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# Guiding the Future of the Supply Chain with Succession Planning

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College of Management and Technology

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Dana M. Beal

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Guiding the Future of the Supply Chain with Succession Planning

by

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MBA, Kaplan University, 2011

BSBM, University of Phoenix, 2008

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2020

Abstract

Some supply chain leaders in the transportation sector lack the succession planning strategies needed to fill leadership positions. The failure to create succession planning strategies will negatively impact an organization’s supply chain through tacit knowledge loss. Grounded in the social exchange theory, the purpose of this qualitative exploratory single-case study was to explore the succession planning strategies transportation industry supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The participants consisted of 6 supply chain leaders working in the Northeastern region of the United States who successfully utilize succession planning strategies to fill leadership positions and retain tacit knowledge. Data were obtained utilizing semistructured face-to-face interviews, interview notes, as well as internal company documents. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the information. Three themes emerged: address the potential loss of tacit knowledge, leaders tend to do more with fewer people, and succession planning. A key recommendation is expanded implementation of staged retirement plans and using independent contractors. The implication for positive social change includes the overall enhancement of employee lifestyles via increased social and economic standing within their workplace and the community.

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# Dedication

The journey to my doctorate is best described as a microcosm of my life. I have experienced a range of emotions, from joy to sadness. It was all in an attempt to reach the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel that represents a crowning achievement. Periodically, I moved forward while looking back at the road traveled. During those progress checks, I realized that my goals were not possible without a past and present support system. I dedicate this achievement to my grandmother, Ruth Johnson, who played an instrumental role throughout my foundational years. My mother, Patricia Beal, who demonstrated tenacity. My aunt, Trudy Lowe, who inspired me to be my best version. Finally, I dedicate this achievement to my wife and partner on this journey, Dr. Angela Freeman. Special mentions go out to my lifelong friends, Keith Thompkins and Johnny Kersey, and to my brothers and sisters in the U.S. Marines Corps. Semper Fidelis!

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I thank God for always providing challenges that I can bear and providing the support that I need to overcome the tests of greater difficulty. To that end, I want to thank all my previous chairs for their unwavering support through this venture. Most of all, I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Susan Fan, for giving me the tough love and push during the final steps of this academic journey. I also would like to thank my committee member, Dr. Carol Anne Faint, and the URR, Dr. Denise Land, for their oversight throughout this journey. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Susan Davis, who inspired my wife and me to "keep it moving" at the residencies.

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# Section 1: Foundation of the Study

The overall goal of a supply chain is to meet the needs of customers while creating a level of profitability (Min, Zacharia, & Smith, 2019). It is the responsibility of organizational leaders to ensure as well as maintain fluidity through the utilization of their knowledge and communication skills to coordinate the intricate movements of a supply chain. However, a significant number of these leaders are members of the baby boomer generation and are nearing retirement age (Chambre & Netting, 2018). The retirement of the members of the baby boomer generation will place a strain on the workforce, as there are not enough people in the talent pool to replace them (Leon & Uddin, 2016). A 20% shortage of entry-level supply chain clerks existed in 2014 (Sinha & Millhiser, 2016). In time, leadership will experience an organizational personnel crisis (Office of Personnel Management, 2018). Instead of facing the potential disaster, many supply chain leaders promote the efficient flow of goods and services by accomplishing more productivity with reduced personnel (Berns & Klarner, 2017).

## Background of the Problem

Personnel shortages in the supply chain field are looming in the United States due to the retirement of the baby boomers, who represent a significant portion of the working population (Chambre & Netting, 2018). Organizational leaders face increased pressure to find replacements for retiring workers, as there are not enough people in the talent pool to replace the projected retirees (Leon & Uddin, 2016). As time progresses, the deficit between qualified employees and the available leadership positions will cause an organizational personnel crisis (Sinha & Millhiser, 2016). The looming crisis will require corporate leaders to develop programs with an emphasis on producing the next generation of supply chain leaders internally to avoid the loss of tacit knowledge (Leon & Uddin, 2016). Some leaders identified succession planning programs as a viable pathway to ensure the continuity of their organization's competitive advantage (Berns & Klarner, 2017). However, other leaders have viewed succession planning as a hindrance to productivity (Zulurnain & Aqsa, 2018) and have sought to accomplish more productivity with fewer people as retirements loom (Leider, Coronado, Beck, & Harper, 2018).

The impending personnel shortage creates a problem that organizational leaders on both sides of the issue must overcome to produce the next generation of supply chain leaders (Berns & Klarner, 2017). Well-orchestrated succession planning is a method to overcome the projected shortages (Berns & Klarner, 2017). Leaders using succession planning programs control the availability of qualified personnel from within an organization while removing a need for an extended period of training after the hire of a new applicant (Schepker, Nyberg, Ulrich, & Wright, 2018). However, even those leaders who agree with the effectiveness of succession planning programs are not utilizing them to their full potential (Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

## Problem Statement

Succession programs are not producing enough leaders to fill the projected gap between qualified personnel and supply chain leadership positions (Flothmann & Hoberg, 2017). The failure to advance qualified supply chain personnel in leadership positions promotes stagnation of knowledge, decreases organizational agility, and increases the learning curve by 57% (Makarius & Srinivasan, 2017). The general business problem is that the ineffective utilization of succession planning programs results in the loss of valued talent, subsequently increasing the tendency for opportunistic hiring in the attempt to fill vacant positions quickly. The specific business problem is that some transportation industry supply chain business leaders lack succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single-case study was to explore the succession planning strategies that transportation industry supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The target population of this research study consisted of six supply chain business leaders within a transportation company in the Northeastern region of the United States who successfully used succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The outcomes of this study will contribute to positive social change in which employees of the organization feel valued through the attainment of a position with a higher salary and by experiencing an increase in stature within the community-at-large.

## Nature of the Study

The research methodologies available for utilization in this study included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. I selected qualitative methodology as a vehicle due to the design's agility as well as the ability to review data from a humanistic point of view. Additionally, the utilization of the qualitative methodology provided access to how things happen rather than the collection and analysis of empirical data

(Yin, 2018). Using the qualitative methodology provided a means to understand why succession planning strategies might not meet objectives.

A quantitative method is a tool used to convert numbers into statistics with the intent to find patterns (Acquaye et al., 2018). However, the quantitative methodology was not an appropriate choice for this study due to the requirement of empirical evidence to test a hypothesis. Furthermore, numbers cannot appropriately capture the emotions of the participants. The tenets of the mixed methods approach permit a researcher to combine the qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Tu, 2018). Still, this researcher could not use the mixed-methods approach because it has the same disqualifying attribute as the quantitative methodology. Therefore, I removed the mixed-method approach from consideration because of its requirement to use empirical evidence to test a hypothesis. The results of the analysis revealed the qualitative exploratory single-case study to be the only method suitable to achieve the goal of learning why the transportation industry supply chain business leaders lack succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions.

I considered the inquiry designs of ethnographic and phenomenological, and summarily rejected them for the following reasons. Ethnography is an excellent tool to discover new social trends or marketing trend analysis (Stolze, Mollenkopf, Thornton, Brusco, & Flint, 2018). It is useful for documenting participants within their working environment to understand an issue or an event that occurred (Yin, 2018).

However, I sought to explore the succession planning strategies that transportation industry supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. Experiencing day-to-day activities to discover social trends for marketing did not help to answer the research question. I eliminated the ethnographic design because the tenets did not align with the objectives of this research.

Users of the phenomenological design emphasize the interviewing process to attempt to understand the root cause of an issue or event (Oliva, Fuentes, Borzone, Meyer, & Aguirre, 2018). Upon the initial review, the design seemed optimal for this research. However, when I compared the phenomenological design to the case study as a vehicle for this work, an in-depth analysis revealed significant differences between them. The findings precluded the approach from being used in this work.

The tenets of the case study included a range of data collection tools, such as interviewing and observations (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the case study is business-centric. Utilization of the case study method afforded a higher level of flexibility, which permitted me to review an event within an organization such as the succession planning program. After completing the comparison between the tenets of the phenomenological design versus the case study, I noted that the case study was the better choice.

## Research Question

What succession planning strategies do transportation industry supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss?

## Interview Questions

1. What succession planning strategies do you use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss?
2. How did you determine the best succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss?
3. What succession planning strategies were not successful for filling organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss?
4. What is your perception of the influence that an employee gains from successfully participating in succession planning within your organization?
5. What is your perception of the effect of succession planning program availability on employee morale?
6. What challenges have you experienced when implementing the succession planning process?
7. What additional information can you provide that relates to your experiences with succession planning within your organization?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study centered on social exchange theory (SET), which is an integral part of the employer-to-employee relationship. SET originated with George C. Homans (1961), and the theory gained notoriety through the book entitled, *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (Homans, 1961). Homans (1961) noted that the use of SET highlighted the inner workings of the human mind, and using SET assisted leaders in the art of merging the social objectives of the employees and the company objectives (Homans, 1961). The use of SET remains relevant to the business environment, as its framework assists leaders with sourcing qualified internal applicants to fill vacant leadership positions through proficiency in the reciprocity of fair exchanges. Leaders create succession planning programs as enticements and employ SET to assure the availability of applicants (Reader, Mearns, Lopes, & Kuha, 2016).

Furthermore, utilizing succession planning and SET in tandem allowed the opportunity for employers to achieve the objectives of filling vacancies, decreasing learning curves, retaining tacit knowledge, increasing loyalty, and increasing the competitive advantage held in the industry (Erturk & Vurgun, 2015). Similarly, some employees sought increases in standing within the organization and their communities that accompany an increase in work responsibilities and, subsequently, salary increases (Nan, 2018). I applied SET as a lens to explore the factors that improve or hinder reaching the objectives of both parties.

## Operational Definitions

*Baby boomer generation:* The term baby boomer generation refers to people born between the years 1945 and 1964 (Leider et al., 2018).

*Certified supply chain professional (CSCP):* The certified supply chain professional is a knowledge worker who has an intimate understanding of supply chain processes. A CSCP receives his or her designation after passing a standardized test with an 80% or higher test score (Luo, Shi, & Venkatesh, 2018).

*Employee trust:* Employee trust occurs when a leader understands the expectations of the employees and creates a work environment that maximizes the employees' ability to perform the duties associated with their jobs (Schneider & Valet, 2017).

*Global talent management:* Global talent management refers to a proactive integration of the organizational resources to find and retain human capital in a globalized economy (Collings, Mellahi, & Cascio, 2019).

*Institute of Supply Chain Management:* The Institute of Supply Chain Management is a testing and certification organization dedicated to providing a minimum standard of knowledge within the supply chain field. The institute is the oldest organization of its kind, with certifications recognized in 75 countries (Luo et al., 2018).

*Knowledge transfer strategy:* Knowledge transfer strategy refers to a process ensuring that intellectual knowledge continues after employee separations, transfers, or promotions (Levinson, 2015).

*Personnel shortages:* Personnel shortages are a reference to the difference between the available jobs and the people trained and capable of filling specified positions (Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

*Succession planning:* Succession planning refers to a process of internally identifying and training the people to fill leadership positions within an organization. The implementation of a succession planning program ensures that the people are available to fill vacant positions (Berns & Klarner, 2017).

*Supply chain management:* Supply chain management is the precise coordination of a product from the raw material state until the finished product reaches a customer. The process includes reverse logistics that removes a product from a client to return to a manufacturer and green logistics that entails the recycling of a product for reuse (Sweeny, Grant, & Mangan, 2018).

*Tacit knowledge*: Tacit knowledge is information accumulated by a person and held outside of manuals, textbooks, or regulations. Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge may not be commonly known or easily expressed (Schulze, Bals, & Johnsen, 2019).

## Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

### Assumptions

Assumptions are the conditions necessary to complete a study (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018). Assumptions are beyond the control of a researcher, but research would not be relevant without including them (Gupta, Chiles, & McMullen, 2016). During this study, I focused on the personal experiences of the people who agreed to participate and relied on their precise recollections. The assumptions prevailed concerning the idea that the respondents provided truthful replies to the best of their ability and answered the interview questions without introducing their personal biases. Another assumption centered upon the notion that the organizational leaders would provide access to the company employees who agreed to participate in this research during working hours and without penalty.

**Limitations**

Limitations are conditions that are beyond the control of a researcher (Lewis, 2015). Limitations include time constraints or physical ability and may exist in every aspect of reality (Gupta et al., 2016). For this study, the target organization's operational commitments placed limitations on the participants' schedules. I could not interfere with the revenue generation of the business while interviewing the participants, which made timing a limitation.

I limited this study to a single industry and one company within that industry that operates in a defined geographic area. The outcome of the limitation potentially reduced the diversity of responses to the questions. The limitation of the variety of respondents hypothetically increased the chance of industry-based and geographic biases due to the similarities of the people who work in the same industry and live in the community (Kache, 2015). Finally, an additional limiter to this work centered on the fact that the researcher was the sole data collector reliant on the memory of others.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations define restrictions and limit the latitude of the research in the areas of methodologies, conceptual framework, participant selection, and interview questions (Gupta et al., 2016). Delimitations contrasted with the assumptions and limitations of this study because I did not control them. The selection of the qualitative methodology provided a delimitating effect by defining parameters for the conduct of the research. Further delimiters included the selection of a single geographic location, the participants of which may not have represented the thinking of other segments of the populace.

The utilization of SET as the conceptual framework became a delimiter. I chose SET based on its usefulness to detail the employer-employee interactions to achieve gains. The choice to use SET meant that the researcher accepted the theory's confines as they applied to this research.

## Significance of the Study

Succession planning provides a tool for supply chain leaders to improve productivity within their organizations. The increase in productivity may improve the competitive advantage, subsequently affecting the local economy. Organizational leaders demonstrating a commitment to their employees foster more significant reputations for their companies within local communities (Philippaers, De Cuyper, & Forrier, 2017).

The study findings are valuable to businesses as a base of knowledge in the attempt to rectify the conditions that cause a deficit between supply chain leadership positions and qualified supply-side personnel. Company leaders might use findings from this study to reduce the need to train staff who originate from different jobs by creating a viable pool of supply chain candidates within their organizations to offset anticipated retirements. In furtherance of this point, Rothwell, Jackson, Ressler, Connelly, and Brower (2015) distributed a survey to human resource professionals at 100 organizations and found that 44 of the companies did not have a succession planning program to ensure a competitive advantage. Of the remaining businesses that had succession programs, 44 failed to operate them effectually (Rothwell et al., 2015). The information contained within this study will help supply chain leaders throughout the industry through the exploration of succession planning strategies used to fill organizational leadership positions that subsequently reduced tacit knowledge loss.

### Contribution to Business Practice

The results of this study contributed to the active practice of business by presenting options to increase the efficiency of an organization's succession planning for supply chain management. The gap between qualified personnel and supply chain positions continues to grow, while business leaders seek ways to fill the vacancies (Hughes, 2018). Succession program strategies are a means to overcome the disparity, and qualified supply-side personnel must receive placement in those programs. The result of not using supply chain strategies successfully is an increase in opportunistic advancements and an extended learning curve that reduces the competitive advantage of a business by increasing lead times for products and services (Pedersen & Slepniov, 2016). This work utilized the experiences of supply chain leaders to guide future leaders' decisions concerning viable approaches for supply chain succession strategies.

### Implications for Social Change

The findings from this research could create or contribute to positive social change by increasing the value of internally sourced employees to the organization. The employees elevated value results in the potential to achieve positions of higher stature, increased salaries, and acclaim within the community-at-large (Reader et al., 2016). The possibility exists to affect a social shift in the community for the reputation of the company through a demonstrated commitment to the employees by the leadership (Baer, Bundy, Garud, & Kim, 2018).

**A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

I used a qualitative exploratory single-case study to explore the succession planning strategies supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. This research included 106 primary sources of literature as part of the exploration of the topic. Of the sources, 93 were peer-reviewed journal articles, which equated to 89% of the sources. In addition to the journal articles, I included four dissertations, which represented 4% of the sources. Of the sources within the literature review, 104 (98%) had publishing dates within 5 years of this researcher's anticipated graduation date.

There are 174 primary sources in the proposal. Of the sources, 157 (90%) were peer-reviewed journal articles, and 6 were dissertations (3%). Of the sources cited, 138 (80%) had a publishing date within the 5 years of 2016 through 2020, which is my anticipated date of receiving Walden University's chief academic officer approval.

There were several search platforms used as mediums to obtain the source of information such as Emerald Management Journals, ABI/INFORMS Complete, Science Direct, and Google Scholar search engine. Additionally, I used several Boolean source constructs to find the relevant source of information. The constructs were (a) *succession planning*, (b) *baby boomer generation,* (c) *tacit knowledge management,* (d) *human capital*, (e) *explicit knowledge management,* and (f) *supply chain management*.

The first section of the literature review detailed the process used to achieve a synergy of existing knowledge in the area of succession planning. The second section of the literature review consisted of 4 sections. Each of the sections emphasized and clarified the relationship between succession planning and preparing to fill projected vacant positions in the supply chain. The sections were SET, talent management, transformational leadership, succession planning, and knowledge management method, talent management, succession planning, SET, transformational leadership, and knowledge management methods.

**Social Exchange Theory**

Organizations employ succession planning programs to manage the deficits between the number of available leadership positions and qualified applicants. A carefully constructed program improves the relationship between management and the employees (Chang, Tsai, Chen, Huang, & Tseng, 2015) by creating a condition where there is an exchange of values (Reader et al., 2016). SET was a conduit to explore the usefulness of succession planning within the targeted organization, noting that the effects of SET on human behaviors align the results with natural law.

Natural law serves as the universal guide for acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in social exchange situations (Chernilo, 2016), which are commonplace and documented throughout human history (Ming-Chuan, Qiang, Sang-Bing, & Yi, 2018). In social exchanges, there is an expectancy of receiving something of value in return for something that has value for someone else (Reader et al., 2016). According to Chernilo (2016), a social exchange naturally occurs when benefits are attached to a fair offer in personal and professional settings.

As an example of a personal scenario, social exchanges arise for consumers at a grocery store when purchasing products such as edibles. The edibles have a value to the consumer to provide calories for energy, and the currency has value to the seller. Each group receives something of value, and loyalty follows for quality exchanges. In the context of this study, a social exchange occurs when the organization offers an opportunity to advance via succession planning programs. If the person finds value within the programs and completes the courses, the exchange is complete, whereas the company receives an educated and loyal employee. The employee receives the opportunity for advancement and, subsequently, a higher salary, prestige in the community, and a better standard of living. The exchange is balanced. However, Lins, Servaes, and Tamayo (2017) noted that an imbalanced social exchange creates equally memorable negative experiences.

The contrary assignment to social exchanges is the punishment associated with not following the norms of natural law in society (Chang et al., 2015). The penalty may be civil (Daspit, Holt, Chrisman, & Long, 2016) or in the business sector by becoming a C-ranked employee who requires additional leadership attention (Chang et al., 2015). No matter the reason, social exchanges that do not have a win-win for both parties cause negative feelings to emerge (Nunkoo, 2016).

Researchers have studied people and history to predict human behaviors, whereas SET emerged as a dominant theory to identify the outcomes of possible actions. Homans (1961) reviewed the work of Aristotle and Freud to gather information from their foundational writings. According to Homans, Aristotle and Freud indicated that further research should lead to a better understanding of fundamental behaviors. Homans wrote about the staleness of the theories from the twentieth century (Homans, 1961), and he undertook a new path to understand and chart the inner works of human conduct (Nan, 2018) by revising the older theories.

Theory revisions are a regular part of existence. Homans (1961) followed the path of Aristotle and Freud's research on natural human behaviors during value exchanges and systematically constructed a theory using four steps. He committed to observing common human behaviors; he listed those behaviors, and then he coded the behaviors, which narrowed the results to a definitive set of reactions to a stimulus (Homans, 1961). His observations revealed that people behave in a manner that increases a positive outcome during an exchange of values if the profit outweighs the costs (Nunkoo, 2016). The behaviors continue only if both sides believe that there is a benefit to the transaction and that the conditions are fair. Homans published his findings in a book entitled the *Human Group* in 1961 (Homans, 1961).

The theory of social exchanges gained intellectual prominence throughout the 20th century. Homans noted the potential to create enduring relationships beyond bartering and bargaining (Nan, 2018). Then, Emerson added to Homans's work when he wrote about the dependence and the dynamics of power as bargaining platforms in 1962 (Nan, 2018). Power became a central component of the theory because its wielder can determine the outcome of an exchange (Nunkoo, 2016).

A succession planning program is an example of social exchange (Keller, 2018). The wielder of power depends on the need to fill a vacancy (Nunkoo, 2016). If the vacancy is critical, the employee has the negotiation power. Conversely, if leadership is expecting a vacancy, then the power is with the organization. Significant imbalances of power can cause feelings of injustice between the parties performing an exchange.

According to Harris and Kacmar (2018), Emerson demonstrated these imbalances of power using an exchange of outcomes matrix. In the exchange of outcomes matrix, the first quadrant illustrates a win-win scenario leading one to believe that there is an equal need for leaders to fill the position, as there is a yearning by a candidate to meet the qualifications. The exchange is balanced. A social exchange also exists where the leadership expects a position to become available with time to place candidates through succession training. The leader holds power while the candidate is disadvantaged and must accept program outcomes as they occur (O'Mahoney & Sturdy, 2015). In the second quadrant, organizational leaders can be at a disadvantage where succession planning is not sufficient or not implemented in time (Harris & Kacmar, 2018). The employee is also at a disadvantage, possibly due to qualifications. The result is that neither the succession program candidate nor the leadership gains negotiating power with influence over the outcome. Quadrant three shows a possibility where both the candidate and the employer are disadvantaged (Harris & Kacmar, 2018). Each party of the succession planning process has a lesser amount of influence on the outcome. In quadrant four, a possibility exists for an unsuccessful or nonexistent social exchange where disappointment happens for both sides (Harris & Kacmar, 2018). An example of this result is in a succession planning program that is ineffective, or students do not meet the expectations.

In 1964, Blau continued adding to the knowledge base for social exchanges and became the first person to use the term *social exchange theory* (Blau, 1964). Blau used his writings to explain the business exchange processes. However, Blau noted that SET has applications to knowledge transfers and workplace behaviors (Blau, 1964; Slack, Corlett, & Morris, 2015).

The uses for SET have evolved. Organizations now use the theory as a tool to increase tacit knowledge retention in businesses via employee satisfaction (Bendickson, Muldoon, Liguori, & Davis, 2016). Leaders use the evolved form of SET as a tool to understand behaviors in the workplace (Harris & Kacmar, 2018) or to create an adaptive strategy to gain a benefit (Reader et al., 2016) such as retention. Succession planning strategies benefit the leader's organization while providing value to the employee (Chang et al., 2015).

SET has two distinct branches. The first branch centers on social-economic exchanges and the second branch centers on social exchanges (Harris & Kacmar, 2018). The economic branch of SET consists of the tangibles and has an emphasis on the financial rewards associated with taking on a task or assignment within the workplace (Raja, Sheikh, Abbas, & Bouckenooghe, 2018). The social-economic branch of SET emphasizes the feeling or intangible rewards associated with completing a task or assignment. The social exchange branch includes self-esteem (Chang et al., 2015).

However, both branches are steeped in organizational justice (Slack et al., 2015), resulting from the dispersal of power (Harris & Kacmar, 2018). The goal is to reach a balanced social exchange where both parties benefit (O'Mahoney & Sturdy, 2015).

An example of the social-economic branch exists in the exchange that occurs within the succession planning process. An employer offers the program with the expectation of loyalty, knowledge retention, and improved competitive advantage (Chang et al., 2015). However, the employee enters the program with the hope of a higher position and the hope of a heightened financial standing or an increase in economic outcomes (Aryee, Walumbwa, Mondejar, & Chu, 2015). The expectation for both parties is reciprocity (Raja et al., 2018). Huang et al. (2016) wrote about the benefits of SET and added to the warnings of the potential for injustices from Blau (Buch, Kuvaas, & Dysvik, 2018). Huang et al. cautioned about dependence on reciprocity. According to Huang et al., reciprocity is ambiguous, and the organizational leaders must remain vigilant to reduce setbacks from unrealistic expectations.

An in-depth look at SET reveals the existence of several types of reciprocity: a free exchange, folk belief, and punishment (Curry, Mullins, & Whitehouse, 2019). Reciprocity, as a folk belief, is reactive to events that may transpire (Blau, 1964). As a folk belief, reciprocity is also relatable to karma in society (Curry et al., 2019). Reciprocity as a punishment has an emphasis on what happens if rules are broken both in business and in society-at-large (Blau, 1964). There is an emphasis on reciprocity as a free exchange within this research.

During the reciprocity of free exchange, an employee receives and exchanges something of value with an employer (Curry et al., 2019). The use of fair exchanges facilitates formal processes such as the succession planning program and fosters stability in an organization via clearly illustrated wage paths (Daspit et al., 2016). The bond of loyalty forms between the employee and the employer within the free exchange (Blau, 1964; Daspit et al., 2016), which may reduce the loss of tacit knowledge.

The use of SET and the reciprocity of fair exchanges relate to talent management theory and, ultimately, to corporate strategy. Leaders who use SET affect talent motivation and production at all levels due to a perception of distributive justice (Curry et al., 2019). Distributive justice is a moral guide that governs the allocation of positions or materials needed to balance the satisfaction of a workforce and the needs of the business (Martinez-Inigo & Totterdell, 2016).

Distributive justice connects to the perception of fairness in outcomes in society. When distributive justice is part of the social exchange, the concerns of employees shift from the society-at-large to the organization (Martinez-Inigo & Totterdell, 2016). Procedural justice pertains to the fairness of the process of selections when planning for successions. Procedural justice includes the transparency of the selection process (Raja et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Procedural justice involves the way that an organization's leadership arrives at a decision or creates policies. The decisions made must be sound, consistent, and neutral (Lou, Liu, Yang, Maksimov, & Hou, 2015). If procedural justice is not evident, the employees will not feel confident in the decision-making process of the leadership (Lou et al., 2015). The result of not having procedural justice is knowledge lost due to attrition (Raja et al., 2018 ) or a reduction in productivity (Aryee et al., 2015). Once the SET reciprocity of free exchange transpires, the work performance of employees improves.

Leaders subscribing to the inclusive point of view define distributive justice as the distribution of resources for the benefit of all employees. Those leaders create a business culture that nurtures the organizational workforce at all levels (Marchinton, 2015). Contrarily, followers of the exclusive point of view define distributive justices as the equitable allocation of resources according to one's productivity (Shaddy & Shah, 2018). The outcome is fair, even though the initial distribution of resources is not divided equally (Raja et al., 2018). The gap between the two strategies remains. However, feelings of inequity appear in the exclusive approach when employees believe that their contributions are not worthy of investment (Brockner, Wiesenfeld, Siegel, Bobocel, & Liu, 2015).

Social exchange actions thrive when the situation is fair to all sides. The tenets of the theory measure human reactions so that the person using it has a favorable outcome (Blau, 1964; Nunkoo, 2016). Brockner et al. (2015) completed research into both branches of social exchange and the variables that caused satisfaction and found several conditions that underly the perception of fairness. Aside from wanting to experience fairness as a right, people seek fairness to (a) receive a better outcome, (b) to gain respect or inclusion, and (c) to mitigate uncertainty (Brockner et al., 2015).

According to Brockner et al., the employees seek both financial and social rewards for their work, and management must do everything possible to create an atmosphere of fairness when creating succession planning strategies. Organizational leaders who outwardly notice exceptional employees received a significant measure of loyalty through productivity and retention (Blau, 1964). Employees who believe that there is justice within their work environment remain loyal and productive (Blau, 1964). Using SET provides a juncture between productivity and employee satisfaction (Ming-Chuan et al., 2018) with the result of reduced employee turnover rates due to a perception of justice based on fairness (Brockner et al., 2015).

When leadership recognizes employee contributions, it creates a genuine bond. Wong and Wong (2017) compared employee perceptions when leaders demonstrate a commitment of support for their welfare, professional training against their intention to leave for other work, or enter retirement. I used social exchange theory to catalog the employee behaviors and noted that when leaders are socially conscious employees feel connected to the company. The employee behaviors align with the principles of reciprocity of free exchange (Wong & Wong, 2017), causing higher retention of tacit knowledge (Dayan, Heisig, & Matos, 2017).

SET has similar properties to another theory named social network theory (SNT). The users of SNT implement quantitative methods to determine power conditions between the employer and employee to predict outcomes (Soltis, Brass, & Lepak, 2018). However, SNT users are concerned with the hierarchy and mobility of the workforce and may use systems such as salary differentials and promotions systems to cause competition between peer employees (Soltis et al., 2018). The results are twofold for organizational leadership when employing the SNT. There is a demonstration of power in favor of the organization and when qualified personnel match with the organizational culture (Soltis et al., 2018). SNT users assume that people will act in self-interest and will only respond to incentives that produce a higher payoff of cash or inclusion into a group (Soltis et al., 2018). To predict behaviors, SNT users use a quantitative-based analysis of employee reactions to incentives (Soltis et al., 2018). SNT users prefer the leader-member exchange style of leadership (Soltis et al., 2018) over the intuitive skills of transformational leaders' ability to manage talent (Han, Seo, Yoon, & Yoon, 2016).

**Talent Management**

The history of talent management is extensive and began more than 200 years ago. In 1776, a philosopher named Adam Smith recognized the benefits associated with task specialization (Levinson, 2015). Adam Smith noted that task specialization is necessary for human development; his work inspired other researchers such as Levinson (2015), who explored the effects of specialization on the transfer of knowledge through the movement of personnel between employers and occupational wage paths.

Occupational wage paths are the choices that people make within their career that set the direction of their professional lives. For example, a supply chain income pathway consists of educational training, employment within the field, successive promotion, and retirement (Flothmann & Hoberg, 2017; Speer, 2017). If the person is talented, a consulting opportunity may appear after the retirement. The wage path is predictable, but employees tend to transition between companies during the first year after receiving a degree, a diploma, or on-the-job training (Levinson, 2015). Once an employee settles onto a wage track, the person gains experience and usually remains on the same pathway for the remainder of a career (Speer, 2017). Levinson (2015) supported the idea that the succession planning programs ensure that employees with a supply chain wage path remain in place. The benefit, in addition to employee retention, is the preservation of tacit and explicit knowledge (Corwin, 2015; Dayan et al., 2017). Human resource departments have a vital part in the management of talent and wage paths (Flothmann & Hoberg, 2017).

The evolution of talent management continued in the 1970s, with business leaders at the forefront of the change (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). Business leaders of the era began to manage their talent with the intent to identify the activities needed to match the right people with suitable positions (Cascio & Boudreau, 2016). The members of the McKinsey Consultant Group distinguished themselves and became prominent when they offered the topic of talent management as a part of its business to business training (Mayo, 2018). During the 1980s and throughout the 1990s, the members of McKinsey Group maintained their prominence by trademarking the term *war for talent* (Mayo, 2018). The use of the phrase linked the theory of talent management to the employees' processes and the corporate strategy (Mayo, 2018).

Eventually, two distinctive viewpoints concerning how to manage talent emerged as a result of the evolution of talent management. The first viewpoint is named exclusive within this study. Leaders using this particular point of view assign a value to specific employees with the assumption that some employees have a higher value to the business

(Meyers, Woerkom, Paauwe, & Dries, 2019). Users of the exclusive viewpoint assign an A rank to the employees who have the aptitude to become listed in the top tier of the organization with the belief that talent and ability are limited to a few (Meyers et al., 2019). These leaders operate under the assumption that human resource department personnel should find, segment, and cultivate talent (Muratbekova-Touron, Kabalina, & Festing, 2018). They believe that a competitive environment is an excellent way to identify A-ranked employees (Muratbekova-Touron et al., 2018). The leadership identifies the A-ranked employees and publishes their names throughout the organization with the intent to create an awareness that the promotions are accessible, and achievements recognized by the organization's leadership (Muratbekova-Touron et al., 2018). There are two additional levels of this study, which are B rank, and C rank.

The qualifiers of the employee rankings vary between companies. The next level of employees, the B-ranked employees, consists of the bulk of workers while the C-ranked employees, the low performers, receive behavioral reinforcements (Voigt & Hirst, 2015). For example, General Electric Corporation has a vitality curve that places the A-ranked high performers in the top 20% of employees, while the B-ranked employees in the second tier represent 70% of personnel. The C-ranked employees in the third tier represent the remaining 10% of the staff at General Electric Corporation. In contrast, The Unilever Corporation places the top 15% of employees at A ranking while the leadership at Infosys Corporation has tighter controls with 3% receiving the coveted position (Kumari, 2018).

The second point of view in this study is inclusive. Leaders using an inclusive style instill a culture with a mandate to utilize and nurture the organizational workforce at all levels (Othman & Khalil, 2018). Those leaders subscribe to a belief that a concentration of resources onto a specified few people reduces morale and creates maximum workplace developments (Tatoglu, Glaister, & Demirbag, 2016). The inclusive viewpoint is viewed as the framework to develop the leadership potential among the bulk of the employees instead of selected employees (Manuti & Impedovo, 2016). The goal is to assist their employees in reaching self-actualization while creating an opportunity to find a leader internally (Meyers et al., 2019). The leaders using the inclusive philosophy measure the internal and external education of an employee to determine a tier placement while supporting higher education and credentialing (Watkins & Marsick, 2016). Credentialing assists with the social need of an employee by fostering self-confidence when assuming a position with greater responsibilities (Watkins & Marsick, 2016). Regardless of the type of philosophy, corporate sustainability is a measure of employees' wellbeing, their interactions within a community, and work-life balance (Baer et al., 2018).

The function of talent management planning is for leaders to identify the right talent to fit positions within the organization. Some organizational leaders are making significant investments in the area (Speer, 2017). The investments include the processes to overcome cronyism and nepotism as well as other priorities not associated with an employee's abilities (Tafti, Mahmoudsalehi, & Amiri, 2017). Furthermore, appropriately managed talent creates higher morale and adds customer value that is challenging for rivals to duplicate (Speer, 2017).

The effectiveness of a talent management scheme depends on how well the leaders can synchronize and optimize the organization's mission. The synchronization includes adherence to workplace requirements (Speer, 2017). Holian (2015) provided information about the mindset of some baby boomer retirees. According to Holian, some people within the baby boomer generation may not seek retirement until their later years due to finding meaning in their work. Therefore, the leadership of an organization must take care to avoid the appearance of age discrimination while planning to fill future positions.

A connection also exists between the talent management process and global mobility. Furthermore, a relationship exists between talent management and social capital theories (Rothwell et al., 2015). Social media and other technologies affect the landscape of talent management theory, and avenues such as LinkedIn and Ladders assist companies in placing the right people into the correct positions (Koch, Gerber, & de Klerk, 2018). Advancements in social media are changing the business climate, and people are using social media websites to move between jobs with a higher frequency (Nayak, Bhatnagar, & Budhwar, 2018). Properly utilizing social media avoids a disassociation between talent managers and talent mobility (Holian, 2015).

In opposition to the research by Holian (2015), the use of these social sites indicates a future with a decrease in employee retention and an increase in knowledge transfer within the industries. Koch et al. (2018) predicted a business climate with a high volume of retirements and fewer replacements. Even with the transfer of tacit and explicit knowledge, the world, as predicted by Koch et al., is one where the work-life balance is askew. The condition of working harder with reduced personnel would persist unless skewed by automation (Irani, 2016), and the affected employees will feel a lack of distributive and procedural justice from leadership (Martinez-Inigo & Totterdell, 2016). Nonetheless, social media sites place a spotlight on the effects of leadership strategies through the perceptions of people who have worked at the organization (Nayak et al., 2018). A successful leader must have established processes and systems to identify the highest-performing employees within the company and to seek potential employees with a high likelihood of success (Holian, 2015).

Job designing is an attempt to provide businesses with a process to attract and retain high-potential employees in addition to succession planning. It is a process where the strategy of job creation aligns with the organization's current and future needs (Oldham & Fried, 2016; Tims, Derks, & Bakker, 2016). Lee (2019) reviewed the means of job designing through the lens of the job demands-resources model using case studies to discuss the relevance of job designing by dividing a position into specific tasks (Lee, 2019). The results of his research added to the knowledge pool by providing a method to predict the results of job designing in the context of the organizational outcomes. In addition to Adam Smith's contributions to the topic, Oldham and Fried (2016) wrote about job specialization and job designs to achieve employee work satisfaction through the creation of a business environment where employees can achieve elevated levels of performance with meaningful work. Job designing does show potential (Kampkotter, Harbing, & Sliwka, 2016). However, employers initiating job designing techniques must be careful to avoid adversely affecting the self-confidence of their employees (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 2016). Specifically, within a person's self-perception is a condition known as the self-as-object.

In this research, I do not attempt to pursue a line of reasoning consistent with the inclusive or exclusive points of view, except to note that the succession planning program receives applications from internal employees within a specified and uniform criterion. As a reminder, the leaders using the exclusive viewpoint assign a rank of A to the employees who can become the top tier of the organization. Brockner and Wiesenfeld (2016) observed that exclusive and inclusive viewpoints might impact a person's self-perception positively or negatively.

The choice of following an inclusive pathway or exclusive pathway depends upon the direction provided by the organization's leadership strategy to reach talent optimization (Meyers et al., 2019). Transformational leadership is traditionally viewed as critical when guiding organizational change events such as job designing because of the emphasis on focusing on one clear vision (Han et al., 2016). Transformational leaders guide the direction of an organization by providing clear expectations with the benefit of reaping a high level of trust in their employee relationships (Alvesson & Karreman, 2015) by using techniques such as SET reciprocity as free exchange.

Job designing is critical to a successful organization. It has relevance for exclusive and inclusive structures as a means to provide a pathway that employees see, like bread crumbs leading towards leadership positions. As a part of succession planning, and in conjunction with the transformational leadership style, ensuring a path of ascension in an organization will satisfy the conditions for a balanced SET.

**Transformational Leadership**

Researchers have discussed the effectiveness of the transformational leadership theory for at least 30 years. According to Besieux, Baillien, Verbeke, and Euwema (2015), the topic dominates leadership research due to the positive outcomes associated with the implementation. Some people believe that transformational leadership is an offshoot of the great man theory (Spector, 2016). However, others believe that the outcomes are unproven (Banks, Davis McCauley, Gardner, & Guler, 2016). No matter the origin, most agree that transformational leaders can change the mindsets of employees away from individualism and toward an organizational objective (Zheng, Liu, & Gong, 2016). A review of the abilities of the transformational leader coincides with the tenets of SET.

Individuals employing the transformational leadership style are usually ethically grounded, which assists in the moral growth of their subordinates. Besieux et al. (2015) sought to clarify the gaps in the transformational leadership knowledge base. Their research focused on people who employ this type of leadership and the resulting types of employee engagements using the four characteristics of the transformational leadership theory. The first characteristic is intellectual stimulation, where a person who exposes transformational leadership qualities may challenge existing circumstances instead of going along with the status quo (Han et al., 2016). The second characteristic is inspirational motivation and entails the power to lead others to become optimistic about a goal by giving it meaning (Fernet, Trepanier, Austin, Gagne, & Forest, 2015). Empathy is the third characteristic of a transformational leader (Han et al., 2016). The leader mentors and makes an interpersonal connection with his employees, creating an atmosphere of caring (Banks et al., 2016). The last characteristic is the idealized influence, where the leader becomes a living representation of the organization's culture, and the mission (Han et al., 2016). The transformational leader's traits foster an exchange relationship between the leader and the subordinate (Fernet et al., 2015). Fernet et al. (2015) supported the findings of Chang et al. (2015), whereas there is a closer link between the employee and the leader when relationships strengthen with the use of SET.

How to identify the four traits that combine for a transformational leader is a problem for supply chain leadership. Besieux et al. (2015) committed to a survey of 5,313 employees from 679 banking institutions to determine if transformational leadership qualities are identifiable. The effort highlighted the differences in employee perceptions of job satisfaction between the establishments with transformational leadership and those without it. Beisieuz et al. used a Likert scale consisting of a range of measurements beginning at 1 for strongly disagree and ending at 5 for strongly agree to assist with quantifying the returns. Of the Beisieuz et al. study participants, 95% who reportedly had a transformational leader thought that their leader developed the abilities of the subordinates; 87% indicated that their company operated with integrity, and 86%

felt a measure of pride with being associated with the enterprise. The results were in line with the theme that transformational leadership increases competitive advantage, but they did not prove that the trait is identifiable.

An integral part of each of the four traits of a transformational leader is communication. People with transformational leadership qualities have excellent communication skills, and the efficient use of communication improves the relationship between organizational communication, performance, and productivity. Enhanced communication effectively reduces turnover and increases employee satisfaction (Banks et al., 2016). The transparency of the communication process is the key to removing tensions between employees and management (Daspit et al., 2016). Employees who know the workings of their company have stronger bonds of loyalty (Hall-Ellis, 2015).

Communication between individuals occurs in several forms, such as verbal, through body language, and electronic mediums. Wells and Dennis (2016) analyzed 12 months of emails to observe the language markers of verbal deference and signals of respect from a peer basis. Wells and Dennis noted there is deference concerning the preservation of status or rank in communications of every type. The deference serves as protection from overstepping boundaries (Wells & Dennis, 2016). However, limitations of the Wells and Dennis study are the lack of contrary views, a reliance on emails to gain data, and ignoring other forms of communications such as storytelling (Duffield & Whitty, 2016).

Duffield and Whitty (2016) wrote that storytelling is a way that leaders can sustain a measure of loyalty during times of change; storytelling is a time-honored communication strategy. Communication is the single, consistent skill set of a transformational leader that spans all the literature reviewed during this research. Transformational leaders inspire higher productivity, creativity, and loyalty toward their stated goals (Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch, & Shamir, 2015). Transformational leaders must be adept in social exchanges to influence subordinates successfully (Erturk & Vurgun, 2015).

Succession planners must create a process to identify people with transformational characteristics that enhance an organization's competitive advantage (Han et al., 2016). Transformational leaders possess a higher level of social exchange skills, which permits a higher level of productivity within an organization (Han et al., 2016). Once a person with the potential to be a transformational leader appears among the employees, there must be an organized means to assist the person's growth (Philippaers et al., 2017).

No one truly understands if the creation of transformational leaders occurs through training or if they arise from skills bred into them from their formative environment. Nevertheless, the search for people with the trait is essential to guide the future of the supply chain. Transformational leaders possess leadership skillsets that stand above the average leader. The result of the communication skills is employee inspiration and trust. Transformational leader exudes SET, which places them in a unique position to manage the forecasted change while preserving tacit knowledge.

**Succession Planning**

The populace of the United States is aging. Information from the National Institute of Health indicated that the percentage of people entering retirement age would be 20% of the total available workforce by the year 2030 (Schulte, Grosch, Scholl, & Tamers, 2018). Organizational leaders need succession planning strategies to stem the tide of retirements with qualified replacements (Berns & Klarner, 2017). The use of succession planning builds a leadership continuity pipeline by developing internal employees to match a job description (Office of Personnel Management, 2018). A good succession plan contains processes to recognize potential talent and to retain internal employees with a potential for high placement (Keller, 2018) by using the inclusive or exclusive method (Meyers et al., 2019). Additionally, leaders should emphasize and internally post jobs that are too critical to remain unoccupied within their plans (Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

The development of newer technologies and the potential departure of qualified personnel from the active labor force causes supply chain leaders to be wary of the future of their field. Some supply chain personnel have learned to retain tacit knowledge to create job security (Alvesson & Karreman, 2015). Information hoarding for job security purposes is no longer a viable option if companies are to remain competitive (Trusson, Hislop, & Doherty, 2017). When employees retire, become deceased, or transition from an organization, their amassed information is lost (Office of Personnel Management, 2018). The replacement often requires a measure of time to adjust, and this learning curve costs time and lowers productivity (Mayo, 2018).

A good succession planning program takes years to implement. However, not implementing the program is detrimental to an organization's long-term ability to remain competitive (Tansley, Hafermalz, & Dery, 2016). The use of succession planning benefits the company and the employee by providing the training and guidance necessary to achieve more within the workplace and the potential to achieve more within the community (Blau, 1964; Rothwell et al., 2015). Adequately utilized succession plans have an impact that reaches beyond a competitive advantage, as they foster a bond between the employee and the business through SET (Ming-Chuan et al., 2018).

The knowledge that a succession planning program exists provides hope and fosters loyalty to the organization from a feeling of being valued by management. An appreciated employee will work harder and experience less absenteeism (Blau, 1964; Mackay, Allen, & Landis, 2017). Furthermore, employees who feel valued provide lower turnover rates and better workplace behaviors (Tafti et al., 2017). Therefore, creating a visible succession plan to fill future leadership positions is imperative to a company's long-term strategy for survival (Fawcett & Waller, 2015; Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

Four categories of succession planning strategies exist development and learning, feedback, retention, and recruitment (Office of Personnel Management, 2018). The development and learning strategy aspect of succession planning emphasized in this research provides exposure to the increasing challenges of the subject. For example, a person entering a succession planning program must endure tests such as being placed into scenarios that require a solution or tackling an assignment from conception to completion with the results reviewed by an administrator (Rothwell et al., 2015). These tests may include a peer-examination through a 360-degree assessment, and external assessments based on performance management systems and mentoring (Rothwell et al., 2015). Some tests measure how a candidate deals with a significant change or attempt to gauge reactions to various other high-stress situations while additional stressors occur during the program when a candidate rotates assignments throughout an organization (Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

When leaders efficiently implement a succession plan, they contrive measures to find the top people with the desired leadership traits. However, the type of measure is dependent upon the type of viewpoint preferred by the leadership of that organization (Hall-Ellis, 2015). Certain conditions are universal. A fitness review is required for each position and includes two apparatuses, the identification of core skills and the determination of the gaps that are necessary to be successful (Hall-Ellis, 2015; Office of Personnel Management, 2018). Business acumen and transformational leadership qualities became a part of the list of core skills for inclusion during succession planning screening in 2013 (Weber, Ward, & Walsh, 2015). Additional gaps are the ability to influence employee behaviors, emotional intelligence, and managing change (Weber et al., 2015). A review of the literature suggests that transformational leaders generally possess the desired skillsets using SET, whether wittingly or instinctively.

Contrarily, organizational leaders who do not have a succession plan may face internal conflicts that result in opportunistic hiring practices. Opportunistic hiring practices replace departing employees with people who are seeking higher pay and influence without possessing the requisite supply chain knowledge (Schepker et al., 2018). A significant difference exists between succession planning and replacement planning. Replacement planning is the process of identifying both short-term and long-term replacements for critical positions within an organization (Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018). Succession planning builds a pool of internally sourced employees to fill future vacancies throughout an organization (Office of Personnel Management, 2018). A comparison of succession planning programs with replacement planning indicates that both programs are necessary due to a lack of preparation for the baby boomer generation with expected retirements (Rezaei & Beyerlein, 2018).

Nonetheless, leaders prefer to use replacement-planning programs as the first step toward succession planning (Moreno & Girard, 2019). In contrast, the candidates for replacement-planning programs gain preferential status for job openings (Griffith, Baur, & Buckley, 2018). The candidates undergo preparation for promotion and receive the A-rank status while awaiting a job opening.

Succession planning programs go beyond the act of replacement planning; these programs bridge the gap between the generations. The candidates of succession planning programs receive development through mentoring and a broad spectrum of training to prepare for the available leadership position. The writers within the Office of Personnel Management agree with the premise of succession planning. The use of succession planning programs helps to identify future leaders in the private sector proactively. Still, notes from the research indicated that a lack of faith exists in the process. Nonetheless, some leaders identify succession planning initiatives as an impediment to productivity.

The impending departure of the baby boomer generation from the workforce will create a need for leadership in all disciplines. Researchers from earlier studies discussed the scheduled reduction in the available labor force through retirements (Leider et al., 2018). Levinson (2015) wrote that knowledge transference to younger employees is necessary for companies to maintain operations without the loss of competitive advantage. Levinson assumed that tacit knowledge has an impact on the maintenance of competitive advantage and collected data that revealed a need for the establishment of a formal succession planning program to groom younger generations. Levinson's research is in alignment with the inclusive point of view, where the company leaders reviewed every employee for possible leadership positions. The use of the inclusive viewpoint ensures equal treatment for everyone (Tatoglu et al., 2016), and even the candidates of succession planning programs receive interviews for the available positions (Rothwell et al., 2015). However, the candidates from a succession planning program gain an advantage by a point system during the interview, and the results of the survey revealed a lack of trust in succession planning at the executive level (Tatoglu et al., 2016).

The viewpoints of executives concerning succession planning are similar in more than one industry. Interestingly, local library systems are also responding to the need to prepare future leaders (Green, 2018). A survey of library managers about succession planning, as well as the hiring practices of their organizations, revealed that their leadership does not understand the importance of a well-structured succession planning program. A significant finding concerning librarian succession planning is that the average ages of the librarians foretell of a substantial number of retirements (Green, 2018). Succession planning programs are rare in the library industry, and if a program exists, it has a lack of top leadership support to provide momentum (Harris-Keith, 2016). Green (2018) determined that future librarian leaders need structured preparation to assume positions in the industry.

There are gaps in the knowledge concerning the positive aspects of succession planning. Personnel within the Office of Personnel Management wrote a government report that explored those gaps and advised the completion of job analysis and task analysis for leadership positions (Office of Personnel Management, 2019). The purpose of the report was to help organizational leaders in determining the requirements to perform the jobs proficiently. Two groups of thought resulted from their efforts (Oldham & Fried, 2016). The first group described the primary tasks of the leadership positions, while the second group listed the skill sets and the knowledge vital to perform those responsibilities successfully (Oldham & Fried, 2016). The data collection occurred over a 21-month observation period from 11 auditors, 15 modelers, 9 retro-commissioning authority personnel, 33 sustainability managers, 32 facility managers, and 23 building technicians via surveys. An unintended result of the investigation identified task overlaps (Oldham & Fried, 2016), while the outcome of the study provided useful information to develop a succession plan intelligently for future gaps between the skilled employees and available positions (Zulurnain & Aqsa, 2018).

In addition to the correlation between job satisfaction and employee engagement, future supply chain leaders must be familiar with the various functionalities of technology. Marin-Garcia (2018) reviewed a study that combined knowledge of supply chain management and information technology and collected information from 193 supply chain executives. The data provided insights about the leaders' familiarity with the supply chain technologies and determined whether information technology helps or detracts from their supply capabilities (Marin-Garcia, 2018). In contrast to the Penn (2016) research, the impact of informatics is borne by middle managers, while top leadership deals in generalized functions (Hall-Ellis, 2015). Hall-Ellis (2015) noted that the skill sets for supply chain leadership are like the skill sets required for senior leadership in general. Hall-Ellis provided insight into the crux of this research by noting that leadership does not need to follow a set learning pathway. Even within an increasingly technological work environment, the skills of a leader remain steadfast (Stevens & Johnson, 2016). Nonetheless, Marin-Garcia (2018) indicated that supply chain leadership benefits from information technology, as the knowledge of informatics assists in decision making. Penn supported the idea that familiarity with technology at the upper levels of leadership is enough.

Earning pathways are not as relevant at the senior leadership level for supply chains. A measure of ignorance exists concerning knowledge attrition when people on a supply chain wage path do not receive promotions due to a focus on the A-ranked tier employees (Flothmann & Hoberg, 2017). Nevertheless, experience erosion and tacit knowledge loss are preventable (Stevens & Johnson, 2016). Mofokeng and Chinomona (2019) reviewed information from 14 employees of a German-based company indicated that attrition causes a loss of knowledge that is disruptive to an organization's supply chain. Subsequently, disruptions to supply chain knowledge capabilities have an impact on competitive advantage (Mofokeng & Chinomona, 2019). The results of the work by Mofokeng and Chinomona revealed a notion that top leadership skill sets are not specialized and demonstrated the benefits of opportunistic hiring if the right qualities exist within a candidate. However, Mofokeng and Chinomona did not account for the learning curve created by the exit of qualified supply-side personnel with years of experience on the job.

The experienced employees are willing to pass on their knowledge before retiring if they feel valued by using methods such as storytelling or demonstration. Zulurnain and Aqsa (2018) reviewed information from a large company with an aging employee base where the leadership intended to preserve the company's corporate knowledge through succession planning. They found that the maintenance of supply chain knowledge by someone on that wage path is paramount to avoid an unnecessary learning curve (Easton & Rosenzweig, 2015; Flothmann & Hoberg, 2017). Zulurnain and Aqsa also noted the importance of capturing any supply chain knowledge before a person retires or leaves the company to work for a competitor. The limitations of their research centered upon the small sample of the study, the reliance on unstructured knowledge, and the uncertainty surrounding the capabilities of the older employee to transfer the experience and the receiver's ability to process the information. Nonetheless, the second portion of their research sought to provide management with tools to prevent a drain on the organizational knowledge that results from employee retirement, such as succession planning.

Succession planning programs are a vital element in reducing the loss of intellectual and financial capital that results after an employee leaves an organization. Therefore, succession planning must have a higher priority in an organization's business strategy (Rothwell et al., 2015). The impending gap between a lower number of employees and an increased amount of vacancies (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015) creates an opportunity to fill these positions internally by preparing employees for succession planning (Hall-Ellis, 2015). Moreover, succession planning is a viable alternative to external hiring (Beyers, 2016). Planning for the replacement of talent due to retirements is critical to remain competitive (Oldham & Fried, 2016). Employers are becoming aware of the impending personnel shortages due to aging baby boomers (Chambre & Netting, 2018), and some have instituted a succession planning process (Office of Personnel Management, 2018). However, there must be a top leadership commitment for the program to succeed (Berns & Klarner, 2017). Depriving the succession planning program of top leadership commitment devalues the program (Berns & Klarner, 2017). The mere appearance of a succession planning program is not enough to elicit participation when a perception that the process will not have a positive impact on an employee's career exists (Khoreva & Vaiman, 2015).

A connection exists between employees' morale and their feelings concerning trust in their leadership and succession planning programs. A link also exists between SET, succession planning, and competitive advantage (Daspit et al., 2016). Beyers (2016) wrote a study administering semistructured interviews with 14 employees of an organization. The interviews confirmed a connection between the organizations that have an at-risk balance sheet and loss of competitive advantage (Beyers, 2016).

The research from Beyers (2016) and Daspit et al. (2016) directs one to the conclusion that retirements lead toward tacit knowledge drains in the organization. In this regard, Williams (2015) noted a quantitative study on mentoring and succession planning of a small federal agency. Williams attempted to understand the atmosphere of a governmental organization in the areas of employee retention, succession planning, and mentoring. An analysis of the data indicated a need for mentoring within governmental organizations to improve an employee's loyalty to the leader and the objectives of the company via a social exchange (Williams, 2015). Furthermore, a review of William's research indicated a need for transformational leadership with the ability to utilize the SET reciprocity of free exchange to reduce tacit knowledge loss. Transformational leaders possess an ability to change the mindsets of employees while aligning them toward the organizational objectives (Zheng et al., 2016).

Employees want to know that their organization has a path to succession. Not knowing leads to stagnation in the wage path or the transition of employees from an organization. To combat tacit knowledge losses and to fill the projected vacancies, the leadership of supply chain management companies must communicate their succession plans, and foster an environment for a balanced social exchange. In contrast, employees who are stagnant in their positions or feel insecure tend to horde knowledge for job security. When those employees retire, or through other attrition, the tacit knowledge leaves with them.

**Knowledge Management Theory**

Knowledge management, coined by Drucker in the 1960s, is a part of the human experience and has been for an indeterminable number of years (Dayan et al., 2017). Knowledge management has two segments; explicit and tacit knowledge (Cerchione & Esposito, 2017). Explicit knowledge is the knowledge that is known and disseminated via various means such as documents and training videos (Flothmann & Hoberg, 2017). Tacit knowledge is the information that a person learns from trial and error throughout a career (Lou, 2016). The preservation of tacit knowledge is a principal business objective (Levinson, 2015), and there must be steps taken to ensure the placement of internally sourced employees within an organization (Berns & Klarner, 2017). Succession planning represents an opportunity to retain knowledge while reducing the learning curve associated with training externally sourced hires (Office of Personnel Management, 2018) when undergoing the transition of the baby boomer generation (Leider et al., 2018).

Members of the baby boomer generation are aging, and there is the potential for a large number of retirements in the future. The generation as a workforce is critical to the economy of the United States (Forbes, 2018). As the populace of the United States continues to grow older, the labor force participation decreased to 64% (Goodkind, 2016). To place the decline in context, the U.S. Census Bureau reported a labor force participation rate of 63.75 in 2012, and a turnout of 83.3% in 2002 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). As a result, organizational leaders are seeking creative ways to retain the tacit knowledge gained by the baby boomers over their years of employment (Dayan et al., 2017).

Members of the baby boomer population entered the workforce in the 1970s and 1980s (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Upon entering the workforce of the United States, the group forced a decisive shift in the economy (Healy, 2018). Unfortunately, the population growth of the United States has not kept pace with the numbers needed to sustain the change (Forbes, 2018). Mossburg (2018) researched the methods that organizations use to bridge the gap to determine the readiness to transfer the subsequent workforce. Mossburg's research indicated that a phased retirement strategy that includes a succession planning program is beneficial in bridging the gap.

Furthermore, using the older employees to mentor younger employees is key to navigating the divide (Chambre & Netting, 2018). The research conducted by Mossburg is in line with the predictions that the numbers of people who are aged 65 years and older and those aged between 20 and 64 years will double (Goodkind, 2016). The tacit knowledge of the older employees must be passed to the next generation to maintain a competitive advantage at every level (Schulze et al., 2019).

The theory of knowledge management encompasses numerous areas, such as a business's internal processes, strategic vision, and the type of leadership style, management, and human resources processes. However, the practice of implementing knowledge management is trailing the academic push for steady implementation (Kaur, Sidhu, Awasthi, Chauhan, & Goyal, 2018). Organizations are steadily challenged to maintain the pools of talent but often fail (Kaur et al., 2018). Overcoming the obstacles to talent management implementation will require researchers and employers to merge efforts (Holzer, Ballard, Kim, Peng, & Deat, 2019). Furthermore, Holzer et al. (2019) advanced the subject further by researching the linkage between talent management and organizational performance and suggested that nurturing talent is imperative to the success of the business. Successful organizations align individual efforts to maximize the generation of shareholder returns (Bommel, 2018). However, the current version of adding value elevates the employee into the position of stakeholder within the business (Viaman, Collings, & Scullion, 2017).

Supply chain leaders are mostly ill-informed about the causes of attrition, which results in opportunistic employment decision-making. Ignorance also has financial and intellectual capital implications, and succession planning is an instrument to overcome the potentials for disaster (Pepper, 2016). The use of succession planning helps to facilitate the transfer of tacit knowledge between employees, and it must be a priority so that qualified people may enter supply chain leadership positions (Office of Personnel Management, 2018). Moreover, the leaders selected for promotion must have transformational qualities that include the ability to utilize the reciprocity of fair exchanges. The reciprocity of fair exchange is one of the three motivators used within social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). A fair exchange is necessary to add value to be a part of the succession planning program and to retain the necessary supply chain knowledge that reduces the need for a prolonged learning curve.

Maintaining a competitive advantage by filling projected gaps in leadership positions is essential to supply chain industry leaders. Succession planning programs are an excellent means to attract leadership candidates from within an organization that is necessary to continue business operations without producing a significant learning curve (Berns & Klarner, 2017; Fawcett & Waller, 2015). However, a succession planning program is only as good as the participants, and industry leaders believe that people with transformational leadership qualities are a crucial component to achieving their goals (Zheng et al., 2016). Another element to the implementation of a good succession planning program is to generate interest in the program to attract the A-ranked employees of an organization (Moreno & Girard, 2019). Value is achievable through the use of the reciprocity tenets of SET (Blau, 1964), which breeds an atmosphere of fairness through conventional means and methods (Aryee et al., 2015).

Using the SET reciprocity of fair exchange provides an outline of the benefits gained by the employer and the employee. When the A-ranked person participates in a succession planning program, the employer retains a competitive advantage while the A-ranked employees gain income and professional and personal standing in the community, creating a winning scenario for everyone.

## Transition

Section 1 includes an explanation about the preliminary elements of this research that included information about the strain placed onto the supply chain management industry as the baby boomer generation retires with not enough qualified employees available for replacements. Many leaders identified the problem and are taking steps to overcome the issue with succession planning. This qualitative exploratory single-case study explored the succession planning strategies that leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions. To accomplish the task, I interviewed eight supply chain business leaders within a transportation company in the Northeastern region of the United States with a focus on SET because it is an essential part of the employer-to-employee relationship. This research created or contributed to positive social change by increasing the value of internally sourced employees to the organization as well as presenting options to increase the efficiency in the target organization's success-planning program.

In Section 2, I reviewed the roles and responsibilities as the primary data collector. Ethics was a focal point during data collection and analysis. Utilizing ethical behaviors guided the behaviors of how and when to maintain privacy for the participants.

Finally, I detailed efforts to attain reliability and validity with the intent to make the findings of this research duplicable, accessible, and legitimate. Section 3 contains the findings from the study, which includes the interpretations of the data, a review of the emerging themes, and insights into the social implications that result after implementing these discoveries.

# Section 2: The Project

Future leaders require the right mixture of skill sets to coordinate the intricate movements of a supply chain (Viaman et al., 2017). Individuals within the baby boomer generation represent a considerable amount of the supply chain workforce, and their accumulated knowledge is problematic to replace. Their departures will place a significant burden on supply chain leaders to find replacements and to preserve the company's competitive advantage (Leon & Uddin, 2016). Utilizing a succession planning program offers a method to ensure that a competitive advantage endures by allowing an organization the means to transfer elicit and tacit knowledge and to source talent internally to minimize attrition (Dayan et al., 2017).

Section 2 includes an overview of the critical elements of this research study. It contains the following subsections, the purpose statement, the role of the researcher, and the participants. Additionally, this section includes the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, and data collection methods. The final portion of this section consists of the data analysis, reliability, validity, and discussion concerning methods used to collect, analyze, and validate the reliability of the research data.

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory single-case study was to explore the succession planning strategies that transportation industry supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The target population of this research study consisted of six supply chain business leaders within a transportation company in the Northeastern region of the United States who successfully used succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The outcomes of this study will contribute to positive social change in which employees of the organization feel valued through the attainment of a position with a higher salary and by experiencing an increase in stature within the community-at-large.

## Role of the Researcher

The primary function of the researcher in the commission of this qualitative research study was to collect, analyze and interpret data collected from the participants, the organizational leadership, and the notes collected during the progression of the research (Jonsen, Fendt, & Point, 2018). I served as the primary data collector for this study. The data collection process was comprised primarily of semistructured face-to-face interviews using open-ended questions. The focus of the study was business leaders within the supply chain management transportation industry in the Northeastern region of the United States. The leaders had experience utilizing succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss.

A researcher must always reveal any connections or relationships to the topic of pursuit (Gehman et al., 2018). The premise of my relationship to the subject matter as the researcher rests upon 30 years of managerial and leadership experiences derived from a combination of civilian and military experience in supply chain management, specifically hazardous materials and transportation management. The additional areas of personal supply chain specialization include but are not limited to recruitment, procurement, customer services, policy, and procedures. The skills were invaluable during the study for the gathering, exploration, understanding, and interpretation of the data. The possession of these experiences allowed this researcher to engage participants during the interview process.

A secondary role of the researcher is to ensure and to enforce ethical behavior standards throughout the research process. I assured ethical confidence by utilizing the Belmont Report protocol as a guide for ethical standards (Miracle, 2016; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). The core principles for ethical research emphasized in the Belmont Report protocol centered upon the respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Miracle, 2016; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1978). This study conformed to the principles outlined in the Belmont Report protocol by utilizing procedures that acknowledged and accommodated the autonomous decision-making process of the participants. Per the benevolence section of the Belmont Report, I ensured that each participant signed an informed consent form. The informed consent signified the voluntary involvement of each participant without coercion or promise of financial gain.

As the primary data collection agent, I had the responsibility to collect data lawfully and in a manner that did not violate or compromise the rights of the participants. The redaction of names and organizational content assured the anonymity and the confidentiality of participant responses. All interviews occurred in a secure, private environment in which the participants felt free of stress or discomfort, subsequently reducing workplace or psychological injuries.

The responsibility exists to remove personal biases or predetermined conceptions from this study. I served as a nonpartisan intermediary over the data collected to maintain a bias-free research environment. The decision to remain nonpartisan prevented tainting the research by existing predispositions, assumptions, and personal beliefs. Random selection of participants removed any appearance of bias. An arbitrary selection process selected participants with the intent of heightening the reliability of the research by eliminating the possibility of an unethical connection. Nonetheless, a list of participants provided by the target company's gatekeeper served to remove researcher bias.

I did not have a previous relationship with any of the participants before this study. Additionally, all relationships during the research process remained professional by refraining from involvement with the participants beyond the limitations of this study. Professionalism eliminated the potential for interference or latent influence of the participants' responses to the interview questions.

The gathering and collection of the research data proved critical to conducting this study. The interview question design created a genuine dialogue while allowing for an in-depth investigation into the research topic. The interview protocol (see Appendix) provided guidelines for data collection that safeguards for the researcher and the participants. The interview protocol for this study aligned with the rules associated with qualitative case study designs and consisted of (a) the primary induction of the researcher as well as the researcher topic, (b) information concerning the method utilized for obtaining data, (c) obtaining permission to commence with participant interviews, (e) the creation of research questions that reflect the overall subject matter, and (f) implementation of practices that encourage member checking through follow-up participant interviews.

## Participants

This qualitative exploratory single-case study explored the succession planning strategies that supply chain business leaders in the transportation industry utilize to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The target population of this research study comprised of 6 supply chain business leaders within a transportation company located in the Northeastern region of the United States. Those supply chain business leaders must have successfully used succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge. The participants possessed detailed knowledge concerning the succession planning subject matter as its architect and had the potential to add value to the field of study. The general requirements for participation consisted of the person being 18 or older, exhibiting a willingness to share experiences with succession planning strategies, and possessing a minimum of 3 years of employment experience in a leadership position within the selected organization.

Requests went to companies in the targeted research area, and one company was willing to permit access to its employees on its grounds. The company's Training and Organizational Development Department (TODD) assigned a gatekeeper as a point of contact for information and admittance. After finding a potential research location, I requested permission to research the company from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Upon receiving approval from the company's TODD and the IRB, the research progressed with an email to the TODD representative requesting access to the company's supply chain leaders who have successfully used succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge. I also requested historical and current documents about the company's succession planning programs from the TODD gatekeeper. The participant access request contained Walden University IRB approval number 07-2419-0458880, and the interview protocol (see Appendix). The interview protocol consisted of a preliminary introduction to the study, generalized study information, the data collection method, and sample interview questions.

Empowered by the approvals of both the IRB and the company's TODD gatekeeper, I began sending invitation emails to the 12 leaders of the company who potentially qualified to be participants for this research. Nine of the 12 leaders gave positive responses concerning the intent of the research, which resulted in a favorability percentage of 75%. However, three of the original 12 invitation emails (25%) did not generate a response. From the remaining nine leaders who showed interest in the topic of this research, three of them noted scheduling conflicts and could not participate. The three leaders represented an additional 25% of the total. Six of the leaders consented to participate in this research. Each of them responding with the words, "I consent" within the content of their email response.

I thanked all of the leaders who responded to the invitation email and sent an additional email with a request for an interview time and date. The correspondence sent to the participants contained detailed information concerning the study, its purpose, and the overall value of the supply chain field. The dissemination of information to participants served as a means of building a foundation of trust between a researcher and the participants (Oltmann, 2016). Furthermore, the dissemination of information created an opportunity to relay to the participants that the data obtained would remain private and warehoused in a location inaccessible to the public for 5 years. Destruction of all study documentation will commence upon the completion of the 5-year time frame.

The participants determined locations to conduct semistructured face-to-face interviews, with each interview lasting between 45 minutes and 1 hour. The structured portion of the interviews consisted of the placement of two digital recording devices, note-taking accessories, and the prepared interview questions. I also explained the participant rights and the ethical obligation toward protecting their privacy.

I took notes with a pen and paper during the interviews with the intent to annotate any nonverbal gestures that might assist with a new understanding of their answers. The participants obtained verbal reminders about the member checking process after each interview. They also received another email thanking them for agreeing to participate in the study within 24 hours after the interview.

Two devices recorded the interviews. One device provided a digital voice playback. The second device utilized a program that created a transcript of our conversation using speech recognition software. The professional speech recognition program provided a text document for each interview, which shortened the time needed to transcribe the information. I reviewed and completed the transcript for each interview within three days after the event.

The review of the transcripts consisted of the removal of any personal or identifying information. Participant names became designations. For example, the first person interviewed became participant number one or P1, and the second person became participant number two or P2, while the subsequent interviews generated the following participant numbering: P3, P4, P5, and P6. Furthermore, I removed any words that identified the location or the name of the company by replacing the identifying company information with generalized wording such as the organization, the company, or the department.

After the completion of each transcript, I transferred the text to the Microsoft Excel program with the QI Macros add-in, which generated a graph of words model. The graph of words model captures wording relationships and displays the findings in an undirected manner. The QI Macros add-in returned results, whereas I used inductive thematic analysis to interpret the patterns. Subsequently, the common themes were (a) address the potential loss of tacit knowledge, (b) leaders tend to do more with fewer people, (c) succession planning strategies. The participant's member checked the themes along with a summary of the answers to each interview question.

The validity of the work increased by adding a transcript review. All the participants agreed with the accuracy of the summary of the interview questions. They also agreed with the accuracy of the transcript and the emergent themes. Their acknowledgment permitted me to move forward with triangulation.

## Research Method and Design

### Research Method

There are three types of research methodologies to choose from for business-oriented studies: the quantitative methodology, the qualitative methodology, and the mixed methodology (Yin, 2018). The qualitative methodology was useful for this study because its tenets permitted an understanding of the influence of the succession planning strategies on the business and the person. The qualitative research process determined whether the succession planning strategies produced qualified leaders for supply chain positions in its current form by reviewing the experiences of the participants.

Using the quantitative methodology, researchers rely on empirical evidence to test a hypothesis with little need for emotional expressions (Elman & Gerring, 2016; Yin, 2018). Users of the quantitative methodology adhere to empirical evidence filtered through mathematical outputs, leading to scientific and detached results (Acquaye et al., 2018). I reviewed the experiences of the participants while seeking to understand those experiences with the implementation of succession planning strategies. The quantitative methodology's tenets were not compatible with the achievement of the goal, which rendered the method unusable as a vehicle for this work.

The mixed-method research approach blends elements of both qualitative and quantitative techniques (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Using the mixed-method approach provides a more robust conclusion by combining an emotional analysis of the qualitative results with the numerical analysis of the quantitative results (Williams & Shepherd, 2017). The robust conclusion increases the reliability of a study (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Nonetheless, the quantitative portion of the mixed methodology proved prohibitive to this work because it relied on numerical data. The experiences of the participants were the primary source of data during this research, making qualitative analysis the best choice to proceed.

The third methodology is qualitative research. Using a qualitative research method permits the collection of data from semistructured interviews using open-ended questions (Morgan, Pullon, & Macdonald, 2017) designed to elicit detailed and possibly emotional responses (Elman & Gerring, 2016). The qualitative methodology was useful because of the interest in exploring the succession planning strategies that supply chain business leaders in the transportation industry use to fill organizational leadership positions and reduce tacit knowledge loss. The qualitative research methodology proved the optimum choice over the quantitative and mixed methodologies because the design is a pathway to explore the reasons the leaders have chosen succession planning (Gehman et al., 2018).

**Research Design**

The single-case study design used for this research permitted an in-depth analysis of a real-world situation or event. The case study research design proved ideal for the investigation of a specific development or a trend within the business environment (Yin, 2018) and an understanding of how to create better processes (Elman & Gerring, 2016). Other design alternatives were the phenomenology and ethnography designs (Corwin, 2015). The two designs had several features that may be suitable within this work. Still, the case study presented as business-centric and ideal for exploring the effects of succession planning strategies within an organization based on the observations of the leaders in charge of implementing them.

The use of a phenomenological design allows a researcher to collect data stemming from the experiences of the participants of a study. The use of the phenomenological design provided this researcher with a tool to identify the practices of an organization through the lived experiences (Yin, 2018). It afforded a means to understand behavior with a description of an event (Oliva, Fuentes, et al., 2018). The phenomenological research design is time-specific and is used to track the lived experiences of participants through reflection and the interpretation of the reflections by the interviewer (Oliva et al., 2018). The phenomenological design did not qualify as a viable design choice for this study because time-tracked experiences were not necessary to gain the information needed to answer the research question.

An ethnographic research design is a tool used to investigate a problem concerning a process (Yin, 2018). The results of the ethnographic research method usually provide a researcher with the ability to shift the focus of work in a new direction. Furthermore, the design has usefulness for validating existing processes, to probe into a culture or to study the membership in-depth (Hammersley, 2018). Utilizing the ethnographic research design is an excellent tool to explore the causes of behaviors within a culture. However, succession planning programs do not represent a culture that makes the ethnographic research design inappropriate for this research (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

Data saturation occurs when no new information or data emerges when coding becomes impractical, and the replication is achievable (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation occurred through the question and answer process that occurred during a semistructured interview process wherein all participants responded to the same questions asked similarly. Although their responses were unique, I isolated the similarities and differences in their statements during the coding phase. The interviews alone did not ensure saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation narrowed the results.

Triangulation occurs with the use of two or more methods to reach equilibrium (Rooshenas, Paramasivan, Jepson, & Donovan, 2019). Member checking is another means to validate the data attained during the collection phase and leads to data saturation. To accomplish the member checking, I created a one-paragraph summary from each question. Each participant received a copy of the summarized results with instructions to address any inaccuracies. If the participants found inaccuracies, then the member checking process continued until all errors were corrected. If trust had faltered, the participants could withdraw from the study before the publication.

## Population and Sampling

The participants for this study included six business leaders from a transportation-based industry located in the Northeastern region of the United States. The sample size represented half of the 12 leaders asked to participate. I used purposeful sampling to find and select potential participants who offered the most insight into a topic. Random sampling is a tenet of a purposeful sampling technique (Palinkas, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015). The sampling minimized the chance of bias and increased the reliability of this study.

The six participants who comprised the sample size proved appropriate to gain a perspective on the effectiveness of the organization's succession planning strategies. A smaller number of participants increase a researcher's ability to capture and interpret data from the perspective of the participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). A small-sized sample is enough to achieve saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The assurance of data saturation occurred through member checking and methodological triangulation. The methodological triangulation consisted of a comparison between the participant interviews, notes from the research journal, and the documents about the organization's succession planning strategies.

There is an emphasis on succession planning strategies in the supply chain industry in this study. However, the effects of ineffective utilization of succession planning strategies and the subsequent loss of valued talent are universal across industries. The gatekeeper provided a list of leaders who worked in the organization's TODD, which allowed participant selection. After receiving the list, I processed it with the purposeful sampling technique.

The target population of this research consisted of six supply chain business leaders who worked within a transportation company located in the Northeastern region of the United States and had successfully used leadership succession planning strategies to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) availability to participate in face-to-face interviews, (b) at least three years of experience in leadership, and (c) consent to the interview. The resulting six participants represented a diverse range of experiences. They offered insight into the organization's succession planning as it pertained to the future of the supply-side management of the organization.

A comfortable interview environment increases the likelihood of attaining more information. The interview environment must be safe, quiet, and calm (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The interviews occurred on the company property with the intent to minimize disruptions to the participants' workday. I requested a private office or a conference room with a table with two chairs and arrived early to prepare the room before the interview began. The preparation included the placement of the recording devices.

## Ethical Research

This study fully complied with the IRB guidelines for ethical research, and no research commenced until after the IRB issued the authorization to proceed. Each participant learned about the nature of this study, the goals of the study, the interview process, the voluntary nature of participation, and the risk or benefit of involvement. Furthermore, I placed the information within the interview protocol (see Appendix) and the informed consent form. The participant received both forms before the commencement of the interviews.

Each participant read and responded with their informed consent to participate in this study. Informed consent also served as a notice of the voluntary nature of the process. Furthermore, informed consent indicated an understanding that there were no financial exchanges or other methods of payment for participating in this study.

The privacy of the participants was a primary concern. I took measures to alleviate their concerns by providing information concerning the handling and storage of their input, as well as the right to withdraw from the study. Additionally, the use of internal control identifiers, such as P1 and P2, offered added protection. Information gathered during the data collection phase is isolated in a safe for a minimum of 5 years to protect the confidentiality of the participants. A systematic deletion process of the data begins at the end of the 5 years. The systematic process consists of shredding paper documents and deleting the recorded interview transcripts.

This research aligns with the guidelines of the Walden University IRB. The data collected during the interviews are inside a safe, the contents of which face destruction at the end of 5 years. The IRB approval number 07-2419-0458880 represented proof of Walden University's IRB authorization to proceed with the research.

I asked the participants 8 questions during the interview in the same way without restricting their responses. Participant responses, recorded using 2 digital devices, assisted the summary of their responses. Participants' interview responses received alphanumeric encryption to replace all information concerning their identities.

## Data Collection Instruments

As the primary collection instrument for this study, I adhered to all ethical standards, monitored biases, and mitigated any preconceptions that surfaced during the data collection process. The semistructured face-to-face interview technique served as the primary data gathering instrument for this research. The face-to-face semistructured interview technique is a tool to foster a conversation between the researcher and the participant and allows participants to answer questions thoroughly (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). A review of the organizational documents concerning the succession planning served as the secondary source of data collection for this research.

I delivered the structured portion of the face-to-face interview by reading the interview protocol form (see Appendix) to the participants. The interview protocol form detailed the preliminary introduction and provided the study information, the data collection method, and an acknowledgment of their informed consent before the interview begins. The semistructured interview was suited for this investigation because there was a time restriction to be in contact with the participants (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Yin, 2018). Nonetheless, the semistructured interview technique was a conduit to elicit a conversation between the participant and the interviewer (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Due to the time requirements imposed on each interview, I used two digital recording devices: a primary recorder and a backup. A pen and notebook paper served as an additional data collection method during the interviews. The creation of penned notes served as a reminder to follow up on specific points of interest or to outline the context of specific parts of the discussion (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Individual circumstances remained constant during the face-to-face interview. There were no distractions during the interview process. The interviews began with an introduction that detailed the university affiliation, the purpose of the interview, and the impact of this study on their business. The minimization of risk occurred with the reminder that the information remained confidential. I provided information concerning the interview protocol (see Appendix) along with a notification of their right to withdraw from this study at any time.

The scheduled interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. During the interviews, the participants received eight focused questions on the strategies used within their organization to prepare for vacancies within the supply chain leadership and to explore the means to retain the tacit knowledge needed to maintain a competitive advantage. I also restated their right to withdraw from the study at any time. If a participant had requested to withdraw, the interview would have ended instantly. An intent to withdraw would lead to the destruction of documents and the recordings of the event.

Two digital devices recorded all interviews. The recording of the interviews assisted with transcription and to provide a means to revisit specific portions of the dialogue for context (Wilhelmy, Kleinmann, Konig, Melchers, & Truxillo, 2016). The preserved recordings with the participants' information reside in a safe with plans to destroy them after 5 years. The stored documents include the written notes in a research journal collected during the interviews.

The written notes consisted of various items considered necessary during the session, such as body language in response to a question or comment that links to other interviews. The written notes served as a tool to assist with the transcription of the recorded interviews. The notes also aided as a means to document an emotion to a specific question (Wilhelmy et al., 2016). After the completion of the interviews, I transcribed the resulting data.

The member checking tool enhanced the reliability of this work. Member checking occurred after the completion of the data collection phase. Following the data collection process, there was an analysis of the information gained from the interviews, organizational documents, and notes. The analysis continued until themes emerged.

Afterward, each participant received a copy of the summarized results of the interpretation of his or her interview. If inaccuracies had existed, the participants could address them and made clarifying remarks, or if trust had faltered, they could have removed themselves from the study before publication. Successful member check promotes dependability in the results of a study by ensuring that the participants' intent is captured (Brear, 2018; Harvey, 2015; Thomas, 2017).

Internal documents concerning the company's succession strategies were a secondary source of data collection for this research. Williams and Shepherd (2017) noted that the collection of data during qualitative research usually included several sources. Those resources must align to answer the research question (Williams & Shepherd, 2017). The internal documents or the secondary source of data for this research aligned with the research question because it was a review of the information concerning the history of the company's succession planning strategies.

I continually collected data to triangulate data points until saturation occurred. The internal organizational documents were invaluable in reaching saturation. The documents relating to the program provided information about the history of the programs, the strategies used to guide the expected results of the programs, the requirements for eligibility into the succession planning programs, the phases of the succession planning programs, and the benefits of participation in those programs. Participants provided access to these documents during the semistructured interviews.

The leaders who participated in this research had busy schedules. If a scheduling problem that prohibited meeting in person had occurred, technology in the form of Skype, FaceTime, or other similar video mediums would have served to preserve the interview (Schober, 2018). The need did not arise. However, if video meetings had become necessary, the same interview protocol (see Appendix) as the face-to-face interview meeting would have applied. No matter the forum, I documented the data provided by the participants during the interview process utilizing digital recording instruments and the researcher's journal. The application of a digital recording apparatus offers the advantage of replaying participant responses when transcribing, and the written journal notes help to attain a better understanding of the context (Morse, 2015).

## Data Collection Technique

I collected primary data directly and for the specific purpose of answering the research questions. The semistructured face-to-face interview, in conjunction with open-ended questions, served as the primary data collection technique for this qualitative exploratory single-case study. The open-ended questions allowed the people who agreed to participate in this research to provide their experiences concerning the succession planning strategies that their organization used to fill leadership positions and to reduce tacit knowledge losses. The organization's internal documents regarding the organization's succession planning strategies were a secondary source of data collection for this research.

Face-to-face meetings using a semistructured interview format assisted the efforts to gain a deeper understanding of the context of the transmitted information (Wilhelmy et al., 2016). The disadvantage of these types of interviews is the time it takes to prepare and to conduct them (Gooch & Vavreck, 2019). The advantage of using the face-to-face interview method is the conversation that occurs directly between the interviewer and the participant (Schober, 2018). A good interview is a two-way conversation in which the researcher actively listens and provides follow-up questions when necessary (Brear, 2018). I prepared the central portion of the interviews in advance of the meeting. Nonetheless, the use of unscripted conversations allowed the participants to feel at ease in the interview setting and created a bond.

If face-to-face interviews had not been advantageous due to scheduling problems, technology would have served as a bridge (Schober, 2018). Technologies such as Skype or FaceTime offer the benefits of face-to-face interviews without being at the same location (Schober, 2018). The use of Skype or FaceTime saves time, offers greater flexibility for the interviewer and the participant, and may save money (Schober, 2018). The disadvantage is that some people are nervous in front of a camera or webcam, and creating a comfortable environment is a more significant challenge (Schober, 2018). Member checking began after the data collection, organization, and transcription (Thomas, 2017). Fortunately, the use of technology as a medium did not occur during the interview phase of this research.

Secondary data consisted of information gathered by others and collected indirectly by a researcher. Some forms of secondary data include newsletters, emails, administrative data, and information provided by the participants (Rooshenas et al., 2019). The benefits of secondarily sourced data are that they are mostly free of cost and add additional context to use when triangulating data (Davidson, Edwards, Jamieson, & Weller, 2019). The disadvantage of using secondary data is the possibility of errors and biases (Davidson et al., 2019). The secondary data for this research consisted of internal organizational reports and newsletters that revealed the strategies used by the company for succession planning. The negatives concerning secondary data did not outweigh the value for this research, and I verified the accuracy of the secondary data using triangulation methods.

Member checking promoted the dependability and reliability of this study. The member check occurred after the completion of the data collection phase (Thomas, 2017). It is the point when a researcher reviews the transcripts from each interview (Thomas, 2017). Afterward, I created a summary for each interview question and emailed it to the participant to confirm the accuracy of the information.

## Data Organization Technique

The proper organization of data collected from the interviews assisted with achieving reliability while smoothing the process to achieve validity through data saturation (Fusch, Fusch, & Ness, 2018). Data consisted primarily of semistructured face-to-face transcribed interviews. The secondary data for this study included documents made available by the participants, as well as the research journal notes. Journal notes collected during various portions of the data collection phase contributed to the reliability of this work. The purpose of the log was to document occurrences and the interpretations of events that did not surface in the transcripts (Rooshenas et al., 2019). Additionally, the internal documents collected from the organization proved advantageous for verifying the validity of the participant comments. Documents received from the participants during the data collection phase were information concerning the succession planning strategies and various newsletter proclamations.

Voice recordings and a transcribing kit program from Martel Electronics created a document from the face-to-face interviews. The program was downloadable and transportable via laptop, which became a digital recording device. Microsoft Word became the word processing platform for this study to preserve the transcripts of the face-to-face interviews. Also, the Microsoft Word program provided a means to record researcher journal notes and to register the coding system.

The electronic databases used were the HyperRESEARCH program and the Microsoft Excel program with the QI Macros add-in. I used the programs to sort through phrases, terms, and words. The purpose of the sorting of phrases, terms, and words was to identify the meanings behind the participants' statements by using a binary term weighting method (Upvall & Leffers, 2018).

The HyperRESEARCH and Microsoft Excel programs provided word search results that assisted in finding verifiable connections between the statements from different interviews. The number of occurrences of words or phrases across the interviews led to the emergence of themes. I scanned and stored the documents from this research. The information remained stored on a USB drive in a fire-resistant safe along with the paper documents. The destruction of the files will commence upon reaching five years

## Data Analysis

I analyzed the data of this study by sending the summarized interview questions and the resulting themes to the participants for member checking, creating the coding framework, and through methodological triangulation. The use of methodological triangulation increases the dependability and confirmability of a case study by confirming differing viewpoints of the same phenomenon (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The different viewpoints compared during this study are the viewpoints of the participant as contained in the interview transcripts, the history of the succession planning strategies contained in various internal company documents, and the notes collected in the researcher's journal.

The process of analyzing the data included becoming familiar with the transcript, developing a coding method, charting the data, and interpreting the results. The use of Yin's 5-step process is ideal for classifying the data received after the member check (Yin, 2018). The Yin 5-step process consists of data compilation, data disassembling, reassembling the data, interpreting the findings, and providing a conclusion (Yin, 2018). Data compilation consisted of the interviews, the internal documents provided by the participants, and the research journal notes.

Thematic analysis served as a tool to disassemble and code the collected information. During the analysis, I processed each transcript through Microsoft Excel using the QI Macros add-in and HyperRESEARCH to determine where the themes appeared. The results of the analysis produced weighted words and phrases. The elements influencing the weight of the phrases or words were (a) the frequency of the use, (b) and the occurrences of words that were relatable to the furtherance of the research (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019).

I eliminated unreliable experiences before reassembling the data and removed any unverifiable information using the Microsoft Excel QI Macros program as a medium to display the results via a graph of words model. The graph of words model design captured relationships and displayed the findings in an undirected manner (Micale et al., 2018). The undirected graph was preferable over the directed graph because the functionality showed occurrences of words regardless of the order in the transcript (Archambault & Purchase, 2016).

The undirected graph method had an additional function of assisting the validity and the reliability of this study by providing an illustration that detailed the research process to find the theme (Micale et al., 2018). Finally, I identified the emerging themes and summarized the results of the interview questions using the thematic analysis to find patterns. The thematic analysis is a flexible tool to assist researchers in identifying the patterns that may appear during qualitative research (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

## Reliability and Validity

Pursuing academic responsibility increases the acceptance of a study by making its findings duplicable, accessible, and legitimate (Mackay et al., 2017). The dependability of the study occurred through consistent documentation and the preservation of information. The research journal was an integral part of accomplishing the task of recording pertinent information to safeguard dependability (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Safeguarding the dependability of this study occurred by preserving all references, the transcripts, the internal organizational documents, and the digital recordings for five years. The preservation of the documents and recording established the ability for future researchers to verify the results of this work (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

### Reliability

Further enhancement of the reliability of this study occurred by creating interview protocols (see Appendix), consent forms, and by documenting the path taken to gain entry to the organization. The enhancement of reliability continued for this study through the documentation of the interview process, which included the transcripts, the digital recordings, researcher journal notes, and the internal organizational documents.

Dependability is the demonstration of consistency and duplicability of one's research (Morgan et al., 2017). Member checking established dependability for this study. Member checking is a process where data are interpreted and summarized into a paragraph for each question and presented to the participant to review (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). When a participant suggested an adjustment, this researcher asked the participant to address it via an email. The email was attached to the transcript and stored for 5 years. I used methodical triangulation to review all the sources of data with the intent to reach data saturation.

**Validity**

Validity occurred through checking the work by reviewing each element determined to make a study valid. The elements were credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Dennis, 2018). Credibility occurred at the intersection between the expectation of the researcher and the reality of the participant (Dennis, 2018), and it was an essential aspect of this case study (Morgan et al., 2017). Credible studies have reliable findings. The credibility of this work occurred through methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation is a tool to compare the results of differing sources (Rooshenas et al., 2019). Specifically, the utilization of methodical triangulation helped to verify the accuracy of the different sources of data used in this research.

Transferability occurs when the findings of research apply to other areas or other industries (Morgan et al., 2017). This work may have value to industries where members of the baby boomer generation are employed. The baby boomer generation produced 76 million people between the years of 1946 and 1964 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). The members of this generation participated in every industry (Holian, 2015), and their retirements will affect numerous fields of work in the United States (Goodkind, 2016; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). No similar baby boom has occurred since the baby  Boom generational years, and the subsequent generations are not populous enough to provide workplace replacements (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The reader is ultimately the judge of whether a study has transferability (Dennis, 2018); however, this researcher assisted the reader's judgment by recording the methods of data collection, keeping a detailed researcher journal log, and ensuring data saturation.

Confirmability is achievable through the creation of a duplicable process trail and validation of the data collected through methodological triangulation to the point of data saturation (Noble & Smith, 2015). Confirmability occurred by maintaining detailed notes about the processes and decision-making used throughout this study. The research notes provide transferability for future researchers (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Also, I ensured data saturation in this work by gathering multiple sources of information and analyzing the information until a theme emerged using the thematic analysis. The records are available upon request.

Data saturation occurs when there is no new information to gain from the information collected from various sources (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Rooshenas et al., 2019). The face-to-face semistructured interview served as the core data collection process; then, the questions asked of the participants were coded and categorized until themes emerged. To confirm data saturation during this study, I used a saturation grid as part of the thematic process of coding and categorization. A saturation grid is a tool to compare the research questions with the results of the data collected during the collection phase of this work (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gordon et al., 2016). The utilization of another saturation grid assisted in comparing the secondary sources of data with the intent to find similar responses. The saturation grid provided a valid document that notes the point when no new or additional data appear. The saturation grid is also a tool to target bias. Bias is unavoidable as part of human nature (Henderson, 2017).

## Transition and Summary

Section 2 contained information about the role of the researcher and the ethical responsibilities associated with conducting research. As the primary data collection instrument for this study, I adhered to all ethical standards, monitored biases, and mitigated any preconceptions that surfaced during the data collection process. This study fully complies with the Walden University IRB guidelines for ethical research. Each member of this study viewed the form and consented to participate. They were aware of the nature of this research, the goals of the study, the interview process, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the potential risks and benefits of their involvement.

In Section 3, I presented findings that resulted from the data collection and analysis. The findings included the interpretations of the data and an emphasis on the emergence of the themes. There is also a discussion of the implications of social change, the applications of the results of this study to professional practice and the options for future research.

## Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The third section of this research study contains findings that resulted from the process of collecting data, the member checking process and a review of various organizational documents such as newsletters that promoted the succession planning program and relevant historical information. Section 3 begins with an introduction and transitions into a presentation of the findings of the qualitative case study. In Section 3, I discussed the results, presented the emergent themes, and applied those themes to professional practice. There was also a discussion about the implications for social change that succession planning programs could create, recommendations for future research.

### Introduction

This qualitative case study explored succession planning strategies that transportation industry supply chain leaders use to fill organization leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The targeted population of this study consisted of six supply chain leaders who worked for a transportation company in the Northeastern region of the United States. These leaders utilized succession planning strategies in their departments. Section 3 contains the finding of the semistructured interview sessions and the results of the analysis following the triangulation of all the relevant information. The themes that emerged from the triangulation were (a) address the potential loss of tacit knowledge, (b) leaders tend to do more with fewer people, and (c) succession planning.

## Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question for this qualitative exploratory single-case study was: What succession planning strategies do transportation industry supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss? Using the qualitative methodology as a vehicle presented as the optimum choice because its tenets permitted an understanding of the succession planning strategies that transportation industry supply chain business leaders use to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. Furthermore, using a qualitative research process fostered a dialogue to learn from the experiences of the participants via a semistructured interview session.

The data collection phase of this work consisted of semistructured interviews and a review of relevant company documents as part of this qualitative research process. The participants verbally received 8 open-ended questions during the interviews designed to gain information about their specific experiences with succession planning strategies. I obtained written consent from a representative of the target company's TODD before commencing research on the company premises. Upon receiving documentation of written permission from the target company, Walden's IRB provided the final authorization to conduct research.

I triangulated the transcripts with the research journal log notes, and the company documents using Yin's 5-step process. The Yin 5-step process consists of data compilation, data disassembling, reassembling the data, interpreting the findings, and providing a conclusion (Yin, 2018). The analysis began by compiling all the information gained during the data collection phase of this work.

After compiling the data, I read and reviewed each of the transcripts several times to become familiar with the verbal and nonverbal communication from each interview. The reviewing process continued until commonalities appeared between each interview that belonged in categories. The disassembling of the data occurred by placing the participant responses in the categories that coincided with each other. As with the Microsoft Excel program, the themes began to become apparent when new data did not emerge due to saturation. The manual and Excel themes were consistent.

**Emergent Theme One: Address the Potential Loss of Tacit Knowledge**

The first theme to emerge from the data collection process that pertained to succession planning strategies used by supply chain business leaders centered upon the retirements of the older workforce. There were concerns among the participants about how operations would continue, without impediments, after losing the years of tacit knowledge that each retiring employee holds.

The consistency of the theme held even though the participants had differences concerning the right process to move forward. P1 stated:

> There is a wealth of information, leaving the company, and creative ways to retain knowledge is imperative. The employees scheduled to retire are valuable members of our company. The last thing wanted is to have them, and their experiences languish or possibly transfer to a competitor.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of the United States published data supporting the P1's assertion concerning the tacit knowledge drain (BLS, 2018). The BLS documented an increase in the number of people over the age of 65 in the United States (Frazis, 2017). As of 2009, retirements represented 16% of the U.S. workforce participation losses; however, by 2016, the number increased to 19% (Frazis, 2017). Conversely, as of 2016, the entrants into the U.S workforce have declined from 2.74% in 2011 to 2.50% toward the end of 2016 (BLS, 2018; Frazis, 2017). An increasing number of active employees are beyond 55 years of age. As noted in the research journal, participants showed concern for the future of their workforce. When asked about the succession planning strategies used to fill the organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss, P2, P3, P4, and P5 talked about the preservation and transfer of knowledge.

P2, P3, P4, and P5 commented about the return of the recently retired employees to work as independent contractors or as employees of a company contracted to perform a service with the intent of preserving tacit knowledge. However, P5 explicitly stated, "There are legal and financial issues to consider when returning former employees to work as contractors." P5 added to his statement by considering how to determine the best succession planning strategy within the context of preserving tacit knowledge. P5 stated the following:

> It makes sense to attempt to retain the retirees and their vast amount of experience as independent contractors. They are familiar with the culture of the company, and they have a chance to come back to a job that they love with compensation above their retirement incomes. Using a third party to retain the retirees resolves

> any legal issues that may appear concerning the collecting of their retirement funds while being paid by the employer.

Independent contractors do not require direct supervision from the employer, the life of the contract is limited, and they are fully employed (Flinchbaugh, Zare, Chadwick, Li, & Essman, 2019). A company does not need to grant independent contractors the legal rights of standard employees, such as medical benefits, resulting in savings (Flinchbaugh et al., 2019). Nonetheless, independent contractors who were employees are a means to preserve tacit knowledge through the training of the company's current employees (Sikombe & Phiri, 2019).

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) of the United States specifies that independent contractors are self-employed, but they are not an independent contractor if the employer controls what the person does and how the person performs the service (Internal Revenue Service, 2019). Independent contractor assignments are a nonstandard work arrangement, whereas the company leadership limits the legal liability generally assigned with a standard hire (Flinchbaugh et al., 2019). The retiree or the company hiring him or her negotiates a salary paid at set timespans (Sikombe & Phiri, 2019). Based on the information received from P5, and the mandate from the IRS, contracting a company to bring retirees back to work is a viable option to retain tacit knowledge.

P2 agreed with the return of baby boomers as independent contractors but noted that the company's leaders must remain aware of the opportunity costs of returning the retired employees. Feelings of injustice within the active workforce may arise along with the financial and legal challenges to the company if the baby boomers do not return to work in a way that aligns with the company's contractual arraignments (Flinchbaugh et al., 2019). P2 went on to say, "Independent contractors occupy positions that could be posted for a competitive selection, thereby reducing the number of vacancies or the potential for promotions."

P2 described the process of procedural justice. Procedural justice occurs when there is fairness from those with power toward those who are not in power (Raja et al., 2018). Per the responses of P2, the power distribution for succession planning functions resides with management. Management is responsible for planning staffing levels that meet the needs and the vision of the company (OPM, 2018). P2 remarked that a method to avoid feelings of procedural injustice in the company is through the company's staged retirement plan. Per internal documents signed by the company's top leaders and union leadership, the staged retirement plan is an agreement that precludes the use of independent contractors.

The stated purpose of the staged retirement program is supporting succession planning by allowing employees close to retirement an opportunity to mentor and train employees who may eventually occupy the key positions held by the retirees. The program endures for 1 year with an option to extend the contract for an additional year. During the program, each retiree works 37.5 hours per week at a rate of $120,000.00 per year. The target organization mandated the provision that 25% of the hours must focus on mentoring activities. Those activities include but are not limited to (a) tacit knowledge transfer documentation, (b) elicit knowledge management, (c) developing the successors by identifying and evaluating potentials, and (d) mentoring the successors with career advice. Each mentee must complete 180 days of training to complete the program.

P2 noted that staged retirement is best suited for the middle and next-level leadership due to the limitation on funding. P3 and P4 also commented about the retention of tacit knowledge via staged retirements in addition to independent contracting. They noted that staged retirements in their areas of authority extend the ability to retain a person by reducing workloads and teleworking.

Even with an active staged retirement plan, P3 noticeably lamented about the loss of talent when the baby boomer generation leaves the workforce, adding that the subsequent generations do not appear to be ready for the responsibility. The most populous generation in the workforce following the baby boomer generation is millennials (Frazis, 2017). P3 believed that the millennials generation's work ethics had not matured enough to succeed in the baby boomer generation's employment responsibilities. However, as the department leader, he has created succession plans that suit the needs of his area of authority. As noted in the research journal, P3 appeared frustrated by the human capital losses when he specified that the training and productivity costs were outpacing the gains for his department. The exploration of the tenets of SET could help alleviate P3's concerns as other programs stated by the participants.

According to the research journal notes, the internal documents, and the participant interviews, addressing tacit knowledge losses within the participants' areas of responsibility appeared to be a daunting task. However, the staged retirement plan permits each of them to retain tacit knowledge successfully. The guidelines of the staged retirement plan directly impact succession where its participants are required to pass on knowledge to those who are selected to assume vacated positions. In the instances where the staged retirement plan is not available, the leaders had the option of bringing retirees back to work as independent contractors under the same auspices.

**Emergent Theme Two: Leaders Tend to do More with Fewer People**

All six participants agreed that there are more jobs available than there is qualified personnel to accept the positions within their company. They also agreed that the problem of sourcing talent in the supply chain industry is intensifying as the pool of talent diminishes due to baby boomer retirements (Whysall, Owtram, & Brittain, 2019). To offset the losses in their workforce, the leaders agreed to the total compensation package increases. However, there are opportunity costs involved in every decision.

Government statistics bolster the claims by indicating that the number of unfilled positions in the supply chain field will expand to 26% by 2020 (Goodkind, 2016). As of 2017, leaders in the transportation, storage, and distribution averaged $100,740.00 per year (BLS, 2018). Historically, as the supply of anything decreases while the demand increases, the costs associated with it increase (Aspromourgos, 2018). The same is true of hiring qualified personnel; the overall costs of the supply chain on the budget increase with the lack of qualified personnel (Aspromourgos, 2018).

According to P6, "The supply chain is a debit [to the budget] and the higher its cost to operate, the more it drains from the operational budget." P6 continued by stating:

> We have sought to reduce our costs by sourcing better technology. The cost-saving devices include warehouse management systems to efficiently store and manage our material handling equipment, instituting inventory controls to reduce losses and mandatory internal training for our employees. These steps make us better at what we do, and it also creates access to a pipeline for succession; for those who choose to move to the next level.

Consistent with the research journal notes, P6 believed that promoting internal employees is a priority, but it would result in fewer front-line employees. The result would leave the company without enough baseline employees, but technology could overcome the problem. P6 stated that leadership is necessary to perform fiduciary functions in his company, which are necessary to move supplies around. Fiduciary functions are a core responsibility of the participants' position.

The appearance of a problem is an opportunity for the participants. The social exchange created by adding technology to the knowledge of their employees is to reduce the workload of the employees (Mofokeng & Chinomona, 2019). The reduction in workload has the opportunity cost of a better work-life balance. The researcher notes document that P2 believed in creating a pleasant working environment to entice employees to join the leadership track.

P2 commented that the entry-level employees complete the core of supply chain work and that management is there to support them. P2 continued by stating, "We endeavor to create an atmosphere of empowerment for our employees to attract and to sustain the millennials, but we need to think about the future." The Kaizen method improves processes and the work environment. It consists of the five principles of sorting, systematic arrangement, shining, standardization, and sustaining (Garcia-Marin, Tarraga-Juarez, & Mascarell-Santandreu, 2018). The millennial generation is the most populace group behind the baby boomer generation in the workforce (Mossburg, 2018).

The future of the supply chain industry includes new technologies. P3 stated, "Technologies help us to be able to do more with fewer employees. We have brought in consultants to review how we can become a better supply chain." The supply chain industry is becoming data-driven in ways that did not exist a few years ago (Whysall et al., 2019). P3 added, "The advent of self-driving trucks, automated inventory picking systems, and vendor managed inventory are removing the requirement to have internal distribution systems in the future, but we are not there yet." The comments from P3 aligned with those of P6. In addition to sourcing people internally to replace aging leaders using the staged retirement plan, independent contractors, or leadership succession programs offered at the top leadership level, P3 plans to use technology as a strategy to offset the loss of entry-level employees due to retirements and promotions.

P5 added that the strategy used for his department plan for the future of the supply chain is "to utilize the programs available and to encourage promising employees to enter into the leadership ranks." P5 made additional comments on the subject.

> The entry-level employees are union-based, and the collective bargaining agreements add protections that empower the employees. Because of the

> protections, some of the entry-level employees do not want to enter management. Management is nonrepresented, which means that the entry-level employees feel as if there is a higher level of job security with the union.

Per the internal documents, employees are entering the company's leadership succession planning programs.

**Emergent Theme Three: Succession Planning**

Internal documents provided by the participants detailed the history of succession planning programs within the organization. The program began in the year 2002 with the backing of the company's top leader, who announced the succession planning program's availability in a staff notice. Those who chose to enter the program were subjecting themselves to a year of training. The internal documents list the purpose of the program as preparing employees to qualify for the projected assistant superintendent positions. Furthermore, the intent for the program included ongoing developmental opportunities for the employees. It is noteworthy to identify the connection to SET as the staff notice outlined a mutually acceptable exchange of values between the two parties.

Per the internal documents, the requirement for participation in succession planning programs included the possession of a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, at least one year with the company, or 5 years of experience in progressive leadership positions. A combination of a high school diploma with progressive leadership experience sufficed if the person did not possess a bachelor's degree. The employee who met the initial requirements faced the screening of the employee records after attending a mandatory briefing to where application distribution occurred. The author of the letter noted that there were no exceptions to the rules of the screening process. The succession planning program failed on the first attempt. P2 commented on the failure with the following statement:

> Each office has "its personality," which caused the original programs to fail. The original succession planning participants needed to spend time in each department to learn the different processes to make them a good fit for any leadership position. The problem with the mandate came in the form of resistance from the office directors. The leaders from those offices failed to relieve the employees from their regular assignments for a year to work elsewhere or sabotaged the process by not participating in the rotation.

P5 added, "The failure of the office-level leaders to join in the organization's job rotation effectively precluded their employees from being considered for succession." In April of 2011, internal documents detailed a second opportunity for employees to participate in the company succession planning program. The newer documents had additional status qualifications.

Applicants had to be nonrepresented employees or individual management assistants. As listed within additional internal documents, the second attempt failed, but the cause was not clear. Per internal documents from 2013, a new top leader held a town hall meeting with some of the employees of the organization. During the meeting, the employees had questions concerning the next steps of their careers. They specifically asked about the succession program and if the top leader would make one available. The questions posed to the top leader added to the information concerning the company's succession planning efforts for this study. Either the employees were not aware that the program existed, or succession planning did not exist at the time.

An internal memorandum provided by P1 showed the creation of a third succession planning program. According to an entry in the internal newsletter, the first class of graduates occurred in September 2016. P1 stated, "The board sourced a new top leader near the time of the first graduating class who believed in succession planning but decided to pursue a different route after reviewing the history and the effectiveness of a company-wide program." Per P5, the newly sourced top leader deemed the program ineffective at the company-wide level. The top leader decided that an effective succession planning program should begin at the department level. The reinstatement of the program occurred in 2017. P5 claimed that in 2017, the newly sourced leader allowed a succession planning program to be created and operated by the department-level leadership.

As of this writing, some of the departments within the target organization had a succession planning strategy agenda, while others were still in the beginning phase three years later. P2 mentioned that there was a department-level succession planning program for the top leaders to assume vice-president or similar positions. The comments from the participants, in conjunction with the internal documents, identified this organization as practicing the exclusive point of view.

The followers of the exclusive point of view believe that the outcome is fair, even though the initial distribution of resources is not divided equally (Raja et al., 2018). The exclusive point of view relates to social exchanges with the offer to enter the succession programs. The leaders and the employees benefit from the arrangement, and achieving a balanced social exchange is critical to avoid negative feelings by both sides.

## Applications to Professional Practice

This study's application to professional business practice is identifying the current succession planning strategies used by transportation industry supply chain business leaders to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. The future supply chain business environment is one where employees are less numerous (OPM, 2018). There is the potential for the loss of tacit knowledge for this company as the baby boomer generation retires (Keller, 2018). Supply chain business leaders could use the information within this study to mitigate those losses.

The change is underway, and supply chain leaders are required to focus on the long term aspect of their business goals. Part of that planning is identifying and growing talent from within the company (Keller, 2018). A communicated and well-implemented succession planning program is a critical aspect of the future of the target organization (Moreno & Girard, 2019).

There is an assortment of succession planning programs that companies can imagine. There are also different types of people whose talents may fit a specific program. The first step in the process is for the top leadership of an organization to support the plan chosen to steer the company into the future.

The target company chose to use two programs to train successive supply chain leaders. One program was the staged retirement program, where the pairing of a future leader with a soon to be retired leader occurs for the transfer of knowledge. The second program is the use of independent contractors program where a retired employee returns to work to transfer knowledge. The independent contractor program is essentially the same as the staged retirement program; however, it occurs at different stages of the leader's employment. There is a formal succession planning program for the executive level, where the future leader has the opportunity to experience all aspects of the business. All of the programs have a duration of 1 year.

Succession planning is a continuous effort. To avoid leadership vacancies, the leaders of the target organization must consistently plan for the next occurrence (Oldham & Fried, 2016). The process includes bringing the Human Resources Department (HRD) into the conversation about the job design to ensure that there is a plan to match the right person to the correct position (Hughes, 2018).

Steps must occur to standardize the succession planning processes across the organization. Standardization promotes stability in the process and trust in the leadership (Schneider & Valet, 2017). The HRD and the supply chain leaders should coordinate their efforts to ensure that the positive and negative aspects of the succession planning training have after project reports. The purpose of the report is to emphasize the functional processes or to address the inadequate processes. The result is to increase the effectiveness of succession planning programs.

## Implications for Social Change

Social change is the diversity and social inclusion efforts made by an organization's leadership (Brimhall & Saastamoinen, 2019). Social change is slow and deliberate (Schlerka, 2019). Schlerka (2019) believed that social change occurred best over extended periods. Schlerka acknowledged that his idea contrasts with the urge to move forward quickly and in opposition to the call to make social change happen immediately. Schlerka believed that an act completed today would have double the result in time using the temporality of practice concept (Schlerka, 2019). Supply chain succession planning is a slow and deliberate process (Moreno & Girard, 2019).

Succession planning program efforts must carefully include the needs of management and the needs of the employees (Chang et al., 2015) by producing a condition where there is an exchange of values (Brimhall & Saastamoinen, 2019; Reader et al., 2016). According to Schlerka's (2019) temporality of practice concept, the employees selected for promotion via the company's exclusive points of view can generate additional income and reach a high level of stature. The same employees could add to their community and progress their families forward via their increased means. The ultimate change is not immediate. Social change in the temporality of practice concept occurs through the person receiving the promotion passing his improvements to his family, and subsequently into the community.

The clear benefit to the supply chain organization is the potential increase in customer brand loyalty when its leaders subscribe to the tenets of social change (Matten & Moon, 2020; Schlerka, 2019). However, there is also the benefit of employee retention and the reduction of tacit knowledge loss through the creation of a work environment where employees feel valued using an inclusive viewpoint (Brimhall & Saastamoinen, 2019).

Supply chain organizations strive to create inclusive work environments to retain and recruit employees (Moreno & Girard, 2019). Nonetheless, the appearance of diversity does not guarantee employee satisfaction (Matten & Moon, 2020). Leaders within the organization can review their policies to ensure the inclusion of homogenous groups (Brimhall & Saastamoinen, 2019). The purposeful and public review of the policy and actions taken to correct any discrepancies could lead to more people staying with the company for more extended periods (Raja et al., 2018).

## Recommendations for Action

The participant interviews and the supporting documents revealed that the target organization has a silo structure consisting of multiple departments. However, each department has a different but supporting function within the supply chain organization. The different functions result in a unique culture in each department and somewhat diverse succession planning needs. Per the supporting documentation, the top leader has delegated control of succession planning strategies to the department leaders as a result of the differences.

The interviews and the internal company documents confirmed that there is a pending shortage of supply chain personnel ensuing from the retirements of members of the baby boomer generation. The expected result of the departures is a drain of tacit knowledge. However, the participants have stemmed the flow of departures with the implementation of staged retirement plans and using independent contractors. Each of the programs preserves tacit knowledge by either extending the time employees work at the company or returning them to work after retirement. The programs demonstrate an ability to stop the flow of tacit knowledge at the company by choosing from a selected group of top-tier personnel. In addition to the participants' efforts, the first recommendation expands the selection criteria for participation in the program. The company must change from an exclusive focus to an inclusive one.

The second recommendation addresses the decision by management to do more with fewer people. Employees within the company want to move through the leadership pipeline, as illustrated in the company's internal documents. The company should create a communication plan within each department for its succession planning programs, such as the staged retirement program. Internal documents list the qualifications and the requirements for the program. However, during follow-up interviews, I learned that very few employees knew of the program, and those departmental leaders had retired without being part of it and sharing the benefits of their experiences. Staged retirements permit the transfer of skills from people scheduled to retire onto the subsequent generations (Clark, Nyce, Ritter, & Shoven, 2019). Finally, the human resource department under the top leader must ensure the even distribution of resources across the departments to change from an exclusive viewpoint to an inclusive viewpoint.

There must be a formal succession planning strategy if the organization plans to guide the future of the supply chain to preserve the tacit knowledge successfully (OPM, 2018). Recommendations to address the issues begin with the top leaders' office, as succession programs do not survive without top leadership support (Fleming & Millar, 2019). I recommend that the senior leader of the target organization create a plan with the department heads to implement a formal succession planning strategy in each department. The plans need to be consistent while allowing for the uniqueness of each of their missions. The projects must have quantifiable performance indicators to measure the points of success for future expansion and failures. The next step is to create a standardized communication plan to publish for employee consumption.

A communication plan must be endorsed by the top leader to be an effective and consistent mode of information delivery. The target organization is in the transportation industry; thus, interested employees are in various locations during a workday. The nature of their jobs requires a multifaceted distribution of information to ensure that everyone receives timely instruction. A newsletter that has digital and paper versions are enough. The digital newsletter containing succession planning information is deliverable to every employee's email address. If some employees do not have access to email, a paper version delivered to the department, and office levels will ensure that information reaches the interested parties.

## Recommendations for Further Research

The strategies that transportation supply chain business leader used for succession planning warrant additional exploration. Per the recommendations for action, there is a need to explore how leadership can effectively communicate succession planning strategies to its employees. Researchers who conduct subsequent studies concerning supply chain succession planning could seek a quantitative viewpoint by exploring the power dynamics as expressed in the SNT (Soltis et al., 2018). The design of this study emphasized the experiences of the participants. The exploration of the quantitative point of view would provide a purely analytical presentation of the findings and offer a contrast to the shared experiences presented in this research.

An additional recommendation for subsequent researchers is to use more than one business in more than one geographic area. The increase in scope would provide a higher amount of diversity and the ability to compare the effectiveness of each company's succession planning strategies. The effect of union power on succession planning is another area to pursue. According to the study data, unions offer protection and security that preclude members from seeking nonrepresented leadership positions of leadership. The situation justifies further research concerning strategies to persuade employees to join management. Without a succession pipeline, opportunistic hiring results with the consequences of increased learning curves and a potential loss of competitive advantage.

## Reflections

This research proved to be challenging (e.g., experiencing the differences in writing at a doctoral level versus a master's writing level) and insightful (e.g., the data collection, which permitted the use of the investigative methods and to talk with various leaders about supply chain management. The quality of research and the review process far exceeded previous experiences.

It is rare to have conversations with so many highly qualified supply chain management professionals outside of a convention. As a supply chain leader with over 30 years of practice who has worked into management from modest origins as a clerk, nevertheless, I was nervous when faced with the prospect of talking with these leaders.

The leaders of the target company conferred that the supply chain mantra of doing more with less has transitioned to an urgent need due to the lack of personnel to replace outgoing professionals. The supply chain consists of people, and people are leaving the field. The next generation of leaders needs preparation to succeed in both the human and technological portions of the supply chain to avoid a reduction in competitive advantage.

## Conclusion

This qualitative case study explored the succession planning strategies that supply chain business leaders in the transportation industry utilize to fill organizational leadership positions to reduce tacit knowledge loss. I answered the research question by seeking data through the conduct of 6 semistructured interviews, utilizing secondary sources, and the detailed notes of the research journal logbook. An analysis of the collected data gave rise to three themes: (a) address the potential loss of tacit knowledge, (b) leaders tend to do more with fewer people, (c) succession planning strategies.

The findings from this study revealed that the problem of personnel shortages due to the retirements of members from the baby boomer generation is real. However, the supply chain leaders of the target organization knew the problem existed. Those leaders successfully implemented programs to stop the flow of tacit knowledge through incentives that either delay retirement or provide a pathway to return as an independent contractor. The solution also addressed the tendency to do more with fewer people. For the specific purpose of this study, the retiring leaders vacated positions add a burden to the remaining leaders. The incentive provides an additional benefit of relief that may subsequently lead to a social exchange with better rewards for the company and the affected leadership.

I focused on one company in a single geographic area while gathering data for this study. Nonetheless, a result of the review of the literature revealed that the projected shortage of personnel problems is commonplace across industries and at all levels from the base employee to top management. Fewer people at the base level will lead to fewer people to fill management positions unless creative succession planning strategies are used, such as the ones implemented by the participants from this study.

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# Appendix: Interview Protocol

Participant Pseudonym:

Interview Date: __________________ Total Time: ___________________________________

| What to do: | What to say: |
|---|---|
| • Introduce myself to the participant.<br>• Go over the contents of the consent form.<br>• Answer any questions or concerns from the participant. | My name is Dana Beal. I am a graduate student at Walden University conducting my doctoral study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate Business Administration. This study will contribute to organizational business practices by reviewing the succession planning program and the effectiveness of the program at qualifying internally sources personnel to fill vacancies. A potential additional impact for your business is a reduction in the learning curve associated with opportunistic hiring, an increase in a competitive advantage, and better service to the community. |
| • Turn on recording devices.<br>• Introduce the participant by the pseudonym.<br>• Ask the interview questions starting with question #1 and following the numerical succession.<br>• Ask any follow-up questions.<br>• Conclude the interview questions, making sure to thank the interviewee for participating.<br>• Restate the interviewers/interviewee contact information for follow-up questions or participant concerns. | 1. What succession planning strategies do you use to fill organization leadership positions and reduce tacit knowledge loss?<br>2. How did you determine the best succession planning strategies to fill organization leadership positions and reduce tacit knowledge loss?<br>3. What succession planning strategies were not successful for filling organization leadership positions and reducing tacit knowledge loss?<br>4. What is your perception of the influence that an employee gains from successfully participating in a succession planning within your organization?<br>5. What is your perception of the moral of the supply chain personnel when they became aware that a succession planning program is available?<br>6. What are your experiences with the barriers that prevent people from participating in a succession planning |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Turn off the recording devices.<br>• End of the interview protocol. | program?<br>7. What other strategies does your leadership utilize to ensure that the tacit and explicit knowledge of supply chain employees remains within the company in addition to the succession planning program?<br>8. Would you like to share any additional succession planning related experiences? |
| • Thank them for participating in the research | Thank you for your participation in this research study regarding the use of succession planning programs and how it is used to fill supply chain vacancies with internally sourced personnel. Your responses will aid your leaders in gaining a better understanding of succession planning within your organization.<br>Please note that all responses and communications will remain confidential, and you will receive an opportunity to review the results of the data collection phase, which includes a summary of the resulting themes. If necessary, you may request a revision before the publication of the findings. If you develop any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Walden University using the contacts listed on the consent form. |
| • Schedule follow-up member checking interview | Would you like to schedule an appointment for the follow-up interview today to meet and review my interpretation of this interview? The review will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. I have time available in two weeks between Monday and Wednesday. |