and vision during the transition. Succession planning and leadership transition are not new concepts among higher education, but a clearer understanding of how specific
succession strategies are planned and executed is needed. With the changing landscape of higher education in the U.S., university staff will rely heavily on leaders who can overcome obstacles and challenges (Duderstadt, 2007). Therefore, a transition between leaders is arguably one of the most delicate times in the life cycle of an organization. Properly navigating a leadership change is vital to the success of an organization.

Researchers (Kesner & Sebora, 1994; Riggs, 2009; Yan & Rajagopalan, 2004) have published articles in which they examined the different aspects and challenges of leadership succession. Studies have been conducted to observe university presidents in transition during capital campaigns and how this affected fundraising (Nehls, 2008). Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) discussed the deficiency in the talent pool for future senior leadership among community colleges. Also, researchers (Gavel, 2009; Hammond, 2013; Martin & Samuels, 2006; Riggs, 2009) have explored the challenges of building a team during transition. How to guide books have been developed for members of boards and search committees to examine each phase of a transition, both planned and unplanned. However, an understanding the succession process and its implementation in higher education firsthand from participants and stakeholders would provide additional insight to better negotiate a transition in leadership.

On May 15, 2007, the faculty and staff of Liberty University experienced a monumental change in leadership. The passing of the founder resulted in the institution moving from the founder to the second-generation leader. The findings from a study to examine the details of this specific succession planning and transition process would contribute to the body of knowledge that exists by seeking to understand the actions both prior to the transition, during, and after.
In 1994, this researcher became an employee of Liberty University, a private Christian university in central Virginia. Reverend Jerry Falwell, a well-known pastor and social conservative, founded the university in 1971. This researcher served in the Office of the Chancellor for 11 years. As an employee, first-hand observations were made of the transition of leadership from the founder to the second-generation leader. While remaining employed after the transition, I did not report directly to Jerry Falwell Jr., the current President.

The motivation for the study was to examine the succession planning and leadership transition. From the public perspective, the transition of responsibility at Liberty University occurred after the passing of the founder. By examining this specific case, the staff and faculty of other educational institutions can glean knowledge on how this particular succession process occurred.

Participating in two leadership transitions provides a clear context of the nuances related to leadership succession. From these experiences, clear appreciation for the effort it takes to facilitate a transition has been realized. The researcher is an ideal candidate for to examine and understand the firsthand account of senior leaders, alumni, board members, faculty and staff at a university, in general, and Liberty University, specifically (Creswell, 2009).
Problem Statement

The problem that is approaching in higher education is the pending exodus of baby boomers from senior leadership positions and the lack of understanding of leadership succession (Bornstein, 2010; Dohm, 2000; Heller & d'Ambrosio, 2008; Skinner, 2010). Research is needed to add to the existing work and research and to help provide guidelines for succession planning. Specifically a better understanding of the process and implementation of a transition will help to ensure successful and smooth transitions among colleges and universities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to get an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40) and to explore and understand the leadership succession plan and leadership transition from the founder to the second-generation leader at Liberty University. For this research study, leadership succession will be defined as “any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department or work group by making provision for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people over time” (Rothwell & Poduch, 2001, p. 405). Transition involves the shift in authority, mission, and vision among senior leadership positions. In the case of higher education institutions, these positions include: (a) president, (b) provost, (c) chancellor, and (d) chief executive officers.

Research Questions

In this study, the researcher sought to explore and understand the leadership succession and transition that occurred at Liberty University in 2007. The following
questions guided this study:

1. What were the methods that key leaders used at Liberty University to plan the leadership succession between founder and second-generation leader?
2. What were the processes that were followed to execute the leadership succession plan?
3. What role did the relationship between the founder and second-generation leader play in the leadership succession?
4. What led to a successful transition in May 2007?

**Significance of the Study**

Knowing that higher education institutions are facing a leadership shortage based on the number of retiring education professionals in the coming years (Dohm, 2000; Hammond, 2013; Heller & d'Ambrosio, 2008; Skinner, 2010), this researcher sought to understand the succession planning experience that occurred at Liberty University. Interviewing key leaders and stakeholders at this institution and reviewing key documents identified key components of succession planning in higher education. By examination of the preparation and events, which led up to the transition, the findings from this study shed light on the succession planning process used at one institution. Another contribution of this study is the leadership transition at a key stage in the life cycle of an organization.

As with any case study, the researcher gathered key insights that can be applied to other like situations and settings. The uniqueness of the transition between founder and second-generation leader provided a context for institutions, which will approach a
similar scenario or have recently experienced a comparable transition. This knowledge will contribute to the education field and potentially other sectors.

Lastly, the findings from this case study could serve to highlight effective or ineffective ways to plan, prepare, and execute a transition. The goal of this case study was to understand what steps a specific organization made in preparations for a succession that only occurs once in the life cycle of an institution. The uniqueness of the leadership transition from the founder to the second-generation will allow other educational institutions to develop best practices for leadership succession planning.

**Delimitations**

To focus the study, the research was narrowed to examine a single case. A case study is employed when a researcher is trying to investigate a phenomenon and provide understanding of what occurred in a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). In order to gain understanding of the specific phenomenon, this study was limited to individuals who had first-hand knowledge of or a relationship with, Liberty University leading up to, during, and after the succession. This included employees, board members, students, and alumni. Each person was over the age of 18. By focusing on these individuals, the researcher was able to develop an overall understanding of the leadership transition at the institution.

**Research Plan**

In order to fully understand what occurred during the leadership succession and transition process at Liberty University, a qualitative exploratory case study research method was selected. According to Merriam (2009), “Often qualitative researchers undertake a qualitative study because there is lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon” (p. 15). The leadership transition, which occurred at
Liberty University, is appropriate for a qualitative study as the researcher sought to create, as described by Merriam, “Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about the phenomenon” (p. 16) and to understand the experiences of the parties involved (Creswell, 1994). A single case approach allowed the focus to be on the unique characteristics of the leadership succession.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this inquiry, the researcher examined the literature related to the succession process in succession planning and management, as well as succession as it related to: (a) nonprofits and higher education institutions, (b) family business, and (c) educational leadership. The framework of the study is the method and process of succession planning management.

Many organizations are confronted with the pending exodus of the baby boomers from the current generation of leadership (Froelich et al., 2011; Skinner, 2010). Staff of the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) estimated that more than 4 million baby boomers will reach the age of retirement by 2020. Heller and d’Ambrosio (2008) state, “As the Baby Boomers begin to retire, discussion is needed about the possible effects of their decisions on various aspects of higher education” (p. 101). As in all sectors, succession planning and management can be a challenging process. “Finding qualified, motivated leaders to fill all the vital executive positions vacated by this generation is going to present pressing challenges for many organizations, nonprofit and for-profit alike” (Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011, p. 4). In addition to the complexity of succession management is the dynamic of a family business. Gaedeke (1994) reported that family businesses have less than a 35% success rate when leadership is transferred into the second generation. When the company moves to the third generation, their prospect of survival is decreased to 10% success (Ward, 1987). Identification of the appropriate individuals internally or externally, who would possess the skillset necessary to lead the organization into the future, carries great responsibility, and this need is becoming more imminent. In a survey
conducted by the staff of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB; 2005), it was reported that 71% of the 4,311 respondents were expected to hand the day to day operation of the business over in transition within the 10 years, 41% were planning succession in the next 5 years. Leadership transition can be problematic and, even more so, when the family dynamic is interjected. Cadieux (2007) stated, “The period during which transfers of management and ownership take place can be difficult, especially for predecessors, for whom the firm probably represents a large portion of their personal, professional, and social lives” (p. 95).

**Succession Planning and Management**

It was Grusky (1960) who pioneered the academic field of leadership succession. He built on prior individual cases, which were compiled by Dale (1957), Gouldner (1950, 1954), and Whyte (1949). Grusky used the situational factors and frame of references developed in these early studies further define succession. Up until this point, there was no systematic course of study related to succession (Kesner & Sebora, 1994). Grusky proposed two main reasons, which all organizational members must deal with transition, “succession is important for two basic reasons: (1) administrative succession always leads to organizational instability, and (2) it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (p. 105). Also, he contended that organizational members must learn to properly deal with the management of a succession no matter what the reason for change.

It was this initial research, which laid the foundation for succession as a legitimate field of study. Grusky (1963, 1964) proposed two main theories related to succession. The first theory was coined, *common sense*, and the second theory was termed, *vicious circle*. According to common sense, an organization would realize performance benefits after
the replacement of a failed leader. In the vicious circle (i.e., cycle), he proposed that, often, decline in organization performance precedes succession, which creates a disruption that lowers morale and eventually leads to a steeper decline and ultimately more succession. Gamson and Scotch (1964) took issue with Grusky’s findings and presented a theory known as *scapegoating*. In these situations, stakeholders would mandate a change based on performance and, as a result, a leader would be removed from his or her position. This transition could occur at each level up the management chain as the blame was passed along (Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005). These studies were and still are the foundation of succession literature. They are commonly referred to as the “three theories of succession” (Kesner & Sebore, 1994, p. 327).

As time progressed so did analysis of succession. The topic was now part of management literature, and researchers (Cannella & Lubatkin, 1983; Gordon & Rosen, 1981; Pfeffer & Leblebici; 1973) sought to define specific terms related to the field. For example, researchers sought to clarify terms such as *insider* and *outsider* as they relate to the background of the successor. Birnbaum (1971) challenged the traditional definition in which an individual was placed inside or outside an organization. Successors from outside an organization might have been versed in the industry and thus have some context related to the characteristic of the business. Therefore, an individual can be an outsider to the organization but not to the industry. Correlations were found between the accomplishments of the successor and criteria related to: (a) environmental context (Pfeffer & Leblebici, 1973), (b) organizational age (Helmich, 1975), and (c) organizational size (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977). It was becoming clearer that succession was a complex area of study and was in need of continued research. By the end of the
1970s, publishers expand sections related to succession, and more than 25 different journals were publishing articles related to the discipline (Kesner & Sebora, 1994).

As the succession discipline was being defined, Gordon and Rosen (1981) offered two areas to consider: (a) pre-arrival factors such as the successor’s characteristics and the organizational history and their experience with succession (e.g., antecedents; and (b) post-arrival factors like the successor’s actions and reactions, and outside influences (e.g., consequences). Zhang and Rajagopalan (2004) examined relay succession and the implication of antecedents and consequences as well. They identified what they termed “four major antecedents that can influence the likelihood of relay successions” (p. 485). It was their conclusion that these antecedents often preceded a succession. The first antecedent dealt with the number of qualified internal candidates, who would be available for the job. This would be a senior executive, who would pose as a serious challenger for the position. If and when this person was identified, an incumbent could begin to provide on the job training. In the second antecedent, the performance of the firm was considered. Multiple studies have tied company performance to the turnover of a chief executive officer (Cannella & Lubatkin, 1983; Ocasio, 1994). The third antecedent dealt with strategic instability, which Zhang and Rajagopalan defined as “the extent in which a firm’s strategy has changed over time” (p. 486). This environment is not stable, and the administrators of the firm seek a leader who can bring a unified strategy to the company. The fourth antecedent considers the instability of the industry of the company. Prior researchers (Datta & Rajagopalan, 1998; Parrino, 1997) showed that industry circumstances can dictate the change in leadership positions.
This current study, like that of Brady and Helmich (1984), began to introduce variables to the succession field. Considerations needed to be made related to the characteristics of the organization and the successor. The variables included items such as: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) national origin, and (d) tenure as they related to the successor. Other variables included items related to the organization like: (a) age, (c) size, and (c) board involvement. Brady and Helmich (1984) concluded there was a need to expand the research on succession and initiate an outline of the succession planning processes. One key point was to shift some importance to the incumbent’s role in the transition. It was clear that the field of study was starting to expand and gain traction for a variety of findings. It was also clear that succession was not simply a linear event, which occurred, but a complex system with multiple variables to consider.

Giambatista, Rowe, and Riaz (2005) conducted a review of articles published from 1994-2004, the period in which succession research was blossoming. Two distinct areas of succession peaked during this period. The first is related to the category of antecedents: (a) board-related antecedents dealt with the make-up of the governing board of an organization and its impact on succession; (b) firm performance as antecedents continued to tie firm performance to the replacement of leadership; (c) leader characteristics and actions as antecedents reviewed details about the incumbent and commonalities related to the need for a change; (d) firm characteristics as antecedents were examined outside of firm performance to discover differences related to age, industry, and firm size; (e) industry and environmental antecedents examined the types of industry and how succession related to market changes; and lastly, (f) succession-
planning variables as antecedents was examined by investigation of the transitions through family firms and common themes by culture.

The second area, which stood out to Giambatista et al., (2005) was the consequences of leadership succession. An overview of the research revealed three areas, which received attention from researchers: (a) accounting related consequences as affected by leadership succession and the reaction of investors; (b) market-related consequences specifically focused on the reaction of markets; and (c) a third category, other performance-related consequences, dealt with the niche industries of succession and the difference variables of those transitions. It was evident that understanding what was happening after successions had taken place gained more of an interest by researchers. It was important to examine what transpired after the succession event had taken place.

As the study of succession expanded, researchers began to develop definitions to describe the process. According to Haran, Drotter, and Noel (2001), “succession planning is perpetuating the enterprise by filling the pipeline with high performing people to assure that every leadership level has an abundance of these performers to draw from, both now and in the future” (p. 167). Likewise, Rothwell and Poduch (2001) described succession planning and management as “any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department or work group by making provision for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people over time” (p. 405). Huang (1999) described succession as a deliberate process with formal rules for individuals to follow, which will allow for managerial transition. It was Rothwell (2001), who added the terms, deliberate and systematic, to define what he viewed as a prescriptive way to keep continuity within key positions in an organization. Lynn (2001)
proposed a succession management process that occurred sequentially to ensure continuity during times of transition. The steps include:

(a) deliberate and systematic identification of organizational needs; (b) discovery of a pool of high-potential candidates; (c) intentional learning experiences designed to increase knowledge, skills, and abilities of these potential leaders; and (d) actual selection of leaders from among the pool of previously identified individuals. (pp. 116-117)

Building a pipeline of talent to manage seamless transitions to ensure continuity is a step in the right direction of succession management planning. According to Hazarika (2009),

It goes without saying that the depth and quality of an organization’s leadership are the most important determinants of the organization’s future, and that especially in uncertain and turbulent times such as these, companies need to focus on building their pipelines of talent and ensuring successful leadership transition. (p. 8)

While succession has gone through several phases of study, there is little support for the construction of a specific theory. “During the past four decades, there has been an ongoing debate regarding the most appropriate theoretical explanation for the impact of leader succession on organizational performance” (Rowe et al., 2005, p. 198). This debate has even caused some to ask the question, does leadership matter? Bertrand and Schoar’s (2003) study on a manager’s effect on a firm regarding policy, financials, organization, and performance concluded that there was a significant impact on an organization from the senior leadership positions. There is no reason to believe
educational institutions would reflect differently. For the time, succession research will borrow theory from other areas of study.

If leadership does matter and does play a pivotal role in all areas of an organization, then a succession management plan is needed. Rothwell (2010) observed that “Many requirements must be satisfied if organizations are to survive in a fiercely competitive environment. One key requirement is that well-qualified replacements must be available as quickly as possible to assume critically important positions as they become vacant” (p. 14). There are several benefits to establishing a succession management plan to mitigate the disruptions that are sure to happen as first indicated by Grusky (1960). To increase the odds of managing a seamless transition process and ensure continued success, the administrators of higher educational institutions can glean from the accumulation of research and literature, as related to for-profit business, and apply the findings to their unique setting.

Leadership succession is not a new process. One of the most popular modern-day leadership succession and transitions occurred in the company, General Electric (GE; Radhaika, 2011). The succession process for GE began in June 1994 when Jack Welch, the current Chief Executive Officer (CEO) identified potential candidates to assume the CEO role when he retired (Rothwell, 2004). Welch implemented a horse race scenario between senior officials from within GE (Friedman & Olk, 1995). This allowed GE to examine the candidates in various settings to help make an informed decision on who would succeed Welch (Rothwell, 2010). It was after the evaluation period that Welch made his decision. One of the three was hired and the remaining two were terminated from their positions. The incumbent CEO played the major role in hand picking his

Another well-known leadership succession worthy of appraisal is the transition that occurred at the McDonald’s corporation in 2004. Jim Cantalupo had returned to McDonald’s after a brief retirement to fill the role of CEO. He began to turn the company around. Investors and customers were pleased with the direction of the company (Rothwell, 2010). One year later at a convention for operators and employees, before he was to speak, Mr. Cantalupo passed away from an apparent heart attack (Associated Press, 2004). Immediately, Charlie Bell was named Cantalupo’s successor as CEO. From the outside, this transition may have looked like a swift decision by the McDonald’s board of directors. However, Bell was at Cantalupo’s side for the previous 16 months preparing for the chief executive spot (Berchelman, 2005). The company released a statement that said, “Charlie Bell has worked side by side with Jim during these past 16 months to revitalize McDonald's all over the world, he is ideally suited and prepared to continue Jim's remarkable focus and discipline on our business” (Associated Press, para. 3). It was clear that a crown heir or relay succession had been chose by Cantalupo and was being trained and mentored for when the transition took place. The GE and McDonald’s leadership succession examples provide a context for this study. Each company initialized and executed a succession plan by use of different methods but accomplished the same thing.
Succession in Nonprofit Organizations and Higher Education

The administrators of for-profit and non-profit organizations understand the importance and value of proper succession planning. In particular, the staffs of higher education institutions and nonprofits know that leadership changes at the highest positions are of notable impact. Yet a large number of institutions operate without a succession plan (Bowen, 2008; Valentine, 2011). In order to ensure a seamless transition, when a leadership succession occurs, the members of an organization will need to rely on a structured process to identify new leaders. This type of planning will help lessen the negative reactions that may result from a transition at senior levels (Rothwell, 2010). The struggles for small universities and colleges as well as a number of nonprofit organizations have been identified, in particular, those with limited amount of resources available to train internal people to take the helm (Tierney, 2006). “Looking internally for successors is unlikely to yield sufficient numbers of qualified candidates in nonprofit organizations” (Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011, p. 8). This is due mainly to the lack of resources to keep qualified talent for the time necessary for proper grooming. Tierney reported that nonprofits will fill executive positions with internal talent 30% of the time, while for profits double that placement with 60%.

As organizations experience a change, there is a possibility for culture, values, and vision to be affected (Valentine, 2011). This shift can be warranted based on the performance of an organization; however, often it is not desired. The installation of a system that can be utilized to identify candidates in advance can ensure a smooth transition of power (Froelich, McKee, & Rathge, 2011). When succession occurs, the new leader will be responsible for three important tasks:
(a) sustain the mission, distinctive role, and basic commitments of the organization; (b) it embodies its purpose by actually implementing its mission and, in the process, gives shape to its culture; (c) and it maintains organizational values and identity by defending the culture’s integrity and making its ideologies as secure and stable as possible. (Selznick, 1957; Valentine, 2010, p. 103)

Skinner (2010) contended that there will arise a new type of candidate to lead the future of higher educational institutions in the United States. As a large body of current administrators exits the workforce, board members and search committees are left to find candidates who can meet the growing demands of higher education. Institutions are faced with a changing landscape in education in regard to: (a) funds, (b) students, and (c) faculty expectations, and the need to manage from a limited power base. Martin and Samels (2004) referred to an exodus of college presidents due to a lack of preparation for the stresses and demands of the job. The lack of a standardized preparation mechanism which would orient the incoming president to the requirements of the job is problematic. “While it is important for organizations to identify the next generation of leaders, they also must attend to how the transition occurs, including making provisions for a smooth transfer of power from one leader to the next” (Balser & Carmin, 2009, p. 185).

Bornstein (2010) contended that all stakeholders in higher education must engage in leadership development and succession planning. The same can be said for nonprofit organizations as they work on limited resources.

It is also important to understand that a transition in employment will not necessarily be smooth or easy. According to Pittinsky and Messiter (2007), in their discussion about the transition from private to public leadership roles, the desire for the
position is not enough to warrant a smooth transition. Often, individuals are left to navigate the nuances of a transition on their own. Incoming leaders or crown heir candidates can benefit from structured processes, which will not leave the success to chance. While the topic of leadership succession has grown in recent decades, a more in depth look at specific practices of organizations will help to create standardized processes.

**Educational Leadership**

According to Bornstein (2010), “Higher education is facing a coming crisis in leadership” (p. 33), and this crisis is related to four key areas:

1. high turnover in the presidential role
2. lack of talent in the pipeline to fill roles
3. bias against internal candidates
4. poorly executed searches and transitions. (p. 34)

The role of the university leadership has expanded. As discussed by Hammond (2013), the position of college or university president requires the management of a host of issues that were not previously a concern. The accountability related to budgets, student enrollment, and navigating the political landscape has driven many individuals to step away from the office. This pressure, combined with the boomer generation reaching the age of retirement, is causing a potential leadership gap in education.

A profile of the current university presidents in the U.S. suggests that the average age is 60 years old (Bornstein, 2005; Ezarik, 2010; Song & Hartley, 2012; Stripling, 2011). Staff or the American Council on Education (ACE; 2007) acknowledged that a sitting president would have a 22-year track record in the current or prior position. Also,
it was reported that the path for the president would have started in the classroom as a full-time faculty member. According to the Song and Hartley (2012) study, only 15% of presidents of independent colleges would have come from outside of higher education. This is a shift upward from the timeless Kruse and Beck (1928) study, in which it was found that the 96% of university presidents came from either within the institution as the result of a promotion or from another school. Of the independent schools studied, 25% of those, who were promoted from within higher education, stayed at the same institution while the others transitioned to alternative school (Song & Hartley, 2012).

The leadership exodus does not just affect the elite institutions. According to a study in 2008 conducted at Iowa State University, 79% of the community college presidents were eligible to retire in 2012 and that number will increase to 84% by 2016. Fulton-Calkins and Milling (2005) published a study about community college presidents, which revealed a pending exodus. They concluded that colleges could experience a successful transition by: (a) awareness of the issue, (b) understanding the institutional needs, (c) consideration of talent outside the normal profile, and (d) consistent opportunities for development for both faculty and administrators. Staff of the Council for Independent Colleges (CIC; 2012) reported that one-half of their member presidents planned to retire in the next 5 years. Consider the 7,006 accredited institutions of higher education in the U.S., and the magnitude of a leadership gap is realized. The researchers at the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2012) reported that there were 109 transitions out of the 420 schools that are part of its membership between April 2011 and August 2012 (Hammond, 2013). Yet, a formal documented outline of how to manage a presidential succession does not exist in most
colleges and universities (Lapovsky, 2006). As a result, institutional staff is often left scrambling to find a replacement when the time comes.

With this leadership crisis, succession planning in higher education is a vital topic. Axelrod (2002) defined succession planning as “an ongoing, systematic process that boards, with the help of their chief executives, can use to create an environment for chief executives to succeed from the very beginning of their terms until the cycle is repeated with their successors” (p. 2). It is inferred that some of the lack of planning is the result in a talent deficit. This is partly to blame on internal candidates, who leave before the president has relinquished his office. Spanier (2010) indicated a recent increase in attention toward succession planning and proposed that presidents take a more active role in mentoring of senior leadership. He proposed this route would attract a higher quality candidate for the administration and could potentially create a pool of candidates for succession.

Leadership roles in education have similar pitfalls, whether a candidate assumes a leadership role at the elementary level or in higher education. Griffith (2006) stated that “Administrators must develop positive relationships with faculty, staff, students, graduates, and the leaders in their communities, state, nation, and global societies” (p. 68). As a leadership succession occurs, these relationships will assist the leader in accomplishing the mission and goals of the institution. Relationship building is a vital function of a leader. At the core of leadership succession is the processes of building allies and creating buy-in from people in the organization. If a proper succession and management plan is in place, the next leader will be able to cultivate the relationships necessary to help him or her in their new role before the final transition occurs (Froelich,
McKee, & Rathge, 2011). There are many challenges for a newly appointed leader. In the examination of the transition of teachers to administrators, Griffith (2006) stated, “New administrators often find their key support personnel invaluable because they provide information and help administrators master different aspects of their duties” (p. 70).

There is a need to understand all the workings of an institution when becoming a leader. This includes things such as: (a) budgets, (b) public relations, and (c) strategic plans. No one leader can master all areas and will need to depend upon key staff to help manage these areas. Herminia (2004) referred to working through informal networks to help navigate leadership transition. A well-organized succession plan allows staff to become comfortable with the new leader when the time is appropriate. According to Barker (2006), “There is a growing recognition that our expectations of what one leader can achieve in a few years are unrealistic and that leadership succession is a critical factor for sustainable improvement” (p. 278). Understanding the strategic plan and the history of its execution can be achieved by identification of a new leader early enough to allow the leader to participate in the leadership decisions before he or she is given the entire responsibility of managing the institution.

**Leadership Development**

A leadership-training program that is successful can prove challenging. Leadership development is not a new concept, and there are many options to cultivate new leaders. Institution administrators must be purposeful in the implementation of its training program or they run the risk of wasting time, effort, and money. As stated by Lee (2010), “Unfortunately, research indicates that no more than 20% of corporate investment in training results in performance improvement or transfer of training to the workplace”
The risk is that educational institutions face in creating programs that do not actually develop the leaders to a point where they can assume their position. Many resources are spent on developing assessment devices that help identify potential leaders and superior staff.

To work as a leader requires the ability to meet the challenges and adapt in order to properly manage change (Basham & Mathur, 2010). These are the qualities that organizations need to identify in future management candidates. According to Bisbee (2007),

One way to help ensure there are trained leaders in academe is to identify potential leaders and provide them with support, training, and encouragement to take on leadership roles. Both key current leaders and institutional programs can be instrumental in helping to identify and train leaders. (p. 78)

The education world is changing rapidly. The last few years have presented many new challenges to educational leaders. They are in a state of constant evaluation to determine if their policies and procedures are what institutions need to be successful. In order to stay ahead of the changing culture, an adaptable leader is the ideal candidate.

Assessing talent is a challenge for any organization. Many corporations depend on an interview process to help identify employees and candidates to promote. While the interview is a chance to evaluate several aspects of the individual, it is only one piece of the total evaluation. Identifying tools to assist in the evaluation process is vital in determining the best talent for leadership positions in education. The challenge is identifying assessment tools that work. Basham and Mathur (2010), in the article
Dynamic Leadership Development in Community College Administration: Theories, Applications, and Implications, wrote:

More than three thousand assessments are available for use in the United States, yet public and private foundations are still channeling millions of dollars into developing new assessments. Are these assessments not valid or reliable? Many of them are both. Are they too costly? Many cost less than a hundred dollars each. Do they not fit the need? You can find many assessments to meet specific needs, whether blue-collar or white-collar, from janitors to CEOs. It makes little sense to continue developing new instruments. Instead, the researchers suggest using an existing form in newer applications such as dynamic team assessment. By using assessments to gauge the benchmarks, strengths, and weaknesses of employees, the employer will have more data available to drive forward innovation and ideals as a change leader. (p. 28)

Allowing candidates to be benchmarked against other educational leaders allows a supervisor to assess talent aside from seniority, personality, and other factors that do not truly assess the qualifications of a candidate.

**Family Business**

A component of this case study, which makes it unique is the relationship between the founder and the second-generation leaders as they were father and son. While this is a rare occurrence in higher education, it is a common occurrence among for-profit businesses as well as nonprofit organizations. When referring to family business, people often picture small mom and pop type of establishments with just a few employees. However, up to 90% of all businesses in the U.S. have been attributed to
family run firms (Davis & Harveston, 1998). Likewise, Kuratko and Hodgetts (2004) reported that companies, which are run by families, create 59% of the jobs in the U.S. It is clear that family businesses are not just a novelty but, also, they are a serious force in an economy. “Family businesses are the engines that drive socio-economic development and wealth creation around the world” (Panjwani, Aggarwal, & Dhameja, 2008, p. 272). As a field of academic study, family business research is not as broad as other social disciplines. Neubauer and Lanke (1998) acknowledged in the 1990s that this was a young area of study, recognized in the 1980s. Their assertion was that, until that point in time, the area was largely ignored. Before 1975, research of family businesses was rare (Handler, 1989; Wortman, 1994). While the discipline may be young, the history of family business is not. “Family business long served as the backbone of ancient economies and civilizations, as well as played a significant role in the development of western civilization” (Bird, Welsch, Astrachan, & Pistrui, 2002, p. 337). In the U.S., the industrialization age was fueled by major family businesses with familiar names such as the: (a) Vanderbilts, (b) Rockefellers, (c) Astors, (d) Carnegies, and (e) Fords. Likewise, In Europe, there were famous families like: (a) Rothchilds, (b) Zegnas, and (c) Hienekens (Hall, 1988; 1995). Currently, there are major firms that are still under the control of families. Ford motor company is now in its fourth generation of familial management. The Walton family owns Wal-Mart by as much as 39% (Panjwani, Aggarwal, & Dhameja, 2008). To dismiss the power and influence of major family firms would be a mistake. Neubauer and Lank (1998) stated, family enterprises were among the most effective locomotives of the economies in which they are located: They created jobs; they were among the few enterprises
that were successful enough to pay taxes and they displayed the agility and
flexibility in the troubled economic waters of their national economies. (p. xiv)

Still, family business as a research field had obstacles to overcome. It was viewed that
family businesses were small shops with little innovation. There were questions related to
the significance of studying the field, except the topic of transferring of assets to future
generations and becoming a unique enough area to warrant a separate discipline to be
studied. The field of entrepreneurship had a similar path as familial business, but is now a
legitimate area of study (Bird, Welsch, Astrachan, & Pistrui, 2002).

It is important to review the operational definitions for family businesses to gain a
full understanding of the term and the broad scope that it covers. In a review by Chua,
Chrisman, and Sharma (1996), they identified at least 34 different definitions. For the
purposes of context, several of the meanings are discussed in this literature review. As a
matter of a broad but clear definition, Astrachan and Shanker (2003) suggested that there
are at least three working definitions of a family firm:

1. a broad definition in which the family retains voting rights that contributes
to the strategic direction of the business;

2. a moderate definition that has the family involved in the day-to-day
operations of the business; and

3. a strict definition that has multiple generations of the family participating
in the day-to-day operations and retaining voting rights that contribute to
the direction of the company.

It is from this point that other literature refers to less or additional criteria to
define a family business. For instance, Miller and Rice (1967) offered a broad
acknowledgement of the family involvement as the main criteria to simply define a family business. Lank (1997) argued that a family business does not mean that 100% of the business is owned by the family, but rather the controlling interest and key strategy decisions are directed by family members. Beckhard and Dyer (1983) simply defined a family business as a system that links family and business. Yet, it was Alcon (1982), who defined the business side of the link when he described a family business as “a profit-making concern that is either a proprietorship, a partnership, or a corporation” (p. 230). He went on to define a publicly owned company to have family involved in the operation of the business. Davis (1983) defined family business as “those whose policy and direction are subject to significant influence by one or more family units” (p. 47), related to strictly ownership and reducing the importance of actual participation in the business. Gallo and Sveen (1991) stated that a family firm is “a business where a single family owns the majority of stock and has control” (p. 181). Rosenblatt et al. (1985) agreed and suggested the ownership and control lies with one single family, who may or may not have been involved in the business directly at some point.

Researchers (Bernard, 1975; Chua et al., 1999; Gallo & Sveen, 1991) have grappled with the definition and criteria that was required to identify an exhaustive and universally adopted definition. Some authors (Churchill and Hatten, 1993; Handler, 1989) started to introduce the idea of succession as a required piece to define family business. The single-family concept and their influence on the future of the business meant that they were at least involved in choosing the person who would run the business. Handler (1989) added this requirement to the definition of family business, when he stated “an organization whose major operating decisions and plans for
leadership success are influenced by family members serving in management or on the board” (p. 262). He did not go as far as requiring the successor to be a family member, but that the family would have the control in choosing that person. Churchill and Hatten (1993) did require the successor to be part of the family and stated that a “younger family member has or will assume control of the business from the elder” (p. 52). The succession portion of the family business definition is important. Panjwani, Aggarwal, and Dhameja (2008) stated, “family businesses are loyal to the principles and ideals of the founder, who was more often than not, a self-made person” (p. 274). Chua, Chrisman, and Sharma (1999) developed a comprehensive definition of a family business and encompassed several key components, when they stated, “a business governed and or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families” (p. 25).

Knowing the commitment to the founder’s purpose and vision, succession as part of the family business definition is vital. This definition not only acknowledges active participation and influence but also that a family member stays at the helm of the company, potentially, for generations. The criterion of succession is vital in examining family businesses. After all, Chrisman, Shua, and Sharma (1999) suggested that the reason family businesses are a topic of study is precisely their interaction as a family. These interactions are unique, in regard to how these firms manage, govern, and choose a successor. It is the family component that changes the way these items are done.
As a deeper understanding of a family business occurs, the more important the observation of the transition of power becomes. Early on, research of family firms dealt with the dynamics related to running the everyday business. In recent years, the research has shifted to the area of succession (Panjwani, Aggarwal, & Dhameja, 2008). Dyer and Sanchez (1998) reviewed 10 years of family business literature to discover that succession was the second most published topic. Chua et al. (2003) referred to succession as the largest requests made to consulting firms to help navigate pitfalls. When a business, including a family firm, moves to the point of considering a transfer, they will need to consider the various stages of a transfer. Usually, the succession point happens during the company lifecycle, when the founder or previous leader understands the need to exit from the day-to-day operations, has a debilitating health issue, or dies. This triggers the transfer of power (Barnes & Hershon, 1976; Giarmarco, 2012). Often, the succession planning is delayed due to concerns of the founder. Aronoff and Ward (1992) described three main reasons for the hesitancy from the founder: (a) the founder/entrepreneur views the discussion around succession pointing to his or her loss of power and leading to his or her mortality, (b) key managers do not want to be viewed as rocking the boat and therefore do not mention succession, and (c) avoiding succession protects owners from making difficult decisions about who in fact would lead the company. The hesitancy of the founder is not without merit. According to Gaedeke (1994) and Shanker and Astrachan (1996), less than 35% of businesses, which pass from the first generation to the second generation, stay in the family. The same statistic drops to 10% in the move from the second to third generation. Many will simply close after the founder is removed. However, to ensure that the family business not only survives the
first transition but multiple transitions in the years to come, Hamilton and Godfrey (2007) identified three main areas, which are required to ensure continuity in a family business:

1. Shared Vision:
   a. Shared family goals/values
   b. Shared family risk/opportunity
   c. Strategic direction for the future

2. Responsible and Motivated Owners:
   a. Rights and responsibilities
   b. Ongoing education process
   c. Strong family leadership

3. Effective family governance:
   a. Unifying structures
   b. Effective processes
   c. Accountability and authority to act

Sharma and Irving (2005) addressed with the transfer of leadership in a family firm as it relates to the successors commitment to the business. Much is written on the transfer from the leader to the next generation. However, understanding the motives and reasons of the successor can contribute to a full insight into succession. A family member can be compelled to join the family business for a variety of reasons. They are defined in the following ways:

1. Affective Commitment – The successor bases his or her decision to join the family business on emotional attachment. This individual believes in the mission and goals of the organization;
2. Normative Commitment – This successor chooses to join the family venture out of obligation;

3. Continuance Commitment – The successor weighs the costs of not being part of the family business; and/or

4. Calculative Commitment – The successor perceives his or her value to stay or join the firm. Leaving the family business forfeits the wealth associated with the company.

Each person has a personal, unique reason for joining the firm and chose to carry on the family tradition by actively participation in the business. As siblings grow up in the family business, successors learn to: (a) understand their place in history and how to focus on something bigger than them while making a contribution; (b) also, they begin to realize the importance of family ties and relationships that help the family firm to sustain (Hamilton & Godfrey, 2007). In order for this to be accomplished, more understanding and better execution of the transitions need to occur. Family business, like all businesses can benefit from the study of recent example of succession.

**Conceptual Framework**

Knowing that succession will occur in all organizations, understanding the succession models of Friedman and Olk (1995) and Vancil (1987) will systematize a conceptual framework to guide this case study. The pillars of the framework (See Figure 1) will provide a means to identify: (a) a method of succession planning and what steps were taken to implement or execute, (b) the process of succession planning, and (c) the validation of the succession planning through the final transition.
Friedman and Olk (1995) developed an outline of a fourfold typology executive succession method, based upon who is in control when the time of the transition begins. Staff of educational institutions can parallel the senior level leaders in business, in this case, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), to the senior academic officials from their institution. The definitions below indicate the four methods:

1. **Crown Heir**, the primary decision-maker is the predecessor CEO, the span of time over which the process unfolds is great, and the heir apparent is identified and informed as to his or her status early on (i.e., information symmetry). He or she may, however, have to wait until the predecessor leaves office in order to assume control.

2. **Horse Race**, in this method, several key insiders are pitted against each other as candidates, who are told that they will be groomed, their progress will be observed, and that whoever performs best over a period of time will be chosen as the new CEO. It is characterized by incumbent rule and preferences about criteria that are unclear or unstable at the outset.

3. **Coup d'Etat**, this method is characterized by non-incumbent rule and preferences being known in advance. Organizational members and others (e.g., board of directors) who constitute a coalition of interests that differs from the incumbent's, make the key decisions in this type of succession. The span of time over which the process unfolds is relatively short.

4. **Comprehensive Search**, in this process, non-incumbents exert control, and preferences are not known in advance. Decision-makers seek a CEO whose background and skills match those required by an intended
organizational reorientation. The process is comprehensive: (a) extensive effort is expended in data collection, (b) many decision-makers are involved, and (c) the procedure incorporates input and approval by individuals who are knowledgeable of both potential candidates and the future demands of the role.

Friedman and Olk (1995) compartmentalized the types of succession, which can transpire at senior levels, to provide insight and analysis of the complexity that can occur in an organization. [are these types relevant to the discussion here?]

Vancil (1987) had previously discussed similar categories as Friedman and Olk but referred to relay succession for CEOs as the process to identify candidates for succession. Relay succession can be examined in two phases. In the first phase, the heir is identified by the organization. The benefit of the designation of an heir at this stage permits the firm to evaluate the performance of that individual and gauge if he or she will be a proper fit. In the second phase, the nominated heir is groomed. Thus, Vancil’s model allows for the potential successor(s) to have access to the CEO for a full immersion in regard to what the duties of the position entail. A process of learning occurs for all parties involved. The heir will gain position specific knowledge and develop as a leader with on the job training, and the firm will get fully acquainted with the individual. This not only helps to create a seamless transition for the leader; it allows the firm to adapt to the leadership style of the heir apparent (Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2004). Understanding the circumstances around a succession can help an organization move from one leader to another while mitigating the potential fallout.
The leadership transition is a vital process for the future success of an organization and is often overlooked by the staff in the sector of higher education. Bynander and Hart (2006) emphasized the need for a quality succession management plan and stated, “However good and powerful they may be, all leaders have a limited ‘sell by’ date. They get old, weary, and sick. They get out of tune with the times or anesthetized by their own power” (p. 707). No matter how effective, a leader eventually will need to step aside and let the new leadership take control.

Planning – Selecting a method for leadership succession
Execution – Specified benchmarks for power shift
Succession – Complete transition of leadership

*Figure 1. Phases of succession management.*
Summary

Demonstrated in this review of literature was the importance of leadership succession in business and in higher education. The value of family businesses and its impact on the economy is equally important. Succession planning has occurred for years and presents a unique area to be examined by researchers. Presented in this current study was a unique insight to leadership succession at an institution of higher education. Additionally, the study provides insight into the family business research. Succession planning and management literature is an emerging field that is continually morphing and expanding to add diversity to the topic. This researcher will provide additional insight into the works that already exist as well as the method and process used by one organization to pass leadership from the founder to the second-generation leader.
CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In order to understand the succession planning and leadership transition that occurred at Liberty University, a qualitative case study was employed. A case study was chosen to gain a rich, thick description of the phenomenon. This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What were the methods that key leaders used at Liberty University to plan the leadership succession between founder and second-generation leader?

2. What were the processes that were followed to execute the leadership succession plan?

3. What role did the relationship between the founder and second-generation leader play in the leadership succession?

4. What led to a successful transition in May 2007?

Research Design

Yin (2009) stated, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 19). To understand the firsthand knowledge of the university stakeholders during the leadership succession planning and the leadership transition at Liberty University, a qualitative research design was selected. The use of a qualitative design allowed a clear, richly descriptive inquiry of the leadership succession and transition at the university (Merriam, 2009). The selected method of research was a qualitative exploratory case study of Liberty University concerning the succession from the founder to the second-generation leader. The single
case study method was chosen to gain insight into a specific phenomenon that occurred in the bounded context of Liberty University (Creswell, 1994; Stake 1995).

According to Yin (2009), a valid reason to conduct a case study is to examine a phenomenon that is unique or extreme. While this method is commonly used in a clinical setting to investigate medical conditions, the leadership succession, which occurred at Liberty University, had several components that made the study unique. First, the transition occurred from the founder to the second-generation leader. This type of transition occurs only once in the life cycle of an organization. Second is the relationship between the founder and second-generation leader; they were father and son. Third is the apparent success indicated by the years of growth and financial stability, which occurred at the university after the transition.

According to Merriam (2009), “The decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery and, interpretation rather than hypothesis” (p. 42). Yin (2009) reported that there are three items to consider in order to decide on which method of inquiry to follow. “The three conditions consists of (a) the type of research question posed (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (p. 8). Further, Yin explained that there are three methods that can be used in all areas of research: (a) exploratory, (b) descriptive, and (c) explanatory. This applies to case study research as well. To determine which method to use, the researcher must examine the questions he or she wants to try to answer. The research questions, which should be used to investigate the what of a phenomenon are typically reserved for exploratory case studies. Questions,
which are used to answer the *how* and *why* of a phenomenon, are designed for explanatory case studies. In this current study, the researcher sought to understand *what* occurred regarding the leadership transition at Liberty University.

This case study was particularistic, as it was focused on the specific phenomenon of leadership succession, which occurred within a bounded system at Liberty University. Also, the case study was descriptive, in that, it provided a rich, thick description of the leadership succession at Liberty University, and it was heuristic, in that, the case study illuminated potential new ways to understand the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

**Researcher’s Role**

Qualitative research is interpretive by its nature as the researcher seeks to understand the lived experiences related to the phenomenon. Merriam (2009) concluded that “The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 15). As a result, the human instrument will carry biases, as they are often familiar with the subjects. Poggenpoel and Myburgh (2003) proposed three potential reasons for bias: (a) the researcher’s mental and/or other discomfort could pose a threat to the truth value of data obtained and information obtained from data analyses; (b) the researcher is not sufficiently prepared to conduct the field research; and (c) the researcher conduct, inappropriate interviews. There is the potential that the investigator can limit his or her curiosities so they discover only what they think they know (Chenail, 2011). The researcher in this case study has an affinity with some of the participants in the study based on years of service at Liberty University. According to Creswell (1994), these experiences can be both a hindrance and a benefit. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this as “becoming thoroughly acquainted with the field sites” (p. 251). Corsaro (1980)
described a process of prior ethnography in which the researcher becomes oriented to increase effectiveness and to strengthen the human instrument. For this current study, the researcher used multiple sources of data to create triangulation amongst the data.

The topic of leadership succession and transition is related to both the researcher’s career experiences and firsthand account of the transition that occurred at Liberty University. As a current employee at Liberty University and a former staff member of the founder, the succession is familiar to the researcher. However, the senior leaders of Liberty University and the Board of Trustees conducted the planning and execution of the succession. For this reason, the researcher detached himself from experiences in order to garner a better understanding of what actually transpired. The benefit of close proximity will allow the human instrument to gain access to key players in the transition. Since the researcher was familiar with the university and the participants of this study there was an added level of trustworthiness (Creswell, 1994).

The researcher’s career in higher education has presented two distinct opportunities to be involved in leadership transitions. The first was a formation of a new division at Liberty University called the Office of Promotional Publications. This office was a new initiative for the University in 2007 and involved the combination of multiple departments under one management structure. As a key player in leadership, the transition required some navigation to develop buy-in from the stakeholders. Three years later, another leadership transition occurred within the distance education program of Liberty University, which was termed, Liberty University Online. During this transition, responsibility was granted to the admissions division. This division included four areas with established directors and staff. In this changeover, an already established model of
business was proven, which required this researcher to gain acceptance and respect from all team members. Again, these experiences provided a context of the study that allows identification of bias but also appreciate some of the challenges and victories that occur in a leadership transition. These experiences made the researcher an appropriate candidate to conduct the study.

The site for the study was selected primarily because of the leadership succession phenomenon that occurred in 2007 with: (a) the transition from founder to second-generation leader, (b) the relationship between the leaders, and (c) the subsequent success, which has transpired in the recent years since the succession. This researcher could have potentially exposed information that Liberty University officials might not want explored. However, permission was sought and obtained to conduct the study from Jerry Falwell Jr., the current president at Liberty University. He confirmed that he would participate in the study (Personal Communication, 2013; IRB Letter, 2013). No information was collected before Institutional Review Board approval.

**Setting**

The site selection of Liberty University for this single case study was chosen because of three main factors. First, to examine the leadership succession planning and process. Second was the uniqueness of the transition from the founder of the institution to the second-generation. Third was the father/son relationship between the founder and second-generation leader.

Liberty University is a Christian university founded in 1971 by Rev. Jerry Falwell in Lynchburg, Virginia. The mission of Liberty University is to “train Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential to impact their world”
(Mission & Purpose, 2013). The vision for the university was to provide a place for Christian men and women to train in their area of discipline while they developed spiritually to be a “champion for Christ” (para. 2).

In its brief history, Liberty University moved from a Baptist college to a major university, where 240 programs of study are offered through its residential and external campuses. Liberty is situated on a 7,000-acre campus in central Virginia nestled below the Blue Ridge Mountains. The campus has undergone major revisions in recent years to its academic, athletic, and student housing facilities (Liberty University, 2013).

The enrollment at Liberty University now exceeds 100,000 students and is the largest private, non-profit, higher education institution in the United States. While Liberty enjoys a large enrollment and a large endowment, the institution has not always flourished financially (Liberty University, 2013).

In the early 1990s, Liberty faced financial turmoil due to decreasing financial gifts to the school. As a result, Liberty was over $100 million in debt. By restructuring the debt and a large gift from a benefactor (e.g., $70 million), Liberty was able to correct its financial path and move toward balanced books (Smillie, 2006). The manageable debt allowed Liberty to expand its campus and programs and resume its growth track.

In 2007, the life insurance payout from the founder, Jerry Falwell Sr., granted the school $30 million. As a result, the school was able to absolve its debts and invest in the infrastructure of the school, which support the largest period of growth in enrollment (Brown, 2007).

Governed by a board of trustees, Liberty University follows the traditional hierarchy of leadership for a university. Currently, Jerry Falwell Jr., occupies the role of
president. The president’s cabinet of vice presidents and their respective divisions manage the operations of the school.

Participants

In this single case study, the researcher examined the phenomenon within a bounded system. In this case, the focus is on the leadership succession that occurred at Liberty University in May 2007. In order to gain an understanding of the events, which led to the transition and the details of what transpired after the transition, a series of interviews and focus group interviews were conducted. According to Yin (2009), this is the most important part of a case study. To glean the most information, an interview was conducted with the current president of Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Jr., and several key officials. Each interviewee was employed or affiliated with the university prior to and during the transition and held firsthand knowledge of the succession event. The key positions included:

1. Provost/Vice Provost,
2. Vice Presidents/Cabinet Members,
3. Board Members, and
4. Alumni.

Table 1
Summary of Participants in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrators/VP’s</th>
<th>Faculty/Staff</th>
<th>Alumni</th>
<th>Board of Trustees</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stake (1995) advised researchers to be aware that not all potential participants will be interested in the case study or deem it worthy of their time. It was important to understand that, potentially, this researcher was invading the privacy of the individuals selected for the study. It was equally important to identify key people, who could provide the best insight on the case. The collection of data from only those, who were available, would have provided the requisite information for this study (Stake, 1995). The researcher did encounter resistance from some key individuals, who were asked to participate. As a result, their account of the succession was not documented for this study.

To secure the participation of the individuals listed, I emailed a letter of intent to summarize the study. A follow-up phone call was made to each potential participant to invite him or her to contribute to the study and to schedule a convenient time to meet. The selection of specific members of the President’s cabinet was predicated on the tenure of the staff member; therefore, only senior leadership with firsthand knowledge of the leadership succession was invited to participate in the research. Specific board members, who were active during the transition, were invited to participate in the study. Alumni were selected based on their years of attendance at the university. Only alumni, who were active students prior to and after the transition and had firsthand knowledge of the succession were invited to participate. A list of potential participants was requested from the Liberty University Alumni Office. I requested their participation in the study via focus group interviews and suggested several times we could meet. Faculty and staff were invited to participate in the study as well. These interactions were conducted via focus group interviews. Participants from this group were limited to persons with
firsthand knowledge of the succession by their employment history. The public directory of employees at Liberty University served to identify a list of potential participants. Because an inquiry can present a burden to a participant, every effort was made to accommodate their time and schedule (Stake, 1995).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) reported that, “In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion” (p. 202). The one on one interview was conducted with 10 participants, who provided the information needed to adequately answer the research questions. There were 11 participants in the focus groups, which provided adequate saturation. According to Merriam (2009), there is no rule about the size of a focus group, but most experts agree that between 6-10 are appropriate. The following table details the gender and role of each participant as well as their years of affiliation with Liberty University.
Table 2

Details of Participants in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview #</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years Employed/Affiliated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>234</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>43 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>235</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>236</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>43 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>237</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>41 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>29 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>243</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>36 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>263</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>35 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>264</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>246</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>42 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>247</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Board of Trustees</td>
<td>22 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>266</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>267</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>268</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>269</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Alumni</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>253</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>254</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>255</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>257</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>259</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Faculty/Staff</td>
<td>24 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Procedures

Before data were collected, approval from President Falwell and the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. There are four basic types of data collection methods in qualitative research: (a) interviews, (b) observations, (c) documents, and (d) visual images (Creswell, 1994). Each of these methods allow for the
researcher to collect the requisite information to understand the phenomenon that occurred in this case study. One of the strengths of a case study is that the researcher is able to collect from multiple sources (Yin, 2009). To best understand the leadership succession at Liberty University, the researcher collected data with the use of: (a) interviews, (b) focus group interviews, and (c) document analysis.

The collection of data followed three principles, as described by Yin (2009). The first principle is to use multiple sources of evidence. In order to maximize the data collection methods, this researcher did not focus on a single source, but used multiple sources, “the use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues” (Yin, p. 115). The researcher used multiple sources to allow for data triangulation, which supported the different sources to corroborate the findings and conclusions (Yin).

To properly organize and categorize the information related to this case study, the researcher developed a case study database as described by Yin (2009) as a second principle of data collection. According to Yin (2009), this is an area, where case study researchers can borrow from other methods of research. A considerable amount of data was collected during the course of this study. This volume required a system for reference and retrieval when needed, since “data management is a skill that comes with experience” (Stake, 1995, p. 55). To help address the learning curve, the researcher generated a database to store and index the collected data. The database was used to manage the case study documents and narratives (Yin).

A third principle to be followed in the data collection is to maintain the chain of evidence (Yin, 2009). Much like the collection of evidence at a crime scene, each point of
data collected should be handled and observed. By ensuring a cohesive flow from the study questions through the evidence, the reliability of the research findings will be increased.

**Interviews**

Interviewing is a “systematic activity” (Merriam, 2009, p. 87), which is designed to collect data. An interview is employed often when direct observation of a phenomenon is not possible. In this case study of the leadership succession at Liberty University, the phenomenon cannot be replicated. Therefore, the researcher relied on the information, which was gathered from individuals who were involved in the transition, in order to obtain both a description and interpretation of the event (Merriam; Stake, 1995). The account of these individuals was essential evidence for this case study as they provided details of the “human affairs or behavioral events” (Yin, 2009, p. 108). The segmented interview questions are listed below.
Table 3

Questions for University Officials and Board Members

Questions

Relationship to the leader/institution
1. Please describe your association with Liberty University and how long you have been connected with the school?
2. What relationship did you have with the school’s founder?
3. What relationship did/do you have with the current president?

Planning for succession
4. At what point did discussion about succession begin?
5. What were the criteria for the successor?
6. Who were the candidates for assuming the role of president?
7. When did it become apparent that a successor was being developed?

Execution of Succession
8. What was your first reaction when you heard that Jerry Falwell Sr. had passed away?
9. What were the biggest challenges and obstacles facing the school during the transition?
10. What were your greatest concerns about the succession?
11. How did your role change (if at all) after the succession?
12. What would you describe as the greatest accomplishment since the succession?
13. What could have or should have been done differently?

Successful Transition
14. To what would you attribute the success of the institution after the transition?
15. Describe what it was like to see the university grow and achieve financial stability.

Familial Relationship
16. How are Jerry Falwell Sr. and Jerry Falwell Jr. alike?
17. How are Jerry Falwell Sr. and Jerry Falwell Jr. different?
18. Describe the leadership style of the president?
19. Describe the leadership style of the founder?
Table 4

Questions for Liberty University President

| Questions |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| **Relationship to the leader/institution** |
| 1. When did you first realize that you would work at Liberty University? |
| 2. What was your first job at Liberty University? |
| 3. How did your role change over the years |
| **Planning for the Succession** |
| 4. At what point did you realize that you might assume the leadership role at Liberty University? |
| 5. Was leading Liberty University something you wanted to do? |
| 6. Was there a point in which you were heavily involved in university business before you assumed the role of president? |
| 7. How far in advance were the preparations for the transition of leadership between you and your father? |
| **Execution of Succession** |
| 8. What were the biggest challenges and obstacles facing the school during the transition? |
| 9. What were your greatest concerns about the transition? |
| 10. What advice did your father give you regarding the role of president? |
| 11. How did your role change (if at all) after the transition? |
| 12. What would you describe as the greatest accomplishment since the transition? |
| 13. What could have or should have been done differently? |
| **Leadership Style** |
| 14. Describe your leadership style? |
| 15. Are you preparing a pool of candidates that could assume the role of President? |
| 16. Are any of your children interested in following in your footsteps? |
| 17. How are you and your father alike? |
| 18. How are you and your father different? |

In order to accurately capture the responses of the interviews, a recording and transcript was made of each interview. The questions for the interviews were derived from the literature review and segmented according to the research questions for this study. The first set of questions was used to establish the relationship of the interviewee with the university and, more specifically, the transition of leadership. The second section
of questions was to gain an understanding of the planning process and the methods used in the succession. The goal was to understand how the interviewee interacted with the leaders, his or her perceptions of what transpired, and insights leading up to the transition.

The purpose of the third set of questions was to understand how the succession was executed. The questions were used to probe the interviewee to reflect on what processes were followed during the transition and what were the challenges and obstacles as well as victories through the succession process. The fourth set of questions derived from the success of the university after the transition. The success was one of the components that made the case study of Liberty University compelling. The final set of questions originated from the literature related to family run businesses. As the founder and second-generation leader were related, this is an intriguing factor in the research. The interview questions were piloted with a peer to check for clarity and wording. Adjustments to the questions were made accordingly (Yin, 1995).

**Focus Group Interviews**

While some legitimate studies have been based solely on one source of evidence, this course of action is not recommended for case study. One of the strengths of a case study vs. other forms of research is the ability to use multiple sources of evidence. To achieve triangulation within the study, focus group interviews were conducted. The goal was to achieve some level of convergence with the data that will corroborate the phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

Merriam (2009) maintained that “A focus group is an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic” (p. 93). One of the advantages of a
focus group interview vs. a traditional interview is the group dynamic that occurs from being together socially. Patton (2002) observed that,

Unlike a series of one-on-one interviews, in a focus group participants get to hear each other’s responses as they hear what other people have to say. However, participants need not agree with each other or reach any kind of consensus. (p. 386)

The data, which were compiled from these interactions, contributed positively to the research because they allowed the participants to consider alternative accounts of the same instance while they were able to hold their own view.

Two focus group interviews were conducted and comprised of alumni, faculty, and staff who were familiar with the leadership succession. Merriam (2009) explained that there is no rule to the size of a focus group but most experts agree that a number between 6-10 ten provides the right amount of interaction. The first focus group conducted consisted of 6 alumni as participants and the second focus group consisted of 5 faculty and staff. The topic of discussion was one that more than likely had been spoken about in public with varying opinions and should not be too restricting in regard to privacy issues related to this current study (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004).

The key to conducting an effective focus group interview is the questions that are asked. Patton (2002) recommended six types of questioning. These types are:

1. experience and behavior questions,
2. opinion and values questions,
3. feeling questions,
4. knowledge questions,
5. sensor questions,
6. background/demographic questions (p. 350)

The focus group questions were piloted to check for clarity and wording. Adjustments to the questions were made accordingly (Yin, 1995). From the review of the literature and the research questions, the following focus group interview questions were used.

Table 5

*Questions for Alumni*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement questions – Relationship to the leader/institution</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. We will go around the room and identify what years you attended Liberty University?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How familiar were you with Jerry Falwell Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How familiar were you with Jerry Falwell Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What is your favorite memory at Liberty University?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Memory of Jerry Falwell Sr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Memory of Jerry Falwell Jr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exploration questions - Succession**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. What was your first reaction when you heard that Jerry Falwell Sr. had passed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What was the mood of the campus with the news of Dr. Falwell’s passing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Were you aware of a succession plan at Liberty University?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Were you surprised that Jerry Falwell Jr. stepped into the leadership role at Liberty University?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How did things change when Jerry Falwell Jr. took over in the Fall of 2007?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Describe how you feel about the current state of Liberty University?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exit question**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Is there anything else you would like to say about Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Sr., or Jerry Falwell Jr.?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Questions for University Faculty & Staff

Questions

Engagement questions – Relationship to the leader/institution
1. What is your favorite memory at Liberty University?
   a. Memory of Jerry Falwell Sr.
   b. Memory of Jerry Falwell Jr.

Exploration questions - Succession
2. What was your first reaction when you heard that Jerry Falwell Sr. had passed?
3. What was the mood of the campus with the news of Dr. Falwell’s passing?
4. Were you aware of a succession plan at Liberty University?
5. Were you surprised that Jerry Falwell Jr. stepped into the leadership role at Liberty University?
6. Describe how you feel about the current state of Liberty University?

Exit question
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Sr., or Jerry Falwell Jr.?

Document Analysis

In order to gain a full understanding of the leadership succession at Liberty University, this researcher examined and analyzed documents that help provide insight into the case. These ready-made documents allowed for examination without having to observe or obtain cooperation from individuals (Merriam, 2009). Documents are the term to describe several types of data including: (a) records/reports and (b) published articles. The records and reports were discovered through referrals from the participants and an Internet search for pertinent documents related to Liberty University. The documents consisted of public records related to financials and enrollment data. The reports helped shed light on the context and environment of the leadership transition (See Appendix K). Published articles were compiled from searching document databases for items that
referenced: (a) the university, (b) any items related to the planning and execution of the leadership succession, and (c) information pertaining to the success of the university.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The purpose of data analysis is to find answers to the research questions developed for this study. One of the unique aspects of a qualitative study is that data analysis begins simultaneously with data collection. This permits the researcher to make notes and organize the information real-time and incorporate those observations into future data collection methods (Merriam, 2009). To properly analyze the information collected in this qualitative case study, I examined the data as it was collected and coded it to categorize the themes according to the predetermined codes established in the coding template derived from the literature review. Some additional codes were developed as they emerged from the data. This procedure helped provide insight into the next data collection session.

To properly interpret the data, which were collected, I first transcribed the audio recordings from interviews and focus groups. I then used a database to log all interviews, focus group interviews, and documents. In qualitative research, these databases are known as Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). This study used a program called MAXQDA11 developed for Apple (MAXQDA, 2014). By loading all of the data into coding software, I was able to identify themes by segmenting different categories of the data as outlined in the coding template (See Appendix D; Merriam, 2009). It is important to note that the software did not perform the analysis; it simply automated an otherwise manual process of organizing the themes that were identified (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).
Data analysis can pose a problem to researchers if there is no plan to guide the analysis similar to the research questions, which are used to guide a particular study. According to Yin (2009), there are four theoretical strategies to guide a case study and keep the analysis on track:

1. Theoretical proposition
2. Develop a case description
3. Use both qualitative and quantitative data
4. Examine rival explanations

It was important to select a specific strategy to guide the analysis. Therefore, the analysis for this case study relied on a theoretical proposition. The use of a theoretical proposition strategy kept the researcher focused on the original propositions that drove the study. These included the research questions and the data collection. It also allowed for the researcher to change and update the propositions as data suggested. The propositions for this case study were: (a) the staff and faculty of Liberty University utilized some type of method for the planning of their leadership transition, (b) there was a systematic execution of the plan that led to the transition, and (c) The relationship between the founder and second-generation leader played a role in the success of the transition.

As a qualitative case study, the data were in the form of interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and documents. The goal of loading these documents into analysis software was to properly code the data and find patterns or themes that emerged from the various data inputs. According to Merriam (2009), coding is the assignment of a shorthand designation to the data in order to categorize and group together. The researcher created a coding template (see Appendix D) to help guide the coding process.
Bernard and Ryan (2003) explained that “A priori themes come from characteristics of the phenomenon being studied; from already agreed on professional definitions found in literature reviews; from local, common sense constructs; and from researchers’ values, theoretical orientations and personal experiences” (p. 88). A template was developed from the literature, previous research, the research questions, and the interviews. This template served as a structure and guide when evaluating the data. The interviews and focus group interviews were transcribed within 24 hours. This enabled time to review the information and code the data accordingly.

According to Richards (2005), the coding process allows the researcher to interpret and reflect on meaning that is derived from the data. Stake (2009) referred to coding as an aggregation of the frequency to identify specific patterns. As the data were coded and reviewed, it became apparent what items had important meaning, as they were identified over and over again (Stake, 2009). A benefit to doing the analysis while the data were collected is that it helped identify themes that occurred in the successive analysis (Merriam, 2009). Each category was relevant to the research questions and segmented the themes. Categories were developed and combined, as needed, to ensure a synthesized analysis (See Appendix D). It was ideal to broadly code by the categories identified (i.e., inductive). This allowed the data to be fully analyzed and prevent premature elimination of certain items. From that point, categories were combined (i.e., deductive) to a manageable five or six. Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe the segmenting of categories as creating baskets or buckets to include patterns and themes. While, figuratively, this picture provides insight on how to organize the data, the CAQDAS assisted in properly developing categories and themes.
Also, documents collected (See Appendix K) were examined through the lens of the coding template (See Appendix D). They were compared to the data collected from interviews for contradictions or confirmation of the information collected. The documents presented new themes that were not discovered through other data collection methods. As a content analysis was conducted over the pertinent documents, structured searches were run using CAQDAS for repeating words and themes (Olsen, 2010). These words and themes were collected and organized and segmented from a broad to narrow scope as described by Marshall and Rossman (2006).

Four principles helped guide the analysis: (a) attend to all evidence, (b) address all major rival interpretations, (c) address the most significant aspects, and (d) use prior knowledge in a case study (Yin, 2009). Adherence to these principles and the proper handling of the data ensured accurate analysis.

**Trustworthiness**

In order to provide valid and reliable findings for this single-case study and provide a rich description of the phenomenon, I collected the data from three different sources in order to provide triangulation. The goal of this inquiry was to provide credible findings and interpretations from the data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are five major techniques to accomplish this goal:

(a) an activity increasing the probability that credible findings will be produced (prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation), (b) an activity that provides an external check on the inquiry process (peer debriefing), (c) an activity aimed at refining working hypotheses as more and more information becomes available (negative case analysis), (d) an activity that makes possible
checking preliminary findings and interpretations against archived “raw data” (referential adequacy), and (d) an activity providing for the direct test of findings and interpretations with human sources from which they have come (member checking). (p. 301)

The methods of data collection for this study were: (a) interviews, (b) focus group interviews, and (c) document analysis. The combination of these three elements helped to ensure a contextual validation via triangulation. By comparing the different points of data, the material will be available to discern patterns and possibly discard data, which is not consistent (Deising 1972; Denzin, 1978). Another source of credibility was in the formation of the research committee. The committee fulfilled the role of peer debriefing. As objective participants, who were separate from the researcher, these individuals kept the researcher honest in the interpretations and played a devil’s advocate role to identify researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The interviews and focus group interviews for this research were audio recorded and transcribed. These recordings and transcriptions were archived for analysis in the future if critiques or additional information related to the study arises. This process will provide a referential adequacy should the need arise. Also, the researcher used member checking to ensure the interview transcriptions were accurate. By allowing the participant to review the material, the researcher took the steps needed to ensure the credibility of the data collected. I also had the committee chair and committee members examine the findings of the study to identify possible errors or researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba).

When dealing with qualitative research, the topic of transferability is often discussed. Since this case study was about a specific context and phenomenon, the
application of the findings cannot be attributed to other environments. However, the
analysis procedures outlined allow for the thick description, which may be useful for such
a task. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “it is, not the naturalist’s task to provide
an index of transferability; it is his or her responsibility to provide the data base that
makes transferability judgments possible on the part of potential appliers” (p. 316).
Dependability and confirmability allow the reader to have confidence in the manner in
which the data were collected, analyzed and the findings presented. This can be
established by the researcher’s development of an audit trail for independent verification
of the assessment and conclusions from the research. However, Lincoln and Guba
cautioned, “that naturalistic criteria of trustworthiness are open-ended; they can never be
satisfied to such an extent that trustworthiness of the inquiry could be labeled as
unassailable” (p. 329).

**Ethical Issues**

During this study, the researcher treated all participants with honesty, respect, and
fairness. The researcher did not attempt to deceive any of the participants. The research
conducted was for the intended use of this study. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher
kept all files in a secure file cabinet with a lock. Audio file and transcripts were protected
by password. In instances where possible, the researcher ensured confidentiality of the
persons being interviewed. Given the nature of the case study, the identification of
participants may be reached. To reduce the chance of this occurring, the participants in
the study were assigned pseudonyms to shield their identity. Before each interview
was conducted, the participants completed an informed consent form in which they were
notified that it may not be possible to completely conceal their identity (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 2002).

As a researcher, who was close to the case being examined, potentially, the data collected might have appeared to contradict the mission of the organization or did not reflect well on the school. In this type of situation, counsel was sought of the committee chair and the other members of the committee to see if the alternative explanations for the data could be derived. By performing this exercise, the potential for bias was decreased (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, the final case study report was submitted to the university president for review before the findings are published.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The motivation for this study was to explore a senior-level leadership succession at a higher education institution. The case site selected was Liberty University. The problem, which is imminent for institutions of higher education, is the pending exodus of baby boomers from senior leadership positions. As a result, it is important to understand how the staff of higher educational institutions plan for and accomplish leadership succession. The researcher sought to understand the method and process used by Liberty University to accomplish a successful transition of leadership. As an additional element, the leadership succession occurred between a father and son.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What were the methods that key leaders used at Liberty University to plan the leadership succession between founder and second-generation leader?

Research Question 2: What were the processes that were followed to execute the leadership succession plan?

Research Question 3: What role did the relationship between the founder and second-generation leader play in the leadership succession?

Research Question 4: What led to a successful transition in May 2007?

The researcher developed a series of open-ended interview questions from the literature review to guide the conduct of one-on-one interviews and focus groups among individuals who had a firsthand account or knowledge of the leadership succession. The interviews were not designed to be exhaustive but were fact-gathering devices to learn
what had occurred at a specific institution, Liberty University. The researcher collected multiple documents for analysis with the use of a priori coding developed from the literature and existing concepts of leadership succession.

To understand what occurred at Liberty University, it is important to understand the background, which led to the events being examined, and to understand the key individuals discussed, specifically Jerry Falwell Sr. and Jerry Falwell Jr. Presented in this next section is a chronicle of the history of Liberty University and its founding, along with information gathered through the collection of data about the individuals at the center of the study.

**Case Background**

Liberty University is a religiously oriented, private, co-educational, comprehensive institution. Rev. Jerry Falwell founded the University in 1971. From humble beginnings, the school was founded as Lynchburg Baptist College. The first class to enter Liberty totaled 154 students, who met at Thomas Road Baptist Church, where Jerry Falwell was pastor. Rev. Falwell served as the initial president of the university. In 1975, the school changed its name to Liberty Baptist College and appointed Dr. Pierre Guillermin as president. After experiencing rapid growth in student head count and programs, the school name was changed to Liberty University in 1985.

Through the 1980s, Liberty established itself as a major Christian university. It enjoyed growth by student head count and academic offerings. In 1988, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Liberty University, 2011) recognized Liberty as the largest private university in the state of Virginia. However, in the midst of the success, Liberty stumbled financially as donations to Rev. Jerry Falwell’s ministry began a rapid decline. As a
result, the university entered into a period of financial duress that almost closed the school.

In 1997, Liberty University began to see relief from its financial troubles by receipt of several key donations to the school. The gifts allowed the University to restructure its debt and return to a state of growth it previously enjoyed. During this time, a leadership transition occurred between long-time President Dr. Pierre Guillermin and Dr. John Borek, while Jerry Falwell Sr. remained Chancellor of the institution. Dr. John Borek served at Liberty University during a pivotal time and helped the University secure its accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Dr. Borek resigned in 2004. At that time, the offices of President and Chancellor were combined, with Rev. Jerry Falwell holding both posts.

In the 1980s, the use of distance education was pioneered with the formation of the Liberty University School of Life Long Learning. As a result, the program expanded, beginning in 2005 when Liberty converted its video course content into an online delivery method. Since 2005, the Liberty distance program, known currently as Liberty University Online, has grown to more than 90,000 students. Coupled with the residential campus of 13,000, the University has an enrollment of more than 100,000 students.
Liberty University was founded with the mission to develop Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential to impact the world. As described in the catalog, it is declared in the philosophy of education that:

Liberty University is a Christian academic community in the tradition of evangelical institutions of higher education. As such, Liberty continues the philosophy of education which first gave rise to the university, and which is summarized in the following propositions.

God, the infinite source of all things, has shown us truth through scripture, nature, history, and above all, in Christ.

Persons are spiritual, rational, moral, social, and physical, created in the image of God. They are, therefore, able to know and to value themselves and other persons, the universe, and God.

Education as the process of teaching and learning, involves the whole person, by developing the knowledge, values, and skills which enable each individual to change freely. Thus it occurs most effectively when both instructor and student
are properly related to God and each other through Christ. (Liberty University, 2012, p. 6).

**Jerry Falwell Sr.**

Rev. Jerry Falwell Sr. was born in 1933 to Carey and Helen Falwell and raised in Campbell County, VA. In 1956 at the age of 22, Falwell started Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA. The church began with 35 members and quickly grew to one of the largest churches in the United States. In 1967, Falwell started a Christian day school for grades K-12. This eventually led to the founding of Liberty University in 1971. Falwell served as chancellor of the university and was the acting president when he passed away on May 15, 2007. Falwell was described in the interviews and articles as a person who was determined to see his vision and dream realized. According to one Vice President,

> It is not like he quit. He never quit. Not all the way until the end. I wish I had written down notes or been able to record that conversation (last conversation). Because it just struck me, wow, this is amazing. This guy, there is no quit in this guy. (Interview, 2014)

Jerry Falwell Jr. echoed these same sentiments when he said, “What is written around the stones in his memorial garden, ‘Don’t quit. Your greatness is not determined by how smart you are or how talented you are but what it takes to discourage you’ . . . he never gave up” (Interview, 2014).

As a leader, Falwell was known to inspire individuals with vision and passion. This made him the natural candidate in 1979 to form a group called the Moral Majority. Falwell led a group of conservatives for more than a decade who were interested in
calling the country back to its Judeo-Christian heritage. He spoke out on conservative issues and was able to lead people on a national scale. One Board of Trustee member remarked, “He was more than a man, He was a movement” (Interview, 2014). With the same vision and passion carried into the formation and development of Liberty University, Falwell was able to assemble a team of people with the qualities and credentials to make his dream a reality. An Administrator stated,

Jerry, Sr. had all types of men who worked with him and for him. I liken it to a man who has all these tools like a workshop. And you need a chisel, a mallet, a bit, and whenever he needed somebody he got different people with different expertise to do certain things. (Interview, 2014)

He inspired people to accomplish more than they thought they could accomplish, one Vice President reflected that,

Somehow, the man was always bigger than life. And I am not sure how he did it, but I really felt like, at least for me, I would crawl over broken glass for him. To help him to accomplish what it was that he wanted to accomplish, and I am not quite sure how he did that, (Interview, 2014)

Falwell Sr.’s leadership style was also one that was very close and personal to the people he led. An Administrator stated,

He was my pastor. He was my boss. He was my friend. He was a person that I felt very comfortable talking with. I had breakfast with numerous times. So I thought I knew Dr. Jerry Falwell Sr. very well and shared his vision. (Interview, 2014)

Falwell led the university up until his final hours right before his passing. The timing of his death was not something people anticipated. One Administrator stated:
I don’t think anyone thought about it. You know, Doc (Jerry Falwell Sr.) was invincible. He was convinced he wasn’t going to die. He had told all of us he wasn’t going to die. So who were we to object to that... (laughter). Never for a moment was there a doubt about who was in charge around here. As long as he was drawing oxygen into his [Falwell Sr.] lungs, he was in charge. (Interview, 2014)

It was clear through the interview process that Jerry Falwell Sr. led Liberty University with great vision and promise for the future and was respected and admired by his employees.

**Jerry Falwell Jr.**

Jerry Falwell Jr. is the oldest child of Jerry and Macel Falwell. He is the namesake of his father. He was born on Father’s Day in 1962. Falwell Jr. grew up in Lynchburg, VA, and is a graduate of Liberty Christian Academy and a 1984 graduate of Liberty University, both institutions founded by his father. After graduation from Liberty, Falwell Jr. attended the University of Virginia School of Law. He graduated in 1987 and received his license to practice law. Falwell Jr. established a real estate business that he still oversees to this day. Initially, he had no intention of working with his father’s ministries.

In 1988, Falwell joined Liberty University as General Counsel after the previous occupant of that role vacated the position. Falwell Jr. served under his father’s leadership as General Counsel until 2003, when the members of the board of trustees named him Vice Chancellor. During this period, Falwell Jr. began to manage and oversee the day-to-day management of the University.
In 2007, Falwell Jr. became president of Liberty University with the sudden passing of his father. During his current tenure as president at Liberty University, Falwell Jr. has secured the future of Liberty by the: (a) removal of all debt, (b) growth of the endowment to more than a billion dollars, and (c) established of $500 million dollar campus renovation to make the Liberty facilities state of the art. Falwell Jr.’s leadership style is different than his father’s. He stated,

In my leadership style, I am not up there speaking to everybody for an hour each week. It is quieter; it is behind the scenes. We use the Liberty Journal to keep the message out there, to keep the vision out in front of folks. It is different methods and different technique. (Interview, 2014)

An Administrator said, “Jerry Jr. has a very different mindset. You know, he is a lawyer. When he says things, he comes from a legal mindset. He is very organized. He is very methodical. He is very analytical, as a lawyer” (Interview, 2014).

It was clear from the interviews that Falwell Jr. has the respect of the people he leads. While almost all, including Falwell Jr. admit that the father and son are not alike in many ways, there are personality and leadership similarities, which those who work closely with both men observed. Both men are described as visionaries. They both see things before others see them and can convey the path and direction to followers. Jerry Falwell Jr.’s biography page on the university website states,

His goal is for the university to fulfill his father's vision—to attain academic excellence and athletic prominence as a world-class university whose graduates will impact the world with the Gospel of Christ, fully equipped for careers in every profession. (Liberty University, 2013)
Themes

Prior to analysis of the data from documents, interviews, and focus groups, codes were established based on the themes derived from the literature review for this research study and the conceptual framework of leadership succession. In addition, there were themes, which emerged from the data during the analysis.

An additional broad category was predetermined and titled organizational traits. Subcategories included: (a) mission, (b) values, (c) vision, (d) identity, and (e) responsibility. As the analysis was conducted, a broad category of timing emerged. Additionally, the data revealed characteristics of Jerry Falwell Sr. and characteristics of Jerry Falwell Jr.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What were the methods that key leaders used at Liberty University to plan the leadership succession between founder and second-generation leader?

Two broad themes were established from this research question: preparation and method. Additionally related as subcategories were: (a) pre-arrival of leader, (b) pipeline, (c) horse race, (d) crown heir, and (e) relay succession.

Method of Succession

To properly understand the related themes of this research, it is important to first establish the method of succession adopted by Liberty University. The data collected from this theme yielded the least amount of response for coding. After conducting the interviews, it was clear that those persons close to the succession planning process were aware of the method. There were no contrary responses. According to one Administrator
“There was never any thought of other candidates” (Interview, 2014). However, another Administrator stated,

I think there was a lot of speculation on people’s parts on what was going to happen. Everybody was watching Liberty and certainly in times when it was doing really well. . . I think there were a lot of people that thought, “I would like to run that.” (Interview, 2014)

While some might have speculated about who would take over the leadership role, it was reported from one Administrator that

There was never any question in his (Jerry Falwell Sr.) mind that he wanted Jerry Jr. to serve as the next President of Liberty University and he wanted his son Jonathan to serve as Pastor of the Thomas Road Baptist Church. (Interview, 2014)

According to a news article (Brown, 2012) about the ministries of Jerry Falwell after his death, it was stated,

He knew that Jerry Falwell Jr. had been groomed to lead Liberty University and the younger son, the Rev. Jonathan Falwell, was called to be a pastor and believed he was ready to assume that role at Thomas Road Baptist Church. Falwell Jr. had served as General Counsel and Vice Chancellor at Liberty since 1988 and Jonathan had served as the Executive Pastor at TRBC for over 10 years. (para. 24)

It is clear from reports like these that it was apparent to the employees and board of trustees what type of transition the founder desired. A Vice President, agreed in his interview and stated,

Well, I think nobody ever thought that Jerry Falwell Sr. would be out of the picture as long as he was alive. You know, that wasn’t going to happen. But I
think Jerry made it clear the last couple of years of his life, he made it clear that he had a succession plan. (Interview, 2014)

Just days after Rev. Jerry Falwell passed away, an article (Arnold, 2007) was published in which it was stated, “Jerry Jr., who assumes the role of chancellor and president of Liberty University, made impromptu comments at the school’s commencement service May 19 after he was introduced to the crowd” (para. 4). There was a clear path of Falwell Jr. joining the ranks at Liberty University and working his way toward the most senior role. “Falwell Jr. talked about the faith and perseverance that was responsible for Liberty’s survival of many difficult years” (Brown, 2012, para. 19). Based on the data collected for this current study, the hardships of Liberty University were very familiar to Falwell Jr. and that he was often the main person who addressed these issues.

“Falwell joined his father at Liberty in 1988 after obtaining his B.A. in Religious Studies from Liberty and his J.D. from the University of Virginia School of Law” (Brown, 2012, para. 19). From that point, Falwell Jr. worked behind the scenes to support his father, and the university that he started. Falwell Jr. recalled his own memory of when he knew he would take over the university, and this did not occur until 2003, despite others mentioning to him that he was the obvious choice. He did remember a colleague speculating early on that he would succeed his father and mentioned to him, “you got to be the most logical candidate to be the next President here” (Interview, 2014). Falwell Jr. had not given much thought to it before that time. He stated, “In 2003 the board named me Vice Chancellor and wrote into the job description that I would automatically become CEO upon his (Jerry Falwell Sr.) death or resignation. That is when it happened in 2003”
(Interview, 2014). It is from that point that Falwell Jr. engaged in a more active role across the university. He recounted, “By then, I was not thrilled about the public side of it, the part I knew I would have to do. But I knew that it was destined to happen” (Interview, 2014). From the data collected across this theme and the possible choices: (a) pipeline of leadership, (b) relay succession, (c) horse race selection and (d) crown heir, Liberty University and the founder, Jerry Falwell Sr. engaged in a relay succession/crown heir succession plan. When asked if there were other candidates considered to succeed Jerry Falwell Sr., all respondents declared that was not the case. One Board of Trustee member stated, “No, never. There was never a discussion of anyone else” (Interview, 2014). It was clear both privately and publicly that a single person would assume the leadership role at the university upon the resignation or death of the founder. It was clear to firsthand observers that person was Jerry Falwell Jr.

**Preparation for Succession**

Of all the data from the documents, interviews, and focus groups analyzed, this theme occurred the most. There are considerable data that contributes to the preparation of Liberty University and Jerry Falwell Jr. for the eventual transition that would occur, once the founder was no longer leading the institution.

It was clear that Jerry Falwell Jr. was being mentored for the senior leadership position at Liberty University before he acknowledged the possibility himself. He reminisced in a speech given on January 15, 2014 at the dedication of the library that bears his father’s name on the campus of Liberty University,

I traveled with Dad all over the country and the world before I was even 11 years old. People wanted to hear about what had happened in Lynchburg and how they
could replicate what had happened here. It was my job to man the tables in the back of the churches and arenas where Dad would speak and vinyl sermon records and books were sold to offset the travel costs. On one occasion in California, at age 7, I remember selling so many books and records that I had no place to put all the cash. My father loved to tell the story of me pulling money out of every pocket, out of my socks, out of my shirt, wherever I could find a place to stuff coins or bills. (Speech, 2014)

It is clear that Falwell Jr. was part of the building of Liberty University from the time he was a small boy. It was a family affair from the beginning. Although Falwell Jr. did not officially join the ranks until 1988, he lived under the mentoring and tutelage of his father. He declared,

I call these first four decades of Liberty’s history its wilderness years. I joined Liberty in 1988 after becoming an attorney and helped manage the financial restructuring that took most of the 1990s to complete. Those were dark days that required us to rely completely on God for everything. There was no planning for the future. We could only focus on surviving one week at a time — make the next payroll, borrow the money to keep the school operating one more month; do whatever we could to appease this creditor or that creditor. (Speech, 2014)

Falwell Jr. was referred to in interviews as a “behind the scenes” or “on the sidelines” type of person. While people knew of him, they did not fully understand his role and his preparation until after he became president. One Alumnus recounted, “I think that is probably his personality. His natural predisposition lends himself to working on the sidelines. He doesn’t like the spotlight as much as his dad did” (Focus Group, 2014).
The focus group interviews revealed that students knew that Jerry Falwell Sr. had two sons, but they were not really aware of Jerry, Jr. until graduation in 2007 or later that fall when he began to speak in convocation.

The serious talks about succession occurred around the time that Jerry Falwell Jr. was named to vice chancellor by the board of trustees. According to those interviewed, talks about succession really started to intensify when Falwell Sr. experienced several health issues that he deemed life threatening.

Then, as time passed he had two more life threatening episodes where his heart actually stopped and had to be restarted and his conversations about how things should be done and his planning for what should be done became much more explicit and my orders became much more direct. (Administrator Interview, 2014)

Initially, Jerry Falwell Jr. did not have plans to succeed his father at the university. He stated,

When you are the son of somebody that is well known like that, there is no point in trying to be a public figure because your father sucks all the oxygen out of the room (laughter). That is why I settled more into a business/legal type thing. That is why I had to do a lot of adapting in the past. It would have been a waste for me to try and do the same things he was doing when he was alive because... there is no way a younger person could compete because he was bigger than life.

(Interview, 2014)

Falwell Jr. describes his father’s ministry at different stages and did not see his skillset matching up with those of his public persona father. He remembered,
So, in the early days I resisted it, but as the organization grew, the succession meant more and evolved into more of what I was called to do and was skilled in. It became more of a business position than a pastoral position. Some people are called to one thing and others are called to another. Dad was called to a bunch of different things, so he did a little bit of everything. (Interview, 2014)

Falwell Jr. recounted that, in 1988, his father was stepping away from the national spotlight of the Moral Majority and began to focus his efforts on Liberty University. He stated,

In 1980s, he moved his office from the church to the Old Time Gospel Hour. That became sort of his main thing in the 80s. In 1990 he moved his office from the Old Time Gospel Hour to the university and spent the last 17 years of his life focusing on the university. I felt like I was better suited to succeed what he did the latter part of his life than the early part of his life. That is just my skillset.

(Interview, 2014)

It was at that point that Falwell Jr. began to warm to the idea of taking over the university after his father. When interviewing one Administrator about Jerry Falwell Jr.’s career path at Liberty he shared,

He was going to be the university lawyer and he is going to do business for the university. Therefore he was being groomed. At least as far as I was concerned he was being groomed for that office. There was just never a question. It was never a decision to do it. It was just done. (Interview, 2014).

The Administrator continued to discuss Falwell Jr.’s preparation, “Jerry, Jr. was prepared to make a better transition than would happen in almost any situation” (Interview, 2014).
It was clear to those who were close to the situation, that Jerry Falwell Jr. was not only the natural choice to succeed his father, but he was the most qualified candidate due to his close relationship with his father and the years he spent working in the back office. One Vice President suggests,

Well, Jerry [Jr.] from the back room was enmeshed in all of that way before he stepped forward and had to take the leadership reins, so he knows a lot more. Nobody could have stepped into this situation and known what he knew. That is why he was able to step in and make good decisions early on. (Interview, 2014)

Analysis of the collected data points to a succession management plan that was officially enacted in 2003 by the board of trustees. The preparation for succession goes all the way back to when Falwell Jr. was a child. He was observing thing related to business and ministry as he traveled and spent time with his father. The preparation time was described as daily interaction among the leaders. Seldom did something happen at the university where one party was not aware.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2: What were the processes that were followed to execute the leadership succession plan?

The broad category of this research question was the process of succession. The subcategories related to process are: (a) the execution of succession, (b) post-arrival of succession, and (c) transition of leadership.
Process of Succession

One of the reasons this study was commenced was to better understand not only the preparation for a succession, but the actual process and execution. Liberty University experienced the loss of the founder on May 15, 2007. From review of documents and analysis of the interviews, it is evident that support for Jerry Falwell Jr. to assume the role of President at Liberty University was collective.

At a gathering of faculty and staff in the auditorium of Thomas Road Baptist Church on the day of Jerry Falwell Sr.’s passing, Senior Vice President Ron Godwin told the crowd,

Staff, faculty, students, our spiritual and administrative leaders at this great ministry is now Jonathan Falwell and Jerry Falwell Jr. As totally committed and dedicated and loyal as I was to Dr. Falwell, I now am to them without equivocation without hesitation. This is the time for each of us to renew our commitment and to find our way to support this family in their grief as they experience this huge, huge blow. (Speech, 2014)

This seems to have been the sentiment of most of the Liberty community. Four days later, on May 19, 2007, Jerry Falwell Jr. took the stage at commencement. He was introduced as the Chancellor and President of the university. He walked to the podium and declared, “All is well at Liberty. We have prepared for this transition for 15 years. No one can replace Dad, but there’s a team here that’s ready. . . “ A Vice President referenced the process of succession when he stated,

There were no power struggles that happened. None of that happened. Everybody here pulled together. They pulled behind Jerry because God had done it just
exactly right. He brought Jerry, Jr. on the scene just in time. He exposed him to all of us. He gave him enough power and authority to be able to, for us to accept him. (Interview, 2014)

Even individuals, who had served the founder, discovered their allegiance to the new president. One Vice President stated,

> With Jerry [Jr.] picking up the leadership there was never even a hiccup. I talk about it all the time. As bad. . . as much as I respected Dr. Falwell, as bad as I miss him today, as much as I admired all that he was and he is and that he has done, the only few hours that I missed working was the few that I sat at his funeral the day they did the eulogy. (Interview, 2014)

Alumni, who were students at the time of the transition, were not as aware of Jerry Falwell Jr. leading up to the transition. One Alumnus mentioned that he did not know Jerry Falwell had a son. He was surprised when he returned that next semester and Jerry Falwell Jr. gave his first speech at the opening convocation. Alumni described a longer process of succession than the senior leaders who were interviewed. They recalled when the student body began to embrace Jerry, Jr. as their leader. One Alumna stated, “I just knew there was a specific reason afterward why he (Jerry Falwell Sr.) wanted his son to take over” (Focus Group, 2014). And “I thought maybe there was a specific reason that he knew, maybe a strength in real estate or advancement and progression. And we see that he does have that understanding and it was all in the Sr.’s plan,” said one Alumnus in response to why Jerry Falwell Jr. was selected to succeed Jerry Falwell Sr. (Focus Group, 2014). Another Alumna described when the student body clearly had accepted Jerry, Jr. as their leader. She recalls, “I remember the first time he cracked a joke (in convocation)
and you could tell he was so nervous to do it. But then everyone just lost it. And you could tell he was just like, ‘Ok, good, I got this’” (Focus Group, 2014). Another Alumnus stated, “I remember at that point he had announced the intent for Liberty University to start a medical school in five years. I was like that is great for Liberty. It sounds like he wants to do big things with Liberty. Liberty is in good hands” (Focus Group, 2014).

There was a convo when Jerry, Jr. started to announce things like intramural field and campus expansion. I think something like that... it was like this school was still headed in a growth direction a positive direction. I remember at one point thinking, Liberty University is going to change big time. It is going to be a good thing and it’s going to be huge. Cause of Jerry (Jr.) it is going to be crazy. It was all meant to be. (Focus Group, 2014)

The process of succession was planned and executed without minor issues and most parties understood their roles. The process of succession was progressive and long term. It consisted of training and mentoring the next candidate, who would carry on the mission and values of the organization.

**Research Question 3**

Research Question 3: What role did the relationship between the founder and second-generation leader play in the leadership succession?

As a broad category, a theme of relationship was established; subcategories included: (a) founder, (b) second-generation leader, and (c) family business.

**Relationship Between Founder and Second-generation Leader**

A unique aspect to the leadership transition at Liberty University was the relationship between the founder and the second-generation leader. They are father and
son. This is a unique transition for higher education and is more prevalent in traditional business settings. However, the father/son relationship is a major construct of this case study.

When asked if he and his father were alike, Jerry Falwell Jr. stated, “I think we are a lot alike. He came from a totally different world than I did. He was forced to do things differently. We are all products of our environment and upbringing” (Interview, 2014). While the two men were raised in different environments, there are similar personality traits and business savvy that have passed from one generation to the next generation. Those who served under both leaders notice these traits. Media reported in articles “Falwell Jr., whose mild manner contrasts with his father. . .” (McDonald, 2013). While Falwell Jr. would describe himself as mild mannered and more of a behind the scenes person, the review of the data suggests that the two operate business similarly. One Administrator describes the business sense among the Falwell’s this way, “I would say both are perfectionist, both are good with money, understand the role of money, the power of money, how to use money. Jerry got maximum use out of money. Jerry, Jr. gets maximum mileage out of money” (Interview, 2014).

As the namesake of the founder, the son grew up in an environment where he grasped the vision and purpose of what his father was trying to accomplish. “I go back to say, the core values of Jerry Falwell Sr. became the core values of Jerry Falwell Jr.” (Administrator Interview, 2014). As a result, a Vice President recalls, “Obviously, both are very aggressive in their dreams and their passion” (Interview, 2014). While their dreams and passion drive them toward success, Jerry Falwell Jr. did not aspire to follow in his father’s footsteps.
In the early days, even when I was a kid, people would say, ‘Of course you are going to be a preacher. It is just the logical thing for you to do.’ And, I didn’t want to become a preacher. I wasn’t called to become a preacher. (Falwell Jr. Interview, 2014)

After finishing law school, Falwell Jr. was compelled to start his own business rather than work for his father. “My family background is entrepreneurial, my Dad, my Granddad. So that is what I wanted to do” (Interview, 2014). Coincidentally, the ministries founded by his father needed a lawyer, and Falwell Sr. tapped his son for the post. As Falwell Sr.’s role changed, Falwell Jr. was drawn to follow in his footsteps. When asked if they were similar in leadership styles, Falwell Jr. replied,

Yes, I am big picture oriented just like he was. I wasn’t always that way. I have become more like him in the leadership style since he passed than before. I take a lot bigger risks now than I did before. I had to become more of a visionary. I moved to looking for ways to build and grow. (Interview, 2014).

The relationship of the founder and the second-generation was a major factor in the leadership succession. The relationship allowed for long-term interaction among the leaders that provided the training and mentoring needed to transition into the role of president. The familial status of the second-generation leader led to a responsibility to protect the mission and values of the organization.

**Research Question 4**

Research Question 4: What led to a successful transition in May 2007?

To identify text in articles and interview transcripts, a broad theme of success was used to identify data, which led to success after the succession. Additionally,
subcategories were included: (a) consequences of the succession, (b) performance after
the succession, and (c) results after the succession.

**Success After the Transition**

One of the vital points in an organization is the transition that occurs between a
founder and the second-generation leader. While examining the data related to Liberty
University, the success in the 7 years since the transition is hard to ignore. This is another
unique aspect of the succession that makes this research captivating. In a *Washington
Post* article (Anderson, 2013), it was reported,

Liberty’s expansion has yielded a river of money. The university ended 2012 with
more than $1 billion in net assets for the first time, counting cash, property,
investments and other holdings. That is 10 times what the school had in 2006,
putting Liberty in the same financial league as universities such as Pepperdine,
Georgetown and Tulane. (para. 7)

The university grew financially tenfold under the direction of the second-
generation leader. At the 2013 commencement ceremony at Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Jr. announced that the school had surpassed 100,000 in student enrollment. The enrollment in the 2006/2007 academic year totaled 28,360. This is a combined enrollment of the residential and distance education programs. The university has grown in other ways since 2007, as well. In another article (Brown, 2012), it was reported:

Since Falwell Sr.’s death, the university has received law school accreditation in
addition to launching a Cinematic Arts Center to fully equip Christians for the
film industry, an expanded health sciences program to educate medical support
personnel, and a College of Osteopathic Medicine, which will train Christian physicians. (para. 41)

As these things occurred, Liberty became the largest nonprofit 4 year college in the United States.

Bloomberg (McDonald, 2013) reported that Liberty is trying to become what the founder originally envisioned, what Notre Dame is for Catholics.

While it was founded as a Bible college, it has been bolstering its liberal arts curriculum as its online operations expand, adding new programs of study such as cinematic arts. The law school, which opened in 2004, was fully accredited in 2010. There are about 160 programs online, from an associate degree in accounting to a doctorate in theology. (para. 15)

Liberty University has achieved in its second generation what the founder had in mind. However, people have reported that even Falwell Sr. might not have pictured it happening so quickly. One Administrator attributes some of the success to Jerry, Jr.’s commitment to the original visions. He stated that Jerry Jr. said, “We are committed to my father’s vision. I don’t have a new agenda, I don’t have a newer vision, and I am going to fulfill the goals and dreams of my father” (Interview, 2014).

Wall Street investors have taken notice of the school's financial standing and Liberty has received strong credit ratings from Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service, placing them among the nation's highest-rated universities for financial strength. The school recently topped $1 billion in net assets, making it the youngest nonprofit university in American history to reach this milestone. (Liberty University, 2013)
In addition, Falwell Jr. said,

I looked at the financial progress, the academic and athletic achievements, the AA rating from Standard & Poor’s, the fact that Liberty would soon become the youngest college in history to accumulate $1 billion in net assets, and I realized that all of that was the fulfillment of God’s promise to continue the good work that I had witnessed as a young boy in the 1960s and ’70s. God had only put his plans on pause. It was a long pause — about 40 years. (Speech, 2014)

The success of the organization is linked back to the long-term and progressive succession from the founder to the second-generation leader. It was evident that the second-generation leader developed the skillset necessary to lead the institution to the next phase successfully. The condition of the university and the timing of the succession were contributing factors to the evident success post transition.

Organizational Traits

Liberty University is an unique organization in regard to its mission and purpose. Jerry Falwell Sr. had a vision to “to create for evangelical Christians what Notre Dame is for Catholics and Brigham Young is for Mormons.” During an interview in 2006, Jerry Falwell Jr. was quoted, “What we build here has got to be bold,” says Falwell, as he took a deep breath. “Our destiny is at stake” (Smillie, 2006). From this statement and others like it, it is clear Falwell Jr. already embraced the vision for Liberty University and had big plans of his own.

Jerry Falwell Jr. stated,

We believe that Liberty will redefine what is considered an academically prestigious university in the future. The school aims to be judged by how many
students it educates and how well it educates them rather than how many it turns away. (Anderson, 2013)

It became apparent in the data collection that the core of Liberty University is more than just an educational model. As stated in a *Washington Post* (Anderson, 2013) article, Liberty weaves biblical teachings into its courses, but faculty are committed to rigorous instruction in disciplines ranging from aeronautics to engineering to law. The university is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which also oversees accreditation of the University of Virginia. (para. 13)

Liberty is unique, in that, “on campus, students are prohibited from drinking alcohol or having premarital sex. They also are barred from watching R-rated movies, with exceptions sometimes granted upon request” (Anderson, 2013). This student code is in stark contrast to the other universities in VA. Jerry Falwell Jr. stated that he is committed to keep the university true to its roots and its Christian mission. He has implemented policies to ensure that the university does not follow the lead of many American universities that were founded with Christian missions very similar to Liberty's, but later changed their missions as they achieved academic, athletic, and financial prominence as institutions (Speech, 2014).

As articulated by one Vice President in his interview, “In my view, the way to do that was to secure faculty and gatekeepers and get them in strategic places so that when I was gone, they kept the mission, and they kept the vision alive” (Interview, 2014). Liberty University and its leadership, according to the data collected, want to remain true to its original mission while they deliver coursework at all academic levels. Jerry Falwell
Jr. has publicly stated that the school does not have a new mission but desires to carry out the original mission of the founder.

**Timing**

In the data analysis, a few themes emerged, but most did not carry the weight to be cited either by importance or frequency. However, a theme that occurred over and over again in the interviews and documented analysis was that of *timing*. The researcher first heard this theme in an interview with a Vice President who stated,

> The timing could not have been more perfect. Jerry Jr. was transitioned in, as far as I am concerned, for the last three years he was under the training of Dr. Falwell, every meeting, everyday, every conversation, Dr. Falwell and Jerry Jr. were together. They both knew every outcome of every situation. (Interview, 2014)

At that time, it was clear that the timing of the succession was a key component of this case study.

In the same interview the Vice President said, “God had built Jerry, Jr. for that time . . . and Dr. Falwell left when it was time. God called him home. We talk about those [events]. . . and I wish it had not have been but. . . for such a time” (Interview, 2014). Another Vice President interviewed said, “In hindsight, I don’t think I could have scripted it better than how it occurred. Even though nobody wanted it, nobody asked for it” (Interview, 2014). In the discussion of the succession with one Administrator, he stated, “Yes, for Liberty’s sake, if he had passed away a year before or a number of different times in our history it would have been fatal, absolutely fatal” (Interview, 2014).
The participants in this study did not take for granted that the timing of the transition was key to the successful execution of the plan.

Jerry Falwell Jr. referred to the theme of timing on a number of instances when he referred to his role at the University. When he was named Vice Chancellor in 2003, he recalled, “By then I was not thrilled about the public side of it, the part I knew I would have to do. But, I knew that it was destined to happen.” Even the migration into the role, specifically the public speaking side, related to time,

I wasn’t too excited about it, but I knew it was something, that I was the right person to do it. And so, when the time came, I made the adjustment. It took a few years to adjust and I ended up liking it. (Interview, 2014)

The timing of the events, which transpired, was very important. This researcher cannot ignore the attributes of Liberty University that make it unique. He cannot ignore the timing of the events, which led to the succession and the transition. If these instances had occurred at other times in the history of the University, the outcome may have been different.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the development and implementation of a leadership succession plan and execution at an institution of higher education. The case selected for the study was Liberty University, where there was a unique transition in its senior leadership position with the passing of its founder and a second-generation leader was placed in that position. The case was a bounded system with three unique aspects. First, the leadership succession occurred at a unique period for an organization, from founder to second-generation leader. Second, there was an added layer of uniqueness because the founder and second-generation leader were father and son. Third, and finally, the case was worthy to examine due to the successful nature of the transition and of the organization post founder. The following research question guided the study:

Research Question 1: What were the methods that key leaders used at Liberty University to plan the leadership succession between founder and second-generation leader?

Research Question 2: What were the processes that were followed to execute the leadership succession plan?

Research Question 3: What role did the relationship between the founder and second-generation leader play in the leadership succession?

Research Question 4: What led to a successful transition in May 2007?
Summary of Findings

Data were collected for this case study with the use of: (a) one-on-one interviews, (b) focus groups, and (c) document analysis. After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed the interviews and sent them back to the participants for review and accuracy (i.e., member check). After receiving approval, the files were loaded into MAXQDA11, software designed to assist in data analysis. The files were coded for analysis. Additionally, published documents, and university records were loaded into the software for coding with the use of predetermined themes extracted from the literature review. The following themes were used to segment the data.

Method of Succession

It was clear from the data collected from the interviews, focus groups, and published records that the founder and the board of trustees at Liberty University selected a decisive method of succession. The method is known in the literature as a relay succession (Vancil, 1987) or the crown heir (Friedman & Olk, 1995). Defined as, “the primary decision-maker is the predecessor CEO, the span of time over which the process unfolds is great, and the heir apparent is identified and informed as to his or her status early on” (Friedman & Olk, p. 141). It was known both privately and publicly after 2003 that Jerry Falwell Jr. would be the person to succeed the founder, his father. Interviewees were emphatic that during the final years of the founder’s tenure, he made clear plans for an orderly transition of power.

Preparation for Succession

Jerry Falwell Jr. became an employee of Liberty University in 1988 after a need arose for his skillset as an attorney to be used at the school. From that point forward,
Falwell Jr. worked up the ranks to be named Vice Chancellor by the board of trustees in 2003. The data collected suggested that Falwell Jr. was a natural choice to succeed his father as he had spent years in the back office learning the intricate details of managing the university.

**Relationship Between Founder and Second-Generation Leader**

All participants in the study agreed that the relationship of the founder and second-generation leader was a key factor in the succession. Documents revealed that Falwell Jr. was not only an employee of the university since 1988 but had grown up during the pioneering days of the school. As a result, he understood its purpose and mission and felt a responsibility to see what his father founded succeed. It was clear to those with firsthand knowledge that Falwell Jr. was trained and mentored for the role.

**Success After the Transition**

In the findings related to the success of Liberty University since 2007, a theme emerged with almost all participants. The theme repeated was *timing*. Analysis of the data suggested that the timing of the succession was at a precise point in the history of the University, when it was primed to move from one generation to the next. The findings indicate that the founder had positioned the school to take large leaps forward. Also, they showed that the skillsets, which were shaped in the years of training and mentoring of the second-generation leader, were exactly what was needed in the University at the precise time. The second-generation leader’s management style, business acumen, and real estate savvy were ideal conditions for success.
Discussion

A Model To Follow

Leadership succession is a reality that all organizations must face. Higher education institutions are not shielded from this reality. In fact, based on the U.S. Census Bureau (2008) data suggest that a national leadership shortage is in the near future. However, a large number of institutions operate without a succession plan (Bowen, 2008; Valentine, 2011). Liberty University was in that category up until 2003, when the board of trustees actively promoted Jerry Falwell Jr. to Vice Chancellor position and specifically mentioned that he would assume the role of president with the death or resignation of the founder. It was imperative for Liberty to develop this succession plan to ensure the mission and the vision of the University remain intact into the next generation. Grusky (1960) stated, “Succession is important for two basic reasons: (1) administrative succession always leads to organizational instability, and (2) it is a phenomenon that all organizations must cope with” (p. 105). Knowing that transition causes disruption or instability, Liberty leaders proceeded to plan for an orderly change in leadership.

Originally, the need for succession planning was not a priority for Liberty University, since the founder was active in the day-to-day management. However, there were several health episodes, which brought about the reality of the founder’s own mortality. It was noted by Barnes and Hershon (1976) and Giarmarco (2012) that the succession point usually happens during the lifecycle of the company when the founder or previous leader: (a) understands the need to move from day-to-day operations, (b) has a debilitating health issue, or (c) dies. This was true in the case of Liberty University,
since the founder had several publicly known hospital visits, which resulted in urgency on his part to make the proper plans for transition.

When there is no formal succession plan in place at an institution of higher education, the institution is at risk when the founder leaves the position of leadership. That do not have a stated succession plan are not sheltered from The methods of succession, which served as the conceptual framework for this study, were developed and described by Friedman and Olk (1995) as:

1. **Crown Heir**, the primary decision-maker is the predecessor CEO, the span of time over which the process unfolds is extended, and the heir apparent is identified and informed as to his or her status early on (i.e., information symmetry). However, he or she may have to wait until the predecessor leaves office in order to assume control;

2. **Horse Race**, several key insiders are pitted against each other as candidates who are told that they will be groomed, their progress will be observed, and that whoever performs best over a period of time will be chosen as the new CEO. It is characterized by incumbent rule and preferences about criteria, which are unclear or unstable at the outset.

3. **Coup d'Etat**, characterized by non-incumbent rule and preferences being known in advance. Organizational members and others (e.g., board of directors), who constitute a coalition of interests that differ from the incumbent's, and make the key decisions in this type of succession. The span of time over which the process unfolds is relatively short; and
4. Comprehensive Search, in this process, non-incumbents exert control, and preferences are not known in advance. Decision-makers seek a CEO whose background and skills match those required by an intended organizational reorientation. The process is comprehensive: (a) extensive effort is expended in data collection, (b) numerous decision-makers are involved, and (c) the procedure incorporates input and approval by individuals who are knowledgeable of both potential candidates and the future demands of the role.

Vancil (1987) described a fifth method:

5. Relay Succession, a two step process in which the members of the organization, first identify an heir internally to assume the leadership role. Second, once the candidate has been identified, the incumbent CEO initiates the grooming process. The heir is granted full access and immersion. Once the heir assumes the leadership role, the process begins again.

The reality is, that at some point, the leader of the institution will either be removed, resign, or pass away. The planning stage can occur prior to these events, or it can take place afterward. Regardless, one of these methods will be followed. It is not the intent of this researcher to advocate one method over the other, per se, as it is to encourage the use of one of the methods when need arises within the institution. At Liberty University, the decision was made to name a successor prior to the removal of the predecessor.
Mentoring and Training

Rothewell (2010) stated, “One key requirement is that well-qualified replacements must be available as quickly as possible to assume critically important positions as they become vacant” (p. 14). The preparation that Jerry Falwell Jr. experienced before taking the senior position at Liberty serves as a model for mentoring and training. It was an ideal situation. By choosing a method that identified the successor early, the university staff and the founder were able to entrust the future leader with more and more responsibility. Key leaders, who were interviewed for this case study, recalled that Falwell Jr. worked in the back office to keep the University afloat. The relationship, which occurred between Jerry Falwell, Sr. and Jerry Falwell Jr., was one, which, ideally, should occur in all organizations, where the staff seek a smooth transition and do not face other factors, which would require the organization goes in a different direction.

For instance, Spanier (2010) suggested that presidents in higher education should take an active role in mentoring. By being active, presidents can develop a pool of candidates, which would be available to make the transition to the next level of leader. Referring back to GE (Radhaika, 2011) and its publicized for-profit example of leadership succession, the incumbent CEO did not choose a crown heir but rather employed a horse race scenario with leaders of different divisions inside of GE. What occurred was that the incumbent CEO, Jack Welch, was able not only to mentor and train the next senior executive of the company, but also participate in the choice of that individual (Rothwell, 2004). It is important to note that all mentoring relationships might not be as close as a father and son, but it does provide a picture of the investment
required to prepare the next generation leader. It involves a clear commitment to mentoring.

Navigating the Transition

From the outside, it appears that Jerry Falwell Jr. took over for his father in May 2007. While this is accurate by title and position, there is more to the transition execution. By choosing a clear method of succession and making people aware of it prior to the actual occurrence, the University was able to employ what was reported as a seamless transition. According to Balser and Carmin (2009), “While it is important for organizations to identify the next generation of leaders, they also must attend to how the transition occurs, including making provisions for a smooth transfer of power from one leader to the next” (p. 185).

Recalling what a Vice President stated, “I think the last five years or so, everybody kind of knew what was going to happen and we were all comfortable with it” (Interview, 2014). The naming of the successor and the clear method allowed for people to warm to the idea. In the case of Liberty University, this was as early as 5 years prior to the event.

By allowing the successor to engage in a more active role from 2003-2007, the employees and the Liberty University community understood what was going to occur after the founder was no longer involved. The timing of his passing was not necessarily expected, but most interviewees reported that they were not shocked. One of the Vice President’s stated, “There was a natural, normal fear of what is going to happen now?” However, if the employees and stakeholders had any fear it was quickly dismissed as Jerry Falwell Jr. stated, “All is well at Liberty. . .”
In an Administrator’s description of the phases of transition, the interviewee stated, “There were no power struggles that happened. None of that happened. Everybody here pulled together. They pulled behind Jerry because God had done it just exactly right. He brought Jerry, Jr. on the scene just in time. He exposed him to all of us. He gave him enough power and authority to be able to, for us to accept him.” The following timeline illustrates Falwell Jr.’s employment history at Liberty and the preparation for succession.
It appears the community of Liberty University embraced Falwell Jr. and was aware that he had earned his way to that position. Therefore, not only was he the designated candidate, he was the ideal choice for the job.

Selznick (1957) and Valentine (2010) discussed important tasks of the new leader. He must (a) sustain the mission, (b) have a distinctive role, and (c) maintain the basic commitments of the organization. In this researcher’s discussion of the transition with alumni, there was a feeling of “What is going to happen next?” People close to the new leader were not as concerned about protecting the mission and purpose of the university, since they felt Falwell Jr. understood and believed in the mission of the organization. The alumni experienced a moment of pause in reflection of the future. However, almost immediately, Falwell Jr. committed himself to his father’s vision and put those apprehensions to rest when he wrote, “I am fully confident that Liberty University will continue to grow and remain true to my dad’s original vision for the school. We are
committed to continually striving for academic excellence while remaining true to our foundational biblical teachings” (National Liberty Journal, 2007).

From that point forward, Falwell Jr. would embrace the new role and begin to adjust to the new demands. He stated, “It forced me to come out of my comfort zone. It is just like starting over. It requires you to learn a whole new set of skills and requires you to take on a whole new set of responsibilities” (Falwell Jr., Interview). While prepared for the management of the business operations of the university, Falwell Jr. found himself speaking to more than 10,000 people at a time. He admitted this was an adjustment to which he was not comfortable, but eventually learned to embrace it.

**Familial Implications**

The researchers for this case study would be remiss to ignore the relationship between the founder and second-generation leader. One of the unique characteristics of the study was the relationship between father and son. Subsequently, this causes some consideration to be paid to Liberty University as a family business. Also, it provides additional insight on the mentoring and training, which a potential successor can receive to be successful.

When viewing this case study from the outside, it may have been a foregone conclusion to some that Jerry Falwell Jr. would succeed his father Jerry Falwell, Sr. as the leader of Liberty University. However, the data collected from this study demonstrated a potential for another path. Jerry Falwell Jr. recalled, “It wasn't really planned. I went to law school. While I was in law school, I started a real estate development business because that is really what I wanted to do.” Hamilton and Godfrey (2007) described the shared vision and responsibility to family as reasons offspring
choose to enter the family business. In this case, Falwell Jr. was establishing himself outside of his father’s ministry in the business of real estate. He mentioned, “I grew up in a fish bowl and had to do all kinds of public things growing up, so when I got out of law school, I went the other direction.” However, it was not long before he was exposed to the ministry once again. Falwell Jr. recalled,

After I had taken the bar, passed the bar that first year after law school I went and started helping out at Liberty and realized that there was a real need for a general counsel. Their general counsel had just left. I was just going to work a few days a week and before I knew it, once I started over there, it just became fulltime quickly. (Interview, 2014)

What was initially started as a way to lend a hand turned into a lifetime commitment for Falwell Jr. Sharma and Irving (2005) described this process in family businesses as “affective commitment” (p. 16). Basically, the family member believes in the mission and goals of the organization and makes a conscious decision to join the firm. He noted that the role of his father had changed over the years, and he would eventually become comfortable with the idea of running a major university. His skillset and experience were in line with the role.

**Seven Years of Success**

At the time of the founder’s passing, Liberty University was turning a corner financially and establishing itself as a major university. According to one Alumnus, “Then Jerry, Jr. became President and stuff started flying fast and it was more progressive. I don’t think it took the emphasis off of the spiritual perspective but it made
it a more relevant school” (Interview). Looking back on the documented achievements since 2007, it is evident that the university was primed to do great things.

The overriding theme of the succession is the timing in which it took place. One senior official thought that the loss of the founder at any other point in the history of Liberty University could have been a fatal blow to the organization. However, at the point of succession, Liberty was enjoying financial and enrollment growth and was ready to be passed to the next generation. One Board of Trustee member stated, “There is not a person on this Earth who could have taken over Liberty and had the success that Jerry Falwell Jr. had.” They went on to communicate that he was the right person based on his experience working with his father.

**Implications**

The implications of this case study focus on the preparation, process, and execution of leadership succession and transition. There are implications for the staff of institutions of higher education that, typically, do not plan for succession (Valentine, 2011). It appears that most institutions are more familiar and comfortable with a comprehensive search, rather than other methods of transition. The comprehensive search method of succession employed after a resignation discounts the input of the incumbent. Usually, a senior leader will offer his resignation, and a committee will be formed post resignation to find a replacement. However, the findings from this case study revealed alternative methods for institutions to employ in order to identify a successor early in the process. This would allow not only the input from the incumbent, but support. Therefore, a comprehensive search is a valid means for finding a candidate but it should be considered earlier in the process to allow time for preparation and mentoring. This case
study revealed that the succession plan at Liberty University was executed in May 2007 with the passing of the founder, but the process began at least 4 years prior with the second-generation leader being mentored and trained by the incumbent.

Another implication of the study is that if an organization takes the time to identify and mentor a successor, it can be anticipated that the transition has the potential of being smooth. Regardless of the method used to identify the next leader to the employees and stakeholders of the institution, it makes them cognizant of the new leader and gives time to acclimate to the idea of that person taking the helm of the organization.

Another implication of this case study reveals the timing of a transition contributes to the apparent success. The staff and faculty of higher education institutions not only need to be mindful of the leader, who will be chosen for the future, they need to be aware of the proper timing for the transition to occur. Hindsight allows stakeholders to accurately attribute success to the timing. However, the preparation that took place prior to the transition allowed Liberty University and its stakeholders to experience a smooth transition. If planning were not part of the equation, the timing theme might not have been prevalent in the data.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

**Limitations**

A limitation to this study of the leadership succession at Liberty University is the fact that other institutions may not align philosophically or operationally with Liberty. As a result, replication of the leadership succession plan may not be feasible. There are varying factors related to the conditions of a president, when he or she leaves his or her
post. As such, it would be important to consider the findings from this study, with especial attention to the consideration of those factors, in order to achieve success.

A second limitation is the valid concern of case study and how to develop generalizations, which can be applied to other instances. The scope of this case study was narrowed by the details of the succession planning and leadership transition (Yin, 2009). The site of the case study is a clearly bounded system of one instance of a leadership succession. The choice of a case study is justified due to the uniqueness of the phenomenon. The transition occurred in a specific region of the United States, central Virginia. It happened at a private, faith-based institution of higher education. The transition took place from the founder to the second-generation leader. An additional element is the succession took place between a father and son. While these facts are limiting, in addition, they are the details that make the case study fascinating and worthy of review.

**Delimitations**

To focus the study, the research was narrowed to examine a single case. A case study is employed when a researcher is trying to investigate a phenomenon and provide understanding of what occurred in a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). In order to gain understanding of the specific phenomenon, this study was limited to individuals who had first-hand knowledge of or a relationship with, Liberty University leading up to, during, and after the succession. This included employees, board members, students, and alumni. Each person was over the age of 18. By focusing on these individuals, the researcher was able to develop an overall understanding of the leadership transition at the institution.
Recommendations

Additional case studies of leadership succession at higher education institutions are needed. While this case study was focused on a succession, which proved to be successful, for the body of knowledge for this, research should be conducted at schools, which experienced other outcomes. For example, conducting a case study of a failed attempt at succession, it might be possible to learn how not to proceed. What were the conditions and contributing factors to the failure? Examination and review of the other side of the issue would be helpful.

Additionally, more research could be conducted about succession in organizations among family members. The focus of this case study was on a founder to second-generation leader. However, more research is needed for successions that occur among family members for generations to come. Also, examining leadership successions that occurs, but do not take place from one family member to another, could be valuable.

This case study was limited to the succession between the founder of Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Sr. and his son, Jerry Falwell Jr. Another potential study would be the succession at Thomas Road Baptist Church between Jerry Falwell Sr., the founding pastor and Jonathan Falwell who assumed the role as pastor of Falwell Sr.

Finally, this case study was conducted because of the apparent success of both the founder and the second-generation leader. Research is needed for organizations, where other methods of succession planning and execution chosen. For instance, there is the search committee method of succession. There could be instances where the board is not content with the direction of the organization, and it becomes essential to make a change at the senior level position.
Conclusion

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to understand the method, process, and execution of a leadership succession at a specific university. After collection of firsthand accounts of the succession via interviews and focus groups, as well as analysis of documents related to the succession, several factors became apparent.

1. The university and its founder engaged in a very specific and intentional strategy to train and mentor the second-generation leader. The method utilized was relay succession/crown heir strategy.

2. The career path of the second-generation leader and the training and mentoring he received from the founder, created a seamless transition, which ensued in buy-in from all the stakeholders.

3. The relationship between the founder and second-generation leader created a mentoring relationship that not only passed on business savvy and management skills, but of a vision and conviction of the goals of the organization.

4. Finally, the success of the organization is in part due to the careful planning of the founder, the timing of the transition, and the skillset of the second-generation leader.
REFERENCES


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Appendix A

Consent Form
Case Study of Liberty University’s Succession Plan From Founder to Second-Generation Leader

Steven D. Peterson
Liberty University
Education Department

You are invited to be in a research study of the succession plan from the founder of Liberty University to the second-generation leader. You were selected as a possible participant because of your relationship to Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Sr., Jerry Falwell Jr. and your first-hand knowledge of the leadership succession. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Steven D. Peterson, Education Department

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore and examine the planning and execution of the leadership succession for Liberty University from the founder to the second-generation leader.

Procedures:

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

1. Submit to a 60-minute interview/group interview answering questions about your first-hand knowledge of the leadership succession at Liberty University. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. You will have an opportunity to validate the interview by reviewing the transcript for errors.

2. Recommend any literature that may contain information about the leadership succession plan at Liberty University.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

This study is of minimal risk and you will not incur any more risk than you would in everyday life.

While there are no direct benefits provided to you, the contribution to the field of education and leadership are substantial. You will be contributing your first-hand knowledge to help future researchers develop leadership succession resources.

Compensation:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you will not receive or be entitled to compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject unless permission is obtained from the individual. While I will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents total confidentiality. I would remind you to respect the privacy of the other participants and not repeat what you hear in the focus group to others. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. In the event that you withdraw from the study no data collected from your interview will be used in the published report of this research. Audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Steve Peterson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him. If you have additional concerns, you may also contact Dr. Ellen Black, the Committee Chair of this study.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

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

_____ I consent to having my interview documented via audio recording.

Signature: ________________________________ Date: ____________________________
Signature of Investigator: _______________________________  Date: 

IRB Code Numbers: [Risk] (After a study is approved, the IRB code number pertaining to the study should be added here.)

IRB Expiration Date: [Risk] (After a study is approved, the expiration date (one year from date of approval) assigned to a study at initial or continuing review should be added. Periodic checks on the current status of consent forms may occur as part of continuing review mandates from the federal regulators.)
Appendix B

LETTER FROM PRESIDENT

November 13, 2013

Liberty University
Attn. Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd., Suite 1837
Lynchburg, VA 24502

To Whom It May Concern:

I have reviewed the prospectus by Steven Peterson (ID: 883479) entitled “Case Study of Liberty University’s Succession Plan from Founder to Second-Generation Leader” and offer my support for this study. I have communicated to Steven that I am willing to participate in the study to the best of my ability.

Sincerely,

Jerry L. Falwell, Jr.
President
January 21, 2014

Steven D. Peterson
IRB Approval 1772.012114: Case Study of Liberty University’s Succession Plan from Founder to Second-Generation Leader

Dear Steven,

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

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

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

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
### Appendix D
CODING CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES

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<td>Vision for the organization</td>
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Appendix E

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

We affirm our belief in one God, infinite Spirit, creator, and sustainer of all things, who exists eternally in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one in essence but distinct in person and function.

We affirm that the Father is the first person of the Trinity and the source of all that God is and does. From Him the Son is eternally generated and from Them the Spirit eternally proceeds. He is the designer of creation, the speaker of revelation, the author of redemption, and the sovereign of history.

We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, eternally begotten from the Father. He is God. He was conceived by the virgin Mary through a miracle of the Holy Spirit. He lives forever as perfect God and perfect man: two distinct natures inseparably united in one person.

We affirm that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, proceeding from the Father and the Son and equal in deity. He is the giver of all life, active in the creating and ordering of the universe; He is the agent of inspiration and the new birth; He restrains sin and Satan; and He indwells and sanctifies all believers.

We affirm that all things were created by God. Angels were created as ministering agents, though some, under the leadership of Satan, fell from their sinless state to become agents of evil. The universe was created in six historical days and is continuously sustained by God; thus it both reflects His glory and reveals His truth. Human beings were directly created, not evolved, in the very image of God. As reasoning moral agents, they are responsible under God for understanding and governing themselves and the world.

We affirm that the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, though written by men, was supernaturally inspired by God so that all its words are the written true revelation of God; it is therefore inerrant in the originals and authoritative in all matters. It is to be understood by all through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, its meaning determined by the historical, grammatical, and literary use of the author’s language, comparing Scripture with Scripture.

We affirm that Adam, the first man, willfully disobeyed God, bringing sin and death into the world. As a result, all persons are sinners from conception, which is evidenced in their willful acts of sin; and they are therefore subject to eternal punishment, under the just condemnation of a holy God.

We affirm that Jesus Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice by the appointment of the Father. He fulfilled the demands of God by His obedient life, died on the cross in full substitution and payment for the sins of all, was buried, and on the third day He arose physically and bodily from the dead. He ascended into heaven where He now intercedes
for all believers.

We affirm that each person can be saved only through the work of Jesus Christ, through repentance of sin and by faith alone in Him as Savior. The believer is declared righteous, born again by the Holy Spirit, turned from sin, and assured of heaven.

We affirm that the Holy Spirit indwells all who are born again, conforming them to the likeness of Jesus Christ. This is a process completed only in Heaven. Every believer is responsible to live in obedience to the Word of God in separation from sin.

We affirm that a church is a local assembly of baptized believers, under the discipline of the Word of God and the lordship of Christ, organized to carry out the commission to evangelize, to teach, and to administer the ordinances of believer’s baptism and the Lord’s table. Its offices are pastors and deacons, and it is self-governing. It functions through the ministry of gifts given by the Holy Spirit to each believer.

We affirm that the return of Christ for all believers is imminent. It will be followed by seven years of great tribulation, and then the coming of Christ to establish His earthly kingdom for a thousand years. The unsaved will then be raised and judged according to their works and separated forever from God in hell. The saved, having been raised, will live forever in heaven in fellowship with God.
Appendix F

MISSION STATEMENT

Philosophy of Education

Liberty University is a Christian academic community in the tradition of evangelical institutions of higher education. As such, Liberty continues the philosophy of education which first gave rise to the university, and which is summarized in the following propositions.

God, the infinite source of all things, has shown us truth through scripture, nature, history, and above all, in Christ.

Persons are spiritual, rational, moral, social, and physical, created in the image of God. They are, therefore, able to know and to value themselves and other persons, the universe, and God.

Education as the process of teaching and learning, involves the whole person, by developing the knowledge, values, and skills which enable each individual to change freely. Thus it occurs most effectively when both instructor and student are properly related to God and each other through Christ.

Statement of Mission and Purpose

Maintaining the vision of the founder, Dr. Jerry Falwell, Liberty University develops Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential to impact the world.

Through its residential and online programs, the University educates men and women who will make important contributions to their workplaces and communities, follow their chosen vocations as callings to glorify God, and fulfill the Great Commission.

Liberty University will:

1. Emphasize excellence in teaching and learning.

2. Foster university-level competencies in communication, critical thinking, information literacy, and mathematics in all undergraduate programs.

3. Ensure competency in scholarship, research, and professional communication in all graduate programs.

4. Promote the synthesis of academic knowledge and Christian worldview in order that there might be a maturing of spiritual, intellectual, social and physical value-driven behavior.
5. Enable students to engage in a major field of study in career-focused disciplines built on a solid foundation in the liberal arts.

6. Promote an understanding of the Western tradition and the diverse elements of American cultural history, especially the importance of the individual in maintaining democratic and free market processes.

7. Contribute to a knowledge and understanding of other cultures and of international events.

8. Encourage a commitment to the Christian life, one of personal integrity, sensitivity to the needs of others, social responsibility and active communication of the Christian faith, and, as it is lived out, a life that leads people to Jesus Christ as the Lord of the universe and their own personal Savior.

Approved by the Liberty University Board of Trustees, November 12, 2010
Appendix G

JERRY FALWELL SR. BIOGRAPHY

Founder of Liberty University
Aug. 11, 1933 - May 15, 2007

In June of 1956, at the age of 22, Jerry Falwell started Thomas Road Baptist Church in his hometown of Lynchburg, Va., with 35 members. Also in 1956, Falwell began the “Old Time Gospel Hour,” a nationally syndicated radio and television ministry that has led millions to Christ.

In 1967, Falwell implemented his vision to build a Christian educational system for evangelical youth. He began with the establishment of Lynchburg Christian Academy, an accredited Christian day school for grades K-12. In 1971, he founded Liberty University, an accredited Christian university for evangelical believers. In 1985 Falwell announced his goal of 50,000 students.

Today his vision has been fulfilled, with more than 12,000 students attending classes on campus in Lynchburg, Va., and more than 90,000 students from all 50 states and 95 countries taking courses through Liberty University Online.

Falwell may be best known outside Lynchburg for his political activism. In June 1979, he organized the Moral Majority, a conservative political lobbying group that was pro-life, pro-family, pro-Israel and favored a strong national defense. The group chose California Governor Ronald Reagan as "their candidate" for the 1980 presidential election, registered millions of new voters and mobilized a sleeping giant — 80 million Americans committed to faith, family and Judeo-Christian values.

Although he became a national figure, his passion was being a pastor and a Christian educator. He often stated that his heartbeat was to “train young Champions for Christ” in every walk of life.

Falwell passed away on the morning of May 15, 2007 at age 73. He was married to Macel for 49 years. They have three children: Jerry Jr., chancellor of Liberty University; Jonathan, senior pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church; and Jeannie, a surgeon; and eight grandchildren.

HONORARY DEGREES

Tennessee Temple Theological Seminary, Doctor of Divinity
California Graduate School of Theology, Doctor of Letters
Central University, Seoul, Korea, Doctor of Laws
VOCATIONS AND POSTS

Thomas Road Baptist Church: Founder and Senior Pastor, from 1956
Old Time Gospel Hour, Inc.: President from 1956
Elim Home for Alcoholics: from 1959
Lynchburg Christian Academy, K-12: from 1967
Liberty University: Chancellor from 1971
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary: Chancellor from 1973
Liberty Bible Institute: Chancellor from 1972
Moral Majority, Inc.: 1979-1989
Liberty Godparent Home for Unwed Mothers: from 1982
Liberty Broadcasting Network: President from 1985
Clergyman of the Year in America, Religious Heritage of America, 1979
Jabotinsky Centennial Medal, for friendship to Israel; presented by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, 1980
Christian Humanitarian of the Year, Food for the Hungry International, 1981
Most Admired Man Not in Congress, Conservative Digest, 1983
Voted several times among the 10 Most Admired Men in America, Good Housekeeping Poll
Named one of the 25 Most Influential People in America, U.S. News & World Report, 1983
Debated New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange, defending the "Western Nuclear Alliance," at Oxford Debating Society, 1985
Named the Most Influential Central Virginian of the 20th Century in a survey conducted by the News and Advance in Lynchburg, Va, Dec. 1999
Named most influential clergyman of the 20th Century in Va. by the Virginia Historical Society
Featured on the covers of Newsweek and Time, and on countless print and broadcast outlets
Speaker at colleges and universities including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Dartmouth, UCLA, and Notre Dame
Met privately numerous times with Presidents George Bush, Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford, and Richard Nixon. Met with world leaders such as Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, South African President F.W. DeKlerk, Jordan's King Hussein, and Israeli Prime Ministers Begin, Shamir, Rabin, Peres, Netanyahu and Sharon.
Led missionary and humanitarian efforts in nations around the world, including the former Soviet Union

BOOKS

Church Aflame - Impact, 1971
Capturing a Town for Christ - Revell, 1973
Listen, America! - Doubleday, 1980
The Fundamentalist Phenomenon - Doubleday, 1981
Finding Inner Peace and Strength - Doubleday, 1982
When it Hurts Too Much to Cry - Tyndale, 1984
Wisdom for Living - Victor Books, 1984
Stepping Out on Faith - Tyndale, 1984
Champions for God - Victor Books, 1985
If I Should Die Before I Wake - Thomas Nelson,
Strength for the Journey - Simon & Schuster, 1987
The New American Family - Word, 1992
Fasting Can Change Your Life - Regal, 1998
Building Dynamic Faith – Thomas Nelson, 2005

FAMILY

Wife, Macel Pate Falwell, married 4/12/58
Son, Jerry Falwell Jr., Attorney and Chancellor of Liberty University, Lynchburg, Va
Son, Jonathan Falwell, Senior Pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Va
Daughter, Jeannie Falwell Savas, Surgeon, Richmond, Va
Appendix H

JERRY FALWELL JR. BIOGRAPHY

Jerry Falwell Jr. became chancellor and president of Liberty University in May 2007 just after the passing of his father, Liberty's founder, Dr. Jerry Falwell Sr.

Since he accepted the position, Liberty has seen substantial growth in enrollment and endowment funding and is in the midst of a $500 million campus rebuilding.

Falwell was born on Father's Day, June 17, 1962, in Lynchburg, Va. He attended Liberty Christian Academy and Liberty University, graduating in 1984 with a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. He obtained his Juris Doctor degree from the University of Virginia School of Law in 1987 and was licensed to practice law the same year.

Falwell married Becki Tilley of Chapel Hill, N.C. in 1987. They have three children: Jerry Falwell, III (Trey), Charles Wesley, and Caroline Grace, and have lived on their farm in Bedford County, Va., since 1987. The president and Becki have made themselves accessible to students and have worked to create a family atmosphere for students at Liberty. The couple hosts about 1,000 students at their home every year for the Senior Picnic.

Falwell began practicing law in Lynchburg in 1987, and served as general counsel of Liberty and other related organizations from 1988-2007. During those years, Falwell also played a key role in the development of real estate in the vicinity of Liberty University. His companies were successful in the recruitment of many national retail and restaurant chains to the area, greatly enriching the lifestyle of the Lynchburg community.

In 1988, Falwell and his father began working closely together in the management and oversight of the university as well as all related ministries. Over time, Falwell assumed from his father more of the responsibilities for the day-to-day management of the university. In 2003 he was named vice chancellor by the Liberty University Board of Trustees.

Since Falwell became president of the university, enrollment has increased from 9,600 to nearly 13,000 residential students and from 27,000 to more than 90,000 online students. Liberty's net assets increased from approximately $100 million in 2007 to over $1 billion in 2012 as a result of increasing support from donors, responsible fiscal management, and almost unprecedented enrollment growth. Liberty has remained among the most affordable of all private universities in the nation and continues to award over $100 million of institutional aid to its students each year.

Falwell is instrumental in the planning and construction of improvements on campus.

"All of these buildings and programs are ultimately and primarily about building lives—the lives of our students and the lives of those they will impact," President Falwell has repeated many times. Under his leadership, the university is constantly monitoring job
market trends, evaluating and adapting its programs accordingly, so that Liberty students have the tools they need to remain prepared for the future.

Liberty currently offers over 350 programs of study, but the classroom is not the only arena where the president's leadership is pushing Liberty to new levels. In 2012, he announced the football program's readiness for a move into the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), which would have it competing at the top level of NCAA Division I football.

Since Falwell became president, Liberty has grown to become the largest private, nonprofit four-year college in the country, the nation's seventh largest university, and the largest college in Virginia. With students from all 50 states and 90 different countries, Liberty is flourishing on the international stage and influencing America through its alumni.

One of President Falwell's priorities at Liberty has been to keep the university true to its roots and its Christian mission. He has implemented policies to ensure that the university does not follow the lead of so many American universities that were founded with Christian missions very similar to Liberty's, but later changed their missions as they achieved academic, athletic, and financial prominence as institutions.

Wall Street investors have taken notice of the school's financial standing and Liberty has received strong credit ratings from Standard & Poor's and Moody's Investors Service, placing them among the nation's highest-rated universities for financial strength. Last year the school topped $1 billion in net assets, making it the youngest nonprofit university in American history to reach this milestone. "I believe that if Liberty continues to be a good steward of the resources God has provided us, the resulting financial strength will give us the ability to resist pressures to change our doctrinal statement and other unique values core to our mission."

His goal is for the university to fulfill his father's vision—to attain academic excellence and athletic prominence as a world-class university whose graduates will impact the world with the Gospel of Christ, fully equipped for careers in every profession.

Falwell is a member of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of the Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce and was named as the 2006 Business Person of the Year for Western Virginia by the Blue Ridge Business Journal. He serves on the board of the Bedford County Public Service Authority and was appointed by Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell to the Governor's Commission for Higher Education Investment and Innovation. Falwell enjoys playing tennis, hiking, and riding ATVs with his family.
Appendix I
PARTICIPATION LETTER

To Whom It May Concern:

I am conducting research for the completion of my doctoral dissertation. My study is a qualitative case study on the leadership succession that occurred between the founder of Liberty University and his successor, the current President.

As an individual that had a first-hand account of the preparation or implementation of the leadership succession, I believe you could assist in my study by participating in a structure interview.

I am requesting a time that is convenient to your schedule to discuss the topic mentioned either by one on one interview or an interview with a group of individuals. The interview will take approximately one-hour in length.

I will be contacting you via telephone in the next few days to discuss the opportunity and potentially schedule a time to meet.

Sincerely,
Steve Peterson
Interviewer: To get started, please describe your association with Liberty University and how long you have been connected with the school?

Interviewee: I am the _____________ and the _____________ in that area. I have been at Liberty since ____________. So, almost _______ years. My role is to ________________.

Interviewer: Related to the founder, Jerry Falwell Sr., what relationship did you have with the school’s founder?

Interviewee: My relationship with Dr. Falwell was somewhat limited but it was there. I think in the early years of __________, Dr. Falwell contacted me and he said ______________________________ . My role _______________________________ and not be distracted by everything else.

Dr. Falwell called on me to take that role. My interaction with him was weekly, generally. I would have an update meeting with him and update him on where we were going, get some direction, get approval, talk to him _____________________________ . He said to me ______________ you are here to take care of whatever I want you to work on. And so, that is what I did. And he said, ________________________________ .

Interviewer: Obviously in 2007, May 2007, Jerry, Sr. passes away. And, almost instantly because of the time of year, Jerry Jr. takes over as President and Chancellor. What relationship did/do you have with the current president?

Interviewee: Yes, his name was Falwell, I already reported to him (laughter).

The current President and I have always had a close business relationship. I answered beside him, to him and his father for those _______ years. Nearly all the times I was meeting with Dr. Falwell, Jerry was in the room. Jerry, Jr. was in the room. And he
always had some input on the outcome of the decision, sometimes generally. He and his Dad always agreed. Very few times when they didn’t. They had a very cordial relationship with each other and very palatable and very accommodating. Jerry was always there... the transition as very easy for me. I was already answering to Jerry, Jr. and it was absolutely no change in the business to me.

**Interviewer:** Ok, that is interesting. From the outside it looks like on May 16, 2007, Jerry Falwell Jr. takes over an organization that was founded by his father. You would say what to that assumption?

**Interviewee:** I have an interesting outlook on that as well.

_I can say that in my personal career and in my personal life that God started training me for this job._

Looking back almost immediately I see how God has directed my path, I look at the way, when I started with Dr. Falwell, how Dr. Falwell had pulled Jerry, Jr. and Jonathan to his side and trained them not really knowing what was going to happen and how it was going to come down.

The timing could not have been more perfect. Jerry Jr. was transitioned in, as far as I am concerned, for the last three years he was under the training of Dr. Falwell, every meeting, everyday, every conversation, Dr. Falwell and Jerry Jr. were together. They both knew every outcome of every situation.

**Interviewer:** When did people (yourself included) begin to realize that there was a need to plan for succession?

**Interviewee:** Well, I think I knew it most. Dr. Falwell had me working

At the same time, Jerry Jr. was working as General Counsel. That was his title.
That is when he became Vice Chancellor.

**Interviewer:** So, at that point you saw him take on a new title and even start to build out his own people, if you will.

**Interviewee:** His own people if you will, yes.

**Interviewer:** Who were the candidates for assuming Dr. Falwell’s role? Were there other people who were discussed you know between yourself other employees?

**Interviewee:** It is one of those things I don’t think you allowed yourself to think about. Dr. Falwell was such a great guy and relatively young.

It was not something we allowed ourselves to think about. But, there was no other person we would have seen taking over that role.

**Interviewer:** What was your first reaction when you heard that Jerry Falwell Sr. had passed away?

**Interviewee:** I really didn’t know what to think. I was in shock. I got a call,

In my heart I knew that Dr. Falwell had passed, I turned around and walked out in total shock not knowing what would happen to the university at that point.

There were days when the university had no way to meet payroll except for Dr. Falwell making some kind of plea and it was very frightening at that time knowing that the university was that vulnerable. It was one of great concern.

**Interviewer:** What were the biggest challenges and obstacles facing the school during the transition? What were your greatest concerns about the succession?

**Interviewee:** I think it was that missing link in leadership that we feared. With Jerry [Jr.] picking up the leadership there was never even a hiccup. I talk about it all the time. As bad… as much as I respected Dr. Falwell, as bad as I miss him today as much as I admired all that he was and he is and that he has done, the only few hours that I missed working was the few that I sat at his funeral the day they did the eulogy.
While we all loved, admired and honored Dr. Falwell for who he was, he would still let you know real quick that it is not I but it is Christ.

He was a guy who liked to be in the backroom working ______ So, knowing Jerry [Jr.] like ________ But, we all knew that God was in control and that comfort was there, you know. We just never missed a beat. It has just been amazing.

**Interviewer:** How did your role change (if at all) after the succession?

**Interviewee:** Yes, and no. The _______ got more focused and got more intense. And the focus, the Liberty focus got more intense. In my mind, Dr. Falwell has a big vision. ______

Jerry, Jr. gave to Liberty 100%. 100% of the focus that was going on in my life was on Liberty University and my leader is 100% focused on Liberty at this point. ______

so, intensity set in dramatically, it really changed that way.

**Interviewee:** Interesting…

**Interviewee:** It is what Jerry, Jr. was to focused on. And, he has done a good job, obviously. But, it’s is quite demanding as well.

**Interviewer:** What would you describe as the greatest accomplishment since the succession?

**Interviewee:** It is really his (Jerry Falwell Jr.) commitment to quality. His ability … I ______

You know, his ability.

**Interviewer:** Customer centric.

**Interviewee:** Yes, sir. His focus is, that is why I have always related.
the library, his commitment has been unwavering. It is very motivation. It is really why we are where we are today.

**Interviewer:** Looking back, in regards to the transition, what could have or should have been done differently?

**Interviewee:** Nothing, God was in control.

Between David and Solomon, David was a warrior and he gathered the building material. He had everything set up so when it was time for Solomon to build the house of God, he could. David could not have done it. He was too much of a warrior. He could not have done that work.

God had built Jerry, Jr. for that time…and Dr. Falwell left when it was time. God called him home. We talk about those… and I wish it had not have been but… for such a time.

We had no idea financially we were okay at that moment. We thought we were doomed but God knew right when the time was right, when the finances were ok. Jerry’s [Sr.] job was done.

And, the students were on the way. The building material, the people were in place.

I am just saying that all around, people were put in place.

Jerry is surrounded by a great group of people. Solomon had a lot of building material that was gathered and laid up at his feet, all he had to do was to put it together. He could have still blown it. But he still did what God wanted him to do.

**Interviewer:** The stage was set, so to speak.

**Interviewee:** Yeah, ___________ Jerry [Jr.] had finished the work in what his father had laid out and what our Heavenly Father had ordained.

**Interviewer:** To what would you attribute the success of the institution after the transition?

**Interviewee:** It was the plan of God.

**Interviewer:** Any manmade preparations you could attribute?

**Interviewee:** I can’t other than all the men in the process that God had selected and put them in the right places at the right time, for such a time as this.

I hear that you have leadership that start rebelling and start fighting against each other during a transition. There were no power struggles that happened. None of that happened.
Everybody here pulled together. They pulled behind Jerry because God had done it just exactly right. He brought Jerry, Jr. on the scene just in time. He exposed him to all of us. He gave him enough power and authority to be able to, for us to accept him.

If he had just walked in off of the street, we would have had a hard time. Even if he knew everything that he knew and every decision was the same… he would have been an outsider to us. But God brought him in and transitioned him in and had him in a place and time, just in time.

Interviewer: How are Jerry Falwell Sr. and Jerry Falwell Jr. alike?

Interviewee: Obviously, both are very aggressive in their dream and their passion. They are very committed to their dreams and passion. Those are the big things… they are very focused.

They are committed. They are both very, very intelligent. Jerry, Jr. knows about things he has never worked with. He is intelligent in that way. He is schooled without having to work in those businesses.

Interviewer: Was that similar in Jerry Falwell Sr.?

Interviewee: Absolutely. Jerry Falwell Sr. never missed a trick. Whatever you told him he knew, very intelligent.

What was funny to watch with Dr. Falwell, no matter what we talked about, when I would present him with a problem, present him with a solution, present him with a recommendation, he made a decision.

Interviewer: How are Jerry Falwell Sr. and Jerry Falwell Jr. different?

Interviewee:

Interviewer: Describe the leadership style of the founder?
Interviewee: These are the areas I don’t think about quite so much.

Interviewer: If nothing comes to mind, don’t feel compelled to answer.

Interviewer: Is there anything you may think is relevant the transition of leadership at Liberty?

Interviewee: No, not really.

Interviewer: Ok, thank you, I definitely appreciate your time.

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## Appendix K
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