Succession Planning in the Federal Government

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I have adhered to the Trinity Washington University policy regarding academic honesty in completing this assignment.

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Abstract

Succession planning is an important mechanism utilized in public and private industry to ensure organizational resiliency. If succession planning is not incorporated within the human resource infrastructure, an organization may not be able to recoup from loss of leadership and knowledge once key employees depart the organization. The federal government, in particular, has been impacted by baby boomer retirement, meaning there is a loss of knowledge, skills, and abilities. The purpose of this research is to identify whether or not federal organizations are implementing succession plans, and whether or not the succession plan activities are positively received by government employees. The literature relating to succession planning within federal organizations is primarily non-comprehensive and dated. Based on the available literature, succession plans should include identification of high potential employees, training, leadership development, and should be incorporated into the human resource infrastructure. This research utilized a qualitative content analysis method to assess current literature and case studies that examine succession planning within federal organizations. To analyze the data, descriptive coding (primary level), thematic coding (secondary level), and data triangulation was utilized to assess findings, and to ascribe meaning. Data analysis occurred by comparing case study findings with a succession planning best-practice framework. The findings indicated four emerging themes: Effective Performance, Operational Efficiency, Knowledge Management, and Human Capital Management. Based on the data from this study it was recommended that federal entities consider Strategic Planning, Human Capital Management, Generational Cohorts, and Knowledge Management to plan efficient succession programs.

Keywords: Baby Boomers, Retirement, Succession Planning, Federal Government, Office of Personnel Management

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Introduction

The federal government's role at the departmental level is to implement programs that support the safety and wellbeing of the public by providing necessary goods and services. It is important that the programs are operated by proactive and knowledgeable federal employees. Currently, a large population of federal employees, those that are of the baby boomer generation, are at-or-near retirement age. This poses a threat to agency resiliency along with the efficiency of programs for goods and services operated by the federal government. To prepare for the exodus of older federal employees the government must implement succession planning activities to retain the knowledge base, and prepare the next generation of government leaders.

Succession planning focuses on the development of individuals with potential in preparation for key positions. The Society for Human Resource Management (2014) defined succession planning as a "key component for business success, enabling an organization to recover when critical talent is lost. An effective succession plan includes a focus on development, preparing individuals for future opportunities, and systematic tracking is also critical" (p. 1).

The exploration of succession planning within the federal government is motivated by the phenomenon of baby boomers reaching retirement age. Baby boomer retirement within the federal government is an isolated phenomenon occurring in the recent past, present, and in the near future. Due to the effects of economic plight, the 2008 recession, there are a significant amount of baby boomers currently working as public servants whom were previously eligible for retirement. There are many outliers influencing succession planning and baby boomers including: organizational culture, economic security, etc. Succession plans play a pivotal role in organizational resiliency and a succession plan is the best approach to prepare for baby boomer retirement within the federal government.

Statement of the Problem

There has been an increase in the number of individuals retiring from the federal government. This is due to the first wave of baby boomers reaching retirement age. The problem is significant because the federal government is responsible for providing citizens with goods and services through federal programs. The retirement of knowledgeable individuals that manage government programs poses a threat to the supply of good and services to the public, and the functional continuity of program operations. The most important method to address this issue is succession planning. Succession planning is a method utilized across various industries to prepare employees to move into vital positions upon departure of an incumbent. Succession planning is achieved through developmental programs that include training, mentorship, and etcetera.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this content analysis was to examine case studies to identify government actions towards succession planning, and reveal federal employee perceptions and experiences with succession planning. The goal was to reveal emerging information from the data that may be incorporated in best practice approaches, and used for future succession studies. Prior research, in the form of case studies, examined elements such as retirement behavior, generational factors, and gender influence related to succession planning. Generally, enough research has not been completed on the topic of succession planning within the federal government.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will uncover the succession planning practices federal agencies are employing, if any, and whether or not practices are positively received by federal employees. This may potentially create an opportunity for organizational human resource officers to determine methods of improvement, and compare with Office of Personnel Management (OPM) standards as benchmarks. In addition, the consolidated data identifying implemented practices may be compared with nationally recognized best practice succession plan strategies employed by successful organizations. Further assessment may also suggest opportunities for improvement.

Theory

The focus of this research was driven by the strategic talent management theory, social learning theory, and continuous organizational change theory. The strategic talent management theory of Collins and Mellahi (2009) is focused on the importance of the identification of significant organizational roles, and their effect on organizational resiliency. The belief is that the identification of high-potential employees support the organizations human resource infrastructure and resiliency. The root of this theory was to maintain a competitive advantage. Secondly, Bandura's (1971) social learning theory stated that individuals are capable of learning based on needs, drives, and impulses. Each characteristic influences individual motives, which dictated success or failure. Finally, Weick and Quinn's (1999) continuous organizational change theory stated that change within organizations cannot occur without failure because of the bureaucratic structure of an organization. Failure is usually based on bureaucratic variations between view, competence, and diversity. Combined, the theories guide the research around succession planning by providing insight into a human resource understanding of succession planning.

Research Method

The inquiry into succession planning within the federal government was guided by the advocacy and participatory worldview (Creswell, 2014). The study's goal was to identify succession plan mechanisms implemented within a federal environment, and to determine the effectiveness to enhance best practice approaches. This qualitative content analysis is considered economical because it comprises of document evaluation. Evaluated case studies completed at the dissertation level, and peer reviewed scholarly trade journals, ensure ethics compliance and integrity. The case study based content analysis provided an opportunity to discover rich content. The data discovered in the case studies provided descriptive and detailed information about succession planning practices and programs within small government agencies. Descriptive coding, thematic coding, and triangulation was utilized to analyze the findings of each text used as a case study.

Delimitations

This study is capable of accomplishing a better understanding of how organizations operate their human resource infrastructure to include succession planning. In addition, the data in case study findings revealed individual perceptions of succession planning, employee participation, and employee perception toward succession planning activities. Succession planning was often used as a developmental tool that included training, mentoring, coaching, etc., to develop personnel in preparation for potential leadership opportunities. The research and analysis from this study may be used to support future succession studies, or considered in the development of best practice approaches.

Limitations

If agencies have not implemented a succession plan, or have failed to implement succession plan activities, this research will not provide a resolution. The analyzed data will not provide a descriptive approach to resolving succession planning issues. Based on the scope of the research, the data was analyzed to support whether or not succession plan implementation has occurred, and if practices were positively received by employees. The raw and analyzed data may be used rather as a prescriptive approach to support flawed succession plan resolutions by providing demographic data, such as outcomes and preferences, and identify case studies that reflect successful succession plans.

Summary

With the increase in baby boomers retiring from the federal government, mechanisms have to be put in place to address attrition for organizations remain resilient. The most recognized mechanism is succession planning. Not much research has been completed on succession planning within the federal government. The purpose of this study is to examine the research that has been completed thus far to identify if federal agencies are implementing succession plans in preparation for the departure of baby boomers, and if the succession plan mechanisms are positively received by employees. This research was achieved through the implementation of a qualitative content analysis.

Literature Review

The federal government's role is to implement programs that support the safety and wellbeing of the public by providing necessary goods and services. It is important that proactive and knowledgeable federal employees operate the programs. Currently, a large population of federal employees are at-or-near retirement age. This poses a threat to agency resiliency and program efficiency. To prepare for the departure of older federal employees the government must implement succession planning activities to retain its knowledge base, and prepare the next generation of government leaders.

Succession planning is a human resource concept adapted from private industry that focuses on the development of individuals in preparation for vacancy in key positions. The Society for Human Resource Management (2014) defined succession planning as a "key component for business success, enabling an organization to recover when critical talent is lost" (p. 1). The Office of Personnel Management's exploration of succession planning within the federal government was motivated by the phenomenon of baby boomers reaching retirement age. Baby boomer retirement within the federal government is an isolated phenomenon occurring in the recent past, present, and near future. The issue has become more apparent as baby boomers have begun to recover financially from the 2008 Recession, and are ready for retirement.

Succession plans generally have a best-practice approach that involve the development of clearly defined job specifications, talent pool management, coaching and mentorship, and transition plans. The purpose of this study was to determine the succession plan activities implemented by federal organizations, and to examine how the populations affected by succession plan implementation perceive agency activities. To achieve this the researcher assessed organizational activity, determined employee perceptions, and offered insight into gaps that existed within activities.

This research was driven by social and change theories which include Collins and Mellahi's (2009) strategic talent management theory; Bandura's (1971) social learning theory, and Weick and Quinn's (1999) continuous organizational change theory. Collins and Mellahi (2009) focused on the importance of the identification of significant organizational roles, and their effect on organizational resiliency. The belief was that the identification of high-potential employees supported the organization's human resource infrastructure and resiliency. The root of this theory was to maintain a competitive advantage. Secondly, Bandura's (1971) social learning theory stated that individuals are capable of learning based on needs, drives, and impulses. Each characteristic influenced individual motives, which dictated success or failure. Finally, Weick and Quinn's (1999) continuous organizational change theory stated that change within organizations cannot occur without failure because of the bureaucratic structure of an organization. Failure is usually based on bureaucratic variations between view, competence, and diversity. Combined, the theories guide the research around succession planning by including the social aspect into plan implementation and efficiency.

The literature on succession planning has failed to place emphasis on the federal government, specifically executive level departments. It is important that scholarly literature shed light on succession planning within the federal government as each department has a pivotal role in public welfare. Theoretically, the idea is that federal government employed limited succession plan activities to address the unavoidable attrition phase of baby boomer retirement. To better prepare, the federal government must implement formal succession plans to avoid and counteract potential labor and knowledge shortages.

Succession Planning Framework

Succession planning is a tool to track ‘high-potential employees’ (those employees more likely to succeed in leadership positions) that are likely to be placed in leadership positions in the future (Noe, Hollenback, Gerhart &Wright, 2013). Succession planning is usually done as a part of strategic planning, strategic management, or in response to natural attrition such as retirement. In private industry, senior management is responsible for attracting and retaining talent, creating professional development opportunities, creating mentorship opportunities, etcetera. Noe et al., (2013) examined several succession planning texts and developed a basic framework of what the succession planning process should look like:

1. Identify what positions are included in the plan.
2. Identify the employees who are included in the plan.
3. Develop standards to evaluate positions (e.g. competencies, desired experiences, desired knowledge, and developmental value).
4. Determine how employee’s potential will be measured (e.g. current performance and potential performance).
5. Develop the succession planning review.
6. Link the succession planning system with other human resource systems, including training and development, compensation, performance management, and staffing systems.
7. Determine what feedback is provided to employees.
8. Measure the effectiveness of the succession plan (p. 429).

In the public sector, specifically the federal government, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is responsible for managing human capital initiatives for all federal employees. This includes providing guidance and the necessary resources to federal entities for implementation of succession planning initiatives. Guidance includes recruitment strategies, developmental strategies, and succession plan development and risk assessments for individual organizations. OPM's *Recruitment Strategies* are geared toward mission achievement. OPM focuses on short and long term human capital investments to enhance an organization's workforce. An organizational goal is to identify 'target positions' and create an inventory of candidates with the necessary competencies. This is done in conjunction with well qualified experts to determine ways to attract the appropriate individuals for available positions (OPM: Recruitment Strategies, 2014). OPM has created various *Developmental Strategies* to assist organizations with retention. This includes linking position required competencies with organizational trainings, planning career paths from employees, leadership development strategy for program implementation, and mentorship program development for implementation (OPM: Developmental Strategies, 2014). OPM is also responsible for generating *Individual Succession Planning and Risk Assessment's* for federal entities. This includes identifying where organizations stand on turnover, recruitment, and bench strength challenges. Working in conjunction with management, a profile is built to determine how organizations should operate moving forward. This profile should consider current workforce competencies, recruitment initiatives, developmental opportunities, and programs that limit organizational knowledge loss (OPM: Individual Succession Planning and Risk Assessment, 2014).

Taking into consideration the practice of succession planning, the goal of this literature review is to identify and examine factors that may determine or influence retirement decisions to show if public service organizations are practicing succession planning, and to identify what areas of succession planning can be improved. Retaining knowledge, skills, and abilities within an organization is important to the resiliency of an organization. Therefore, the purpose of this literature review is to examine the literature available on succession planning in relation to baby boomers of retirement age within the federal government.

The figure below is a literature map identifying the factors related to succession planning in this study and the supporting scholars.

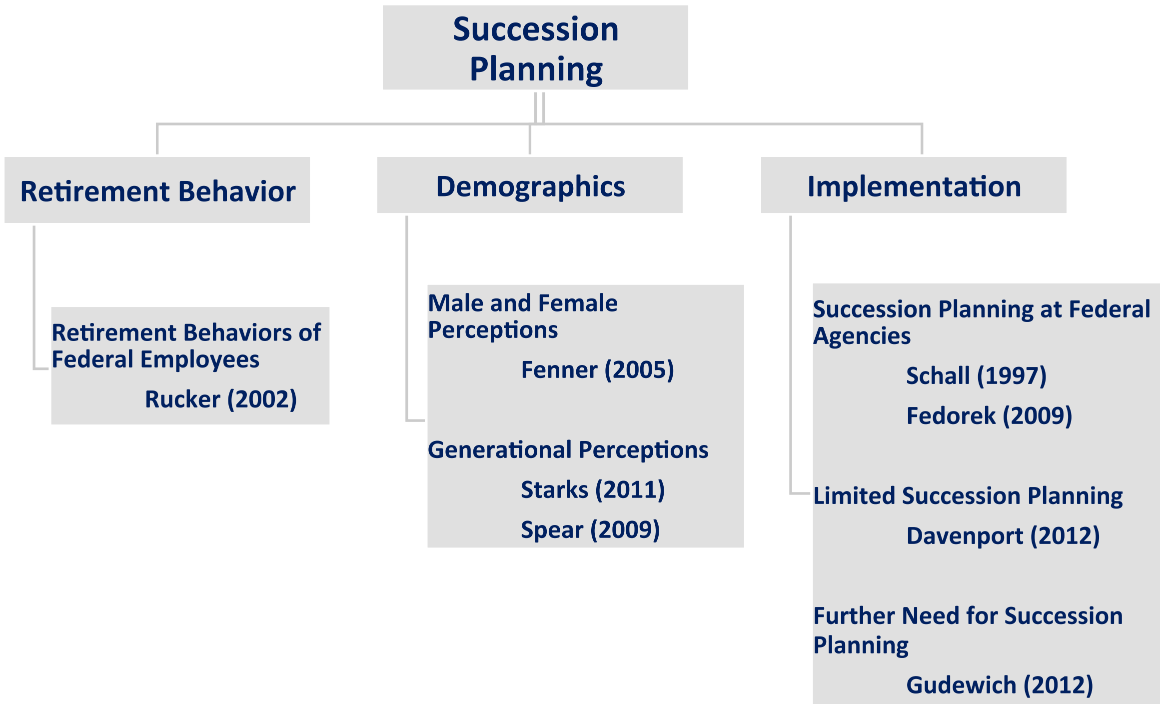

Figure 1. Literature map of succession planning

Retirement Behavior

Before examining succession planning, it is important to examine the basis of retirement behaviors. Rucker (2002) surveyed the American Federation of Government Employees to examine retirement behaviors within respective individual organizations. Specifically Rucker wanted to know the likelihood of retirement eligible federal employees leaving the government at age "55 with 30 years of service" (p. 7). The sample population was Civil Service federal employees between the ages of '46-55' with '20 or more years of service', which consisted of "25 percent of the [American Federation of Government Employees] workforce" (p. 37). Rucker's (2002) research was centered on Steers and Mowdays (1981) 'voluntary turnover employee model' that identified behaviors that influenced retirement or natural attrition (p. 36).

The survey responses implied that 'less than 10 percent of the sample population felt they were less likely to retire within the short term (2 years) (p. 73).

Rucker (2002) also focused on the behaviors of retirement eligible employees by examining variables that influenced departure such as employee commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, and the characteristics of the organization. A notable factor that influenced departure was the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) NFATC Career Transition Center, which assisted retired employees with finding future career opportunities. Rucker (2002) noted several factors which included strong correlations between: pay/work satisfaction and retirement age, employee health with retirement behavior; retirement behavior is not necessarily centered on Civil Service retirement requirements. Economic factors included pay, which was positively correlated with the employee intentions to stay on the job longer; however, organizational commitment did not. Rucker (2002) addressed specific cultural aspects which included work satisfaction, and employee relationship with coworkers, each shown to slightly influence retirement behavior within this particular case study.

To put this into perspective, perhaps if this representative population was in fact the actual population of retirement age federal employees, it would call for an immediate need of succession planning. Though this conclusion is drawn, it is important to note that the attrition of baby boomers may not gravely affect the American Federation of Government Employees because those at-or-near retirement age within the organization did reflect this information in survey responses as it related to retirement in the short term (Rucker, 2002, p. 72).

There are several factors that may potentially influence retirement behaviors. Retirement eligible employees under the Civil Service retirement program have the benefit of receiving a pension and a reduced salary simultaneously if they choose to work for the federal government postretirement. Rucker (2002) noted that employment postretirement, or lack of, is a decisional factor that influenced retirement behavior.

The shortcoming with Rucker (2002) is that the culture of the American Federation of Federal Employees may have influenced employee responses. If an organization has a positive upward culture, then survey response may favor work continuity over retirement. It is also important to point out that Rucker's (2002) survey was given in 2002, and primarily to the generation formed after the baby boomers. This means that though the case study is relevant, in essence it cannot be completely applied presently without some reservation to the intentions and behaviors of retirement age federal employees.

Demographics

Demographic factors play a role throughout most studies. In this particular study, demographics in the context of age and gender play an important role in the workplace. With various age groups, rather generations within a work environment, there are certain perceptions and beliefs associated with each cohort. In relation to gender, there's a common misconception that the glass ceiling no longer exists. The glass ceiling is organizational structures or influences that impede or prevent women from upward mobility. Age and gender are factors that should always be considered when studying work environments.

Male vs. female. Fenner (2005) examined the perceptions of male and female employees in relation to the perceptions of succession planning components inclusive of: career development, training, and succession planning in general; however, Fenner (2005) focused on the differentiation in perceptions. Federal employees felt the need for succession planning was centered around:

> Increased job opportunities, changing workload demands, database automation, identifying organizational short and long-term goals, and monitoring individual

> development plans, while 'barriers' impeding succession planning included: overburden of work, managers placed in key positions without necessary qualifications, insufficient support from senior executives, and senior executives quick fix attitude (p. v).

The findings indicated a strong correlation in each tested category with the exception of 'communication', 'morale', 'career development', and 'coaching and mentoring'. Seventy one percent of female federal employees surveyed responded negatively to each of these categories (Fenner, 2005, p. v). Relevant to male and female perception differentiation, males preferred mentor-style programs inclusive of coaching, where females preferred 'job rotations', 'collateral duties', and 'shadowing assignments'. Fenner's (2005) data also supported female employees felt as though they did not receive career support from senior leadership.

Generational. Starks (2011) examined knowledge transfer between generations, defined as multigenerational knowledge transfer (MGKT), was inclusive of 'knowledge sharing', 'knowledge safeguarding', 'learning preference', and 'learning outcomes'. The study was undertaken to determine if a knowledge transfer took place between experienced and limited-experienced generations; and if so, was the knowledge transfer supported by the generations, and were employees perceiving the knowledge transfer as negative or positive. Though the survey itself did not reflect a strong correlation between the categories due to the population size, they're important questions and concepts to understand when working with multiple generations.

Spear (2009) was able to get feedback from a younger generation's ideas and perceptions towards succession planning. Leadership made an attempt to better understand Generation X to cater to developing their leadership capabilities and preparing the group to take on leadership positions and senior leadership positions. Generation Xers prefered 'structured learning', 'hands-on experience', knowledge sharing, mentorships, and access to executives. Starks (2011) and

Spear (2009) both noted that younger generations want and need to be challenged so that they identify strengths and weaknesses and find methods to further develop upon.

Lack of Succession Planning

Davenport (2012) implied federal agencies were slow to implement succession planning based on the responses of human resource professionals from the IPMA-HR. The goal was to identify if a relationship existed between “succession planning and employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational commitment” (Davenport, 2012, p. 7). Sixty-four percent of government agencies dabbled in succession planning, but did not have an official succession plan in place. Employees whom organization had some form of succession planning had greater employee satisfaction, engagement, and organizational loyalty.

Need for Succession Planning

Gudewich (2012) supported the need for mentoring programs (a major component of succession planning) for administrative, professional, and technical staff, or ‘APT’s’. In a federal agency natural attrition and retirement significantly contributed to the small workforce within the tested organization. The organizational leadership focus, within the undisclosed organization, was to decrease turnover, boost employee morale, and create a succession plan. Based on the data collected from the agency, achieved through survey and focus group assessments, Gudewich (2012) identified that a mentorship program was desirable, and direct correlations existed between employees feelings for a mentorship program and ‘retention, morale, and succession’ because employees generally felt that such programming would address retention rates within the organization. A flaw with Gudewich (2012) was that the study implied that though mentorship is an important aspect of succession planning; however, forced relationships are less likely to work, hence the mentor and mentee both do not benefit from the relationship (Noe et al., 2013).

Succession Planning in Place

Schall (1997) theorized that succession planning was hardly utilized in the public sector because organizational leadership, whom were political appointees, were tied to an elected administration. Political appointees often times are aligned with an administration and replaced upon conclusion of the leadership term. Therefore, the leadership was focused on short-term impact and immediate administration needs, rather than long term planning. Hence, the lack of emphasis on succession planning, where the primary focus should be strategically aligning an organization.

Schall (1997) used her succession from a leadership position as a case study to support the theory. The driving force for succession planning was that the organization had implemented new programs that were beneficial to the community. The fear was that the new political appointee would end such programs. Schall (1997) also noted that she possessed specialized knowledge in her field that she wished to pass on to her employees. To do so, successful strategic planning must have been ‘future-oriented’, and inclusive of succession planning. Schall (1997) noted that “succession planning done well involved preparing the agency for a change in leadership, but it also included assessing what has been valuable, and how that can be preserved and transferred to the subsequent regime”(p. 5).

An important note about Schall’s (1997) case study is that it focused on the behaviors of leadership, the individuals that intended to retire, and the actions taken place by employees to preserve the knowledge, skills, abilities, and programs created. This is a topic that is not always discussed in the literature (Fenner, 2005; Spear, 2009; Davenport, 2012). The case study also examined departure and succession planning from a political point of view, where changes in administration and political beliefs influenced the actions of leaders and their intentions towards succession planning. This is very relevant to the federal government, noting a potential change in administration every four years.

Fedorek (2009) theorized that effective succession planning engaged stakeholders, built partnerships, enhanced recruitment, and focused on present and long-term strategies. The goal of this case study was to determine: (1) how the leadership dealt with the potential mass exodus of retirement eligible employees; (2) how the organization's human resource strategies measured up with more 'contemporary human capital strategies'; and, (3) how current employees felt about issues that affected the aging workforce (Fedorek, 2009, p. 55). The study revealed that Air Force Base X (AFBX) in fact engaged in succession planning practices such as creating 'educational partnerships', 'recruitment pipelines' and a mentorship program where retirees were the mentors and newer workers were the mentees; however, AFBX failed when it came to 'strategic alignment', 'leadership and knowledge management', and talent management. In addition, employees indicated they did not plan to leave or retire from the federal government within the next 3-5 years.

Fedorek (2009) also found that organizational leadership may not have recognized mass retirement as an issue, and may not have seen the need to further develop succession planning methods (p. 101). This idea could have negatively impacted survey outcomes. Fedorek's (2009) evaluation was based on a Likert-style survey, interviews, and 'institutional records'. Fedorek (2009) went a step further with his study by researching and providing optional resolutions to AFBX. He cited the Human Capital and Assessment Accountability Framework (HCAAF) by the Office of Personnel Management as a resolution to the lacking strategic alignment system. HCAAF is an all-inclusive human capital system that allows an agency to record strategic planning methods relevant to employees (talent management, milestones, leadership, etc.).

Shortfalls with Fredorek's (2009) research method was that the Air Force Base X was undisclosed. The initial government environment is much different than the defense environment, where war and homeland defense are of a much greater focus.

Review of Related Research

To better understand the federal workforce, one must understand the demographics that exist within the federal government. Currently, there are four generations present in the federal workforce. Cole (2010) determined the four generations currently working are: Traditionalists, those born between 1920 -1940; Baby boomers, those born between 1940 -1960; Generation Xers, those born between 1960 -1980; and, Millennials, those born between 1980 -2000 (p.50). For agencies to plan effective programming, organizations must understand characteristics associated with each generation. Based on such characteristics, Cole (2010) provided management recommendations for each generation.

In summary, Cole (2010) stated that Traditionalist were adaptive, loyal to the organization, and sociable. It was recommended that organizations allow Traditionalists to participate as trainers and mentors, offer them classroom based training, and do not demand risk taking (Cole, 2010, p. 50). Baby boomers were identified as idealist, loyal to the organization, and self-fulfilling. Cole (2010) recommended that organizations provide baby boomers with meaningful and purposeful work, create environments of involvement and participation, and encourage personal growth (p. 50). Cole (2010) stated that Generation Xers were reactive, somewhat loyal to their respective organization, and prefer autonomy. It was recommended that organizations avoid micromanaging Generation Xers, allow flexibility, and provide continuous feedback (Cole, 2010, p. 50). Finally, Millennials were identified as civic, preferred job satisfaction, yet they are not as loyal to the organization. Cole (2010) recommended that organizations offer learner-centered training, allow interactive forms of learning, and provide challenges.

Tying the understanding of generational demographics and succession planning with leadership development, Chavez (2011) provided recommendations to enhance leadership development within organizations. By recognizing the impact of baby boomer retirement, Chavez (2011) suggested that organization seek replacement candidates internally before attempting to develop leaders from outside the organization. It was also indicated that organizations create a benchmark for identifying suitable leaders to deter susceptibility to leaders that “imitate existing leadership styles” (Chavez, 2011, p. 15). Chavez (2011) recommended that organizations only consider individuals for leadership development whom are “Visionaries with, passion, courage, curiosity, and integrity; Open-minded peers who listen and learn from others; Those who are willing to take risks; Those who demonstrate longevity; Individuals respected by their peers for being value-driven, people-centric, trustworthy, humble, and authentic” (p. 15).

To ensure that individuals are suitable for positions, organizations must assess their bench strength and include non-managerial personnel. Alter (2013) interpreted this as assessing the individuals, along with their competencies, that currently exist within an organization. Once this information is comprehended, organizations must project future needs and goals and align the two to avoid developing qualifications for open positions that are difficult to meet. It was recommended that roles should be designed to meet future needs, and this too should be incorporated in succession planning. Rothwell and Pudoch (2014) believed that succession planning should go beyond executive leadership, and include non-managerial personnel, for organizational resiliency. The purpose is to ‘cultivate talent’ through development, and to enhance bench strength, for the continuity of operations. This method of inclusion is stressed to retain institutional memory that senior leadership may not be aware of (i.e. process flow, operating procedures, and task solutions). This concept is recognized by Rothwell and Pudoch (2014) as technical succession planning, where those that inform management action are the main focus.

Theoretical Construct

To examine perception and effectiveness of agency succession activities, the research took on a constructivist approach centered on an understanding of succession planning within the federal government. Succession planning occurs within a social environment (amongst personnel), and the environmental factors can influence the implementation and outcome of succession planning (Creswell, 2014). This is a Pragmatic worldview adopted from Creswell's (2014) concept which placed emphasis on outcomes from application rather than theory. The purpose of this piece was to examine "actions, situations, and consequences" of succession planning within the federal government in preparation for the departure of baby boomers (Creswell, 2014, p. 10). Secondary data such as existing case studies and succession planning literature were examined to answer the research questions discussed in the Research Methods section.

The following paragraphs describe the factors included in this qualitative research. The factors help to focus their meaning within the literature.

Succession planning in the federal government. Succession planning in the federal government is the most important aspect based on the nature of this study. Succession planning is a mechanism used to organize and structure trainings and mentorship opportunities (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). The goal of a succession plan is to ensure organizational resiliency by developing and strategically placing federal employees. In this study, succession planning was tested to determine if agencies implemented any succession plan type activities.

Official succession plan implementation. The general understanding is that agencies should develop a succession plan based on the guidance provided by the Office of Personnel Management. Official succession plans are documented with measurable goals and include high potential individuals, along with developmental opportunities (Office of Personnel Management, 2014).

Best-practice implementation. Scholars have examined succession planning within private industry. The result of the observation is the identification of several reoccurring practices that have proven succession plans to be successful. These practices include strategic talent pool management, facilitation of coaching and mentorship activities, and the assessment of job specification accuracy (Noe et el., 2013).

Identification of high potential employees. High potential employees (also referred to as high performing employees) are identified in the Succession Planning Framework (Noe et el., 2013). These are the agency identified employees that are likely to be placed into leadership positions. Organizations usually invest most of their human resources into such employees. Collins and Mellahi (2009) also noted that these employees were significant to organizational resiliency.

Training opportunities. Training opportunities are always beneficial to employees. Fenner (2005) identified that employee training was an important role in organizational functionality. However, when testing training preferences and experiences, it was noted that males and females perceived training differently. This facet was included within the study to determine if gender disparity was still prevalent. Training, which was also part of the Succession

Planning Framework, is linked to other human resource systems such as development, compensation, and performance measurement (Noe et el., 2013). Starks (2011) also indicated that organizations often cater to younger generations to groom.

Leadership development – With many vacancies occurring, organizations have an opportunity to develop employees for leadership opportunities by developing their leadership skills. Schall (1997) used her leadership succession as an opportunity to groom her peers as leaders.

Employee participation – Employees may perceive agency succession planning activities as beneficial as long as they participate. There may be factors that impede employee participation, which affect personal gain (Cole, 2010). This aspect is being considered to assess efficiency of succession programs.

Retirement eligibility and agency preparedness. Baby boomers are reaching the age of retirement eligibility. Federal employees have the option to leave between ages 46-55, with at least 20 years of service. Rucker (2002) identified that retirement eligible employees within the surveyed organization did not plan to leave the government in the short term (2 years). In addition, Rucker identified the surveyed agency did not have a large population of retirement eligible employees; therefore, the organization was not prepared for succession. This aspect is considered because agencies without a large population of baby boomers may not view succession planning as imminent; therefore, agencies put limited effort into it.

Figure 2. Theoretical construct of succession planning

Summary

The literature on succession planning within the federal government is limited. However, the available literature revealed that identification of high potential employees, training opportunities, leadership development, employee participation, and retirement eligibility are often over looked factors in succession planning. There were also indicators that disparities existed amongst gender and generations. In addition, the literature revealed that agencies may not recognize baby boomer retirement as a threat, therefore do not plan accordingly. It is important that organizations consider these factors when developing succession plans.

Research Methods

This qualitative research was driven by Collins and Mellahi's (2009) theory of strategic talent management where positions that play a vital role in the resiliency of an organization were identified along with 'high performing' individuals, and included within a 'human resource architecture' that supported organizational efficiency. Collins and Mellahi (2009) noted that within strategic talent management vulnerable positions were those that had the ability to cause a "potential or differentially impact on sustainable competitive advantage" (p. 10). The goal of this research was to examine if government agencies were implementing succession planning activities that were considered effective. The research goes further to examine the perceptions of federal employees to identify if agency implemented succession planning activities were positively or negatively received.

To examine perception and effectiveness of agency succession activities, the research utilized a content analysis, informed by an Advocacy and Participatory Worldview, centered on an understanding of succession planning within the federal government. Succession planning occurs within a social environment, and the environmental factors can influence the implementation and outcome of succession planning (Creswell, 2014). The effect on participants may result in positive or negative outcomes, which in turn impact the efficiency of federal programs. The Advocacy and Participatory Worldview adopted from Creswell's (2014) concept placed emphasis on "the needs of groups and individuals in our society that may be marginalized or disenfranchised" (p. 9). The purpose of this piece was to examine "actions, situations, and consequences" of succession planning within the federal government in preparation for the departure of baby boomers (Creswell, 2014, p. 10). Secondary data such as existing case studies and succession planning literature were examined to answer the research questions discussed below.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the inquiry into federal government succession planning practices to better understand the practices of federal agencies in preparation for the departure of baby boomers. This research study investigated the central research question: “Is the federal government proactively engaging in succession planning to prepare for the retirement of baby boomers?”

Research question one (RQ1). How is the federal government implementing succession planning activities in response to the departure of the baby boomer generation from key positions within government agencies?

Sub question one a. Have agencies identified baby boomer retirement as a threat?

Sub question one b. What types of succession planning programs and initiatives are agencies taking to prepare for the retirement of their baby boomer population?

Sub question one c. Are organizational initiatives generally considered best practice and/or effective?

Proposition one. Though the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) may recognize the need for succession planning, but limited action has taken place at the agency level to prepare for departure of baby boomers. In individual case studies the agency may consider facets of succession planning, incorporated into regular HR functions, as proactive. Agencies may operate in this manner because they do not identify the mass departure of baby boomers as a threat to their organizations. In addition, the facets of succession planning incorporated within regular human resource functions may not be considered as best practice.

Research question two (RQ2). What are the perceptions of federal employees in regards to their agency's implementation of succession planning activities, and are activities perceived to be beneficial?

Sub question two a. Do pre-retirement and promotion potential federal employees perceive the initiatives as beneficial?

Sub question two b. Have federal employees identified areas of improvement within their agency's succession plan?

Sub question two c. Are there perceived demographic disparities (gender, age, race) within agency implemented succession plans.

Proposition two. Federal employees may perceive their agency's succession planning activities as beneficial as long as they're participating in developmental trainings, mentorship activities, and work-share programs. The hands on aspect reassures the experience is positively perceived. However, those that are not participating in such activities, whether through personal choice, management choice, or lack of access to programs, may not deem succession planning activities as beneficial. In addition, the quality of the activities may influence the employee's perception. There may also be demographic indicators which affect access to programs based on political or managerial choices.

Data Source

The content utilized to investigate the research questions came in the form of documentation; case studies, trade journal articles, and organizational documentation. The research included a meta-analysis of secondary data, trade journal articles, and case studies on government agency succession planning activities. Case studies were selected due to their surveyed population, and trade journals were selected for their agency-specific data. Case studies completed at the dissertation level were preferred based on their approval by university academic boards; ensuring the data is scholarly and peer reviewed. The journal articles were selected because they were classified as scholarly and peer reviewed. Data restrictions included peer-reviewed materials from industry and scholarly journals dated within the past 12 years. The retrieved articles primarily addressed succession planning within the federal government.

The primary sources of data were the ProQuest and EBSCO databases, such as ABI/INFORM, and Business Search Premier. Keyword search terms included: *succession planning, succession planning within organizations, succession planning within the federal government, and federal succession planning*. The following are examples of search results:

> Fenner (2005). Linking succession planning to employee training: A study of federal employees.
>
> Rucker (2002). Retirement-eligible workers: A turnover study in the federal government.
>
> Starks (2011). Linking multigenerational workplace dynamics to knowledge transfer utility in the federal government sector.

Authoritative sources. Based on the limited availability of academic work focused on succession planning within the federal government, authoritative resources were utilized within this research to supplement data from case studies. Authoritative sources are credible, and often provide historical and up-to-date topic data. The authoritative source included organizational information from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). OPM is the top authoritative resource for information about succession planning within the federal government.

OPM is the governing body of human resource management for the federal government. Though the agency-specific information is limited, the organization provides a general overview of the practices and guidelines that agencies should abide by when implementing human resource management practices. OPM has a host of information available including agency guidance on succession planning programs and activities. All succession planning documentation for federal entities is publicly accessible via the OPM government website.

Ethical Considerations

This content analysis was exempt from most ethical considerations due to the exclusion of human subjects and human interaction. However, accessible content may have contained sensitive information; therefore, documents were handled appropriately. Personally identifiable information was excluded and replaced by a pseudonym (when necessary) in an effort to maintain the creditability of the research. Documents containing sensitive information were held in a secure location that was not easily accessible. All data was handled in an ethical manner.

It is important to note that the content and findings of this research will not be utilized to diminish, criticize, or devalue any party, or support a negative cause. The research intended solely to identify succession planning mechanisms within federal entities, and determine program effectiveness. Analyzed data was interpreted in a positive manner in an effort to determine opportunities for program improvement. As a precaution, the researcher has completed the National Institute of Health IRB training course for Protecting Human Research Participants.

Research Strategy

Case studies were relevant to the succession planning research topic because they occur in isolated agency environments. Case studies were chosen as the primary method of research because each case study focused on a particular agency population within a particular timeframe. Each of the case studies focused on the respective agency's succession planning activities, employees, and outcomes within a specific timeframe. The goal was to first ensure that the case studies were applicable to the research topic, and were capable of answering the research questions, in addition to providing explanations on occurrences within government agencies.

Though case studies are considered a secondary source, the original researcher has observed and surveyed the individuals within a specific organizations. The case studies provided supportive detailed data from survey instruments (Likert scale and interviews) with a focus on agency-specific data. It was determined a qualitative correlation between successful case studies was the best method to use to answer the research questions discussed above.

Data Analysis Strategy

With this research a coding scheme was created for the data found within case studies and organizational documents. By implementing this method data was sorted into participant response categories that answered the research question, or supported/nulled perceived assumptions. Understanding the difference between agency functions was taken into consideration when sorting through data. Raw data was compared and themes were analyzed during case study review by placing notes and writing memos about documents. To further categorize, Merriam's (2009) categorization methods were employed as guidance for data analysis. Merriam's (2009) methods entailed exhausting data and appropriately categorizing documents (p. 185-186). Merriam (2009) also stated that data should be managed using a coding mechanism for organization of findings.

Coding. The use of a coding schematic allowed the interpretation of reoccurring themes throughout the documentation that reflected indications of succession planning, and its effectiveness within the organization. Based on the cases examples fell under the coding schemes of demographic, morale, and career development when sorting the data. The categories included succession planning and employee training, retirement behaviors, and generational behaviors.

Coding took place at three levels: primary, secondary, and triangulation. *Descriptive coding* was used at the primary level, and was regarded as the most basic level of coding.

Descriptive coding is topic centered, rather than content centered. Meaning is derived from the topic within the context, rather than abbreviating the content (Saldana, 2013, p. 88). The secondary level of coding is *thematic coding*. According to Saldana (2013) “theming the data” is an outcome of categorization and analysis at the primary level and is a descriptive method used to summarize the data. Themes were derived using two methods; whether observation within literature, or implied within the phenomenon (Saldana, 2013). At the secondary coding level raw data derived from the primary level was categorized into groups based on its relationship to one another. This level focused on the general context such as demographics, retirement behavior, agencies lacking succession planning, etc. In addition, the secondary coding level further focused themes to centralize the data. The third level of coding, *triangulation*, was included to ensure the integrity and credibility of researcher’s data. At this level the secondary themes were compared with the descriptive codes at the primary and secondary levels to determine differences, similarities, and draw further implications.

Summary

The strategic talent management theory was the driving force into the inquiry: “Is the federal government proactively engaging in succession planning to prepare for the retirement of baby boomers?” Taking into consideration the advocacy and participatory worldview, this research was a means to not only identify succession planning practices within federal agencies, but to determine methods to improve practices based on employee feedback. To answer this question content was analyzed utilizing data acquired from case studies, trade journals, and authoritative sources. Case studies were an effective method of acquiring detailed population data. Though secondary data sources, data and material were handled in an ethical manner. Once the data was acquired, descriptive and thematic coding methods were utilized to consolidate and categorize data. Conclusions were drawn from analyzed data to further examine the phenomenon of baby boomer retirement within the federal government.

Findings

In this chapter the researcher examined the data derived from qualitative content by utilizing scholarly and peer-reviewed articles. Each article examined succession planning from a federal perspective, having occurred within the past twelve years. A multistep coding process was utilized to assess the content including: descriptive coding, thematic coding, and triangulation. This process was included to gain a better understanding of how federal agencies implemented succession planning activities, and whether or not employees deemed the activities effective.

Data Analysis Strategy

The analysis incorporated data coding methods defined by Saldana (2013) at the primary and secondary levels. The data coding method defined by Creswell (2014) is "the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text in order to develop a general meaning of each segment" (p. 227). Simply put by Merriam (2009), coding is the "tagging of any unit of data that might be relevant to the study" by categorizing the data into functional groups that ascribe meaning to emerging data (p. 200). Coding entails the researcher is capable of analyzing the content to determine the efficiency of succession program implementation within the federal government.

Specifically, descriptive coding was incorporated at the primary level to ascribe meaning to the topic within the content. Thematic coding, incorporated at the secondary level, was utilized to further categorize the raw data at the primary level into themes to examine the relationships that existed. Finally, the triangulation component was a qualitative validity strategy that allowed the researcher to gather data from various sources (at the primary and secondary levels), categorize data, and ensure emerging data was trustworthy by comparing with the raw data and initial data (Creswell, 2014).

Synopsis of Scholarly Articles

Rothwell, W. and Poduch, S. (2004). Introducing technical (not managerial) succession planning. Rothwell and Poduch examined the role of non-managerial succession planning by clarifying that succession planning was not exclusive to executive leadership. This article introduced the concept of technical succession planning, which is a mechanism for talent development with the intention of enriching organizationally experienced key people to "preserve and enhance specialized knowledge" across the non-managerial spectrum of the organizational structure. Rothwell and Poduch developed a seven-step approach to succession planning centered on organizational knowledge transfers. In addition, the authors interviewed a Human Resource Analyst at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDot) to gain further insight as to how the organization implemented the technical succession planning concept. The findings indicated that PennDot successfully developed the Position Analysis Workbook, which provided a framework for preserving organizational knowledge as a succession planning method. Though PennDot operates at the state level, the research is relevant to the federal level because it implied that succession planning should be inclusive of all staff, rather than specifically geared solely toward executive leadership.

Kim, S. (2003). Linking employee assessments to succession planning. In an effort to enhance government performance and accountability Kim suggested linking employee assessments to organizational succession planning practices. Using a Likert-scale format, this study was completed by surveying personnel at the Department of Energy –Nevada Operations Office to examine how employee assessments may be linked to succession planning in an attempt to measure employee perception of existing succession plan practices. In addition, this article further examined how the organization structured assessment procedures to include the career development facets of succession planning; i.e. training, mentorship programs, workforce diversity, etc. The findings of Kim's research proposed several concerns about diversity and inclusion of non-managerial employees. In addition, findings suggested that employee assessments should influence management decisions about succession planning. The research implied that corrective actions would not be effective unless managers changed their approach toward succession planning and how they viewed organizational structures.

Ballenstedt, B. (2008). The replacements. Ballenstedt examined the succession plan practices at the Department of Veteran Affairs- Veteran Health Administration (VHA) in an effort to reveal how government agencies dealt with the departure of baby boomers. The study took on an overview approach by tracking organizational practices. The study reflected VHA received an early start with succession planning in the 1990's, recognizing the average worker age was 48.3. The findings indicated that VHA's succession practices were incorporated into a web-based infrastructure where trainings were broadcasted, personnel actions were captured, and a communication space existed for mentors and mentees. This study implied that technically savvy individuals, or those interested in succession plan activities, were more likely to have participated.

Endres, G. and Alexander, J. (2006). Two government agencies look at succession planning. Endres and Alexander examined federal organizations that experienced brain drain due to the loss of baby-boomers. Uniquely, the researchers reviewed the practices of two government agencies, the US Department of Agriculture-Food Safety Inspection Service (USDA-FSIS), and the United States Postal Service (USPS). The study was completed by reviewing organizational responses to an Office of the Inspector General audit (USPS), and the Presidents Management Agenda (USDA-FSIS). Findings for USDA-FSIS indicated a leadership panel was created to manage the organizations development of the succession plan. As a result key employees were identified along with their leadership competencies, and trained to move into managerial positions based on an organizational leadership competency model. Findings for USPS indicated a web-based succession plan program was developed to create a framework for ‘assessment criteria, competencies, and development’. The assessment enabled the organization to place employees into one of three categories: ready-now, ready-in-one-year, and ready-in-the-future. The research implied that succession plans should be reviewed often to ensure alignment with organizational goals.

Kochanowski, Y. (2011). Human capital management in government: Replacing government retirees. Under the perception that government hiring systems were flawed, and incumbent workers were unprepared for leadership positions, Kochanowski considered a modified private sector approach to organizational knowledge transfer in an effort to identify how agencies maintained institutional memory, and how they selected upcoming leaders. Kochanowski argued that full incorporation of private sector succession planning could not exist within government entities because government practices included role transitions due to openings in other departments, federal appointments, and budget cuts that impeded agency operations. Therefore, Kochanowski recommended a five step succession planning supplemental. This study implied that having the key individuals in the right place would help a federal organization operate more efficiently.

Marbury, R and Mayer, R. (2013). Succession planning: Connecting the dots among people, budgets, and mission. Marbury and Mayer examined the relationship between human capital, budgets, and organizational mission. Survey findings indicated that human resource managers did not acknowledge organizational knowledge retention as a high priority, and federal managers were unaware of their organization's succession plan implementation. Marbury and Mayer encouraged succession plan implementation within federal organizations to avoid negative impact due to baby boomer retirement. The researchers encouraged federal entities to consider knowledge management, understanding generational cohorts along with their characteristic, and monetary impact.

Cole, I. (2010). Generational differences and succession planning policy: An examination of United States customs and border protection. Cole examined succession planning activities at the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) component to assess the succession plan activity preferences that existed amongst generational cohorts. Survey findings indicated that a succession plan existed within CBP; however, generational cohorts believed that certain aspects of the plan were more effective than others. This study also indicated that understanding the preferences of generational cohorts is an important facet in succession planning in order to make programs more effective.

Liebowitz, J. (2004). Bridging the knowledge and skills gap: Tapping federal retirees. Federal organizations were presented with the task of dealing with a skills gap in the absence of experienced baby boomers that departed from organizations to retire. Liebowitz encouraged organizations to tap into the knowledge base of retirees as a means of bridging the gap. Liebowitz recommended buyout programs, part-time reemployment, phased retirement, limited term appointment, emeritus programs, and knowledge sharing, in conjunction with retirees, as a means of filling the knowledge gap. Members of the National Institute of Standards Technology and NASA Goddard Retires and Alumni Association were surveyed to better understand preferences amongst retirees and retirement age employees. The article concluded with several recommendations which included: the suggestion that congress should pass legislation to allow agencies to reemploy annuitants, retiree inclusion in knowledge management roles, development of a retiree association for each organization, and a flexible workforce for agencies.

Bagley, T. (2008). Employee retention and succession planning for a Department of the Navy program office. Bagley examined the Department of Navy Program Executive Office – Ships, in an effort to determine if the organization complied with President Management Agenda objectives from FY2002. The purpose of this research was to uncover whether or not succession planning was incorporated in the organization's human capital practices, and if experienced employees were aware of succession plan programs. The findings from the questionnaire and survey instrument indicated the organization had an existing Strategic Workforce Plan in place, with the first course action to create a succession plan. It was misperceived by employees as a succession plan.

Marbury, R. (2012). Succession planning at executive branch federal agencies. Marbury Surveyed members of the Federal Managers Association (FMA) to determine if mid-career federal personnel participated in development opportunities that would allow them to transition into senior leadership positions after the departure of baby boomer incumbents. The population surveyed were those within FMA that identified they were employed by an executive branch department. The findings had several indications which included: managers lacking knowledge of an existing succession plan within their respective agency, the belief that employee development should begin early in the career, and acknowledgement that organizations had not identified prospect personnel to transition into key positions.

Data Analysis and Coding

Descriptive Coding. In this study the researcher utilized Saldana's (2013) descriptive coding method, which enabled the researcher to align key words with the topic of succession planning. Descriptive coding, often incorporated within qualitative analysis as the most basic level of coding, was used to clearly define the research topic within the context of the content. This was achieved my examining keywords and phrases within the content as they related solely to the topic, which assisted the researcher in developing a better understanding the topic. In this study the researcher thoroughly read each article and documented words and phrases that were aligned with succession planning methods, outcomes, and facets. Table 1 represents the descriptive codes derived from each case study, and the associated categories.

Table 1. *Descriptive coding results*

Author(s) and Article Title	Descriptive Codes	Categories	Succession Plan Components
Rothwell and Poduch. (2004). Introducing technical (not managerial) succession planning.	Bench strength, specialized knowledge, proactive, cultivating talent, efficiency, talent development, institutional memory, horizontal movement, valuable experiences, passing knowledge to successors, productivity improvement, gaining experience, process analysis, information exchange.	Operational efficiency, effective performance, knowledge community, proactive succession planning, technical succession planning, tacit knowledge, strategically important objectives, knowledge exchange, Talent development, knowledge management.	Documented knowledge transfer, mentorship programs, employee training, identification of key employees.
Kim. (2003). Linking employee assessments to succession planning.	Employee assessment, training needs, retirement plans, key strategic planning tool, employee values, employee opinions, workforce diversity, lateral job movement, near retirement.	Organizational objectives, strategic workforce plan, leadership developments, career development, organizational assessment.	Employee assessment, mentorship program organizational assessment, strategic workforce plans, training, employee development, fully qualified applicants, employee work plan.

Ballenstedt. (2008). The replacements.	Projected knowledge retention, workforce drivers, mission-critical occupations, knowledge transfer, recruiting and retention, intranet.	Workforce review, leadership, upward mobility, knowledge retention	Web trainings, documented succession plan, incorporation into strategic and operational plan, mentorship, leadership development (for younger workers), retirement plan, annual plan enhancements.
Endres and Alexander. (2006). Two government agencies look at succession planning.	Brain drain, human expertise, knowledge economy, potential successor, leadership competencies, demographics, developed committees, feedback, knowledge transfer, talent, consultants from private industry, project management fundamentals, fair, equitable, transparent, conflict resolution, consulting skills.	Strategic operational continuity, business goals, competency based, integrated into human capital development, performance accountability, career development, coaching, focus on emotional intelligence, coaching for leaders, high performance teams.	Documented succession plan, leadership competency model, succession plan evaluation, workforce assessment, web-based, executive coaching program, program evaluation, oversight.
Kochanowski. (2011). Human capital management in government: Replacing government retirees.	Brain drain, organizational memory, knowledge worker, benefits, compensation, training, upward mobility, advancement, critical positions, knowledge transition, federal and state government.	Diversity, transcend administrations, human capital management, knowledge worker classification, talent management, mentoring, individual plans.	Adjusted retirement plans, talent management, hiring practices, coaching, workforce analysis, mentorship, workforce planning, recruitment tools, benefits, workforce projection, database, monitoring, feedback, coaching, training.
Marbury and Mayer. (2013). Succession planning: Connecting the dots among people, budgets, and mission.	Perfect storm, employees unaware of succession plan, generational cohorts, generation X, generation Y, monetary cost, impact costs.	Generational cohorts, talent management.	Knowledge management, leadership training, coaching, early mentoring.
Cole, I. (2010). Generational differences and succession planning policy: An examination of United States customs and border protection.	Generational cohorts, employee benefits, retention, flexible hiring practices, bonuses, millennials, generation X, baby boomer, early boomers, traditionalist.	Demographics, generational cohorts, employee development.	Recruitment, employee development, retention, benefits package, trainings, fellowships.

Liebowitz. (2004). Bridging the knowledge and skills gap: Tapping federal retirees.	Skills gap, federal retirees, mentoring, knowledge sharing, reemployed annuitants, flexible workforce, lessons learned.	Knowledge retention, Skills gap, institutional memory.	Retirees: retirement buyouts, part-time reemployment, phased retirement, limited term appointment, mentoring, emeritus programs, knowledge sharing.
Bagley. (2008). Employee retention and succession planning for a Department of the Navy program office.	Retention, continuity of process, collective wisdom, knowledge society, continuous learning, long-term leadership education	Knowledge management	Documented succession plan activities unavailable.
Marbury. (2012). Succession planning at executive branch federal agencies.	Development, key personnel management, skill, skill gap, professional development, tenured employees, key management	Employee development, senior leadership	Details of specific succession plan activities within organizations were not available.

The category titled ‘descriptive codes’ are data retrieved directly from each of the case studies. The descriptive codes are a variation of terms mentioned by the author, or the simplified researcher’s interpretation of data. Whereas, the column titled ‘categories’ consist of raw data clustered into groups created by the researcher. The final column titled ‘succession plan components’ conveys aspects of succession planning detailed by the author within the data sets. To convey how data was acquired, the following is an excerpt from Endres and Alexander (2006):

> The Agency has established a succession planning system to identify top candidates with managerial and leadership qualities and to prepare them, through select developmental opportunities to assume as executive or managerial position in the future (p. 25).

Within this excerpt the keywords and phrases include: *established succession plan, identify top candidate, leadership qualities, development opportunities, and managerial position*. By examining data at the descriptive coding level the researcher was able to draw several conclusions. Much of the raw data, identified in the descriptive code column, was seen throughout each case study. Examples included references to diversity, knowledge, and development. These are indicators that some federal entities are not only implementing succession plans, but are going beyond to assess programs to discover how they may be improved. For example, organizations realized that certain demographics were more than likely inclined to participate or benefit from succession planning practices. Specifically, younger and less experienced personnel were typically excluded from succession plan programs because organizations practiced the concept that higher federal grade levels should be the only group to take on leadership positions. The authors argued against this practice stating that organizations would not receive the full benefit of succession planning, or achieve their anticipated outcomes if organizations did not incorporate diversity into their practices; especially with the inclusion of younger and less experienced generations (Ballenstedt, 2008; Cole, 2010; Marbury & Mayer, 2013). The groups were more likely to retain organizational knowledge, and therefore development of such individuals would positively impact organizational efficiency (Bagley, 2008; Endres & Alexander, 2006; Rothwell & Poduch, 2004). Based on these findings the researcher moved to the second level of coding, thematic coding.

Thematic Coding. The second level of coding, thematic coding, was achieved by further classifying first-level data into several categories. Clustering the categories created four emerging themes that related to succession planning: Effective Performance, Operational Efficiency, Knowledge Management, and Human Capital Management.

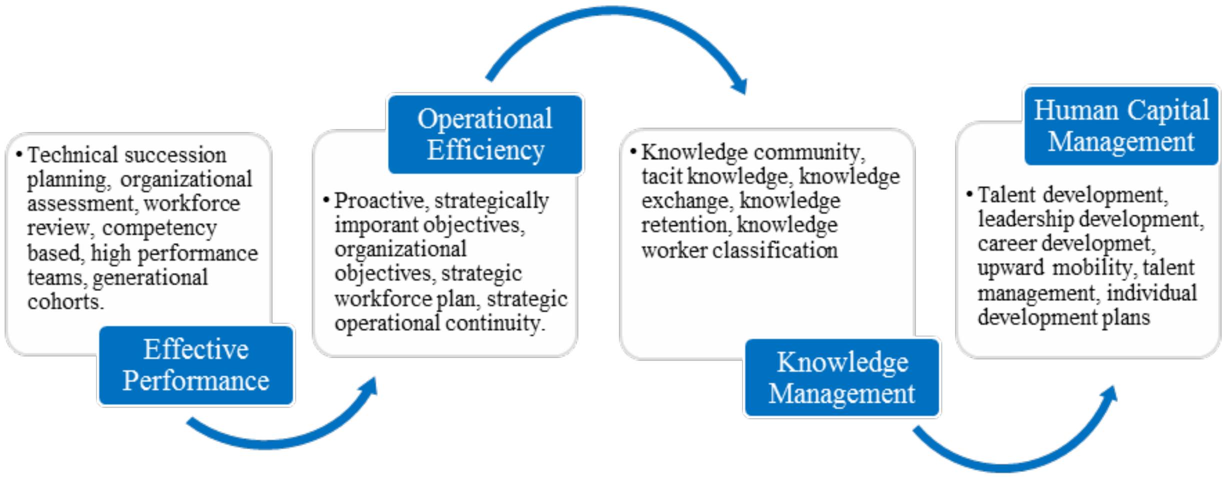

Figure 3. Thematic coding results

The theme of *Effective Performance* emerged through categories such as technical succession planning, organizational assessment, and competency. Rothwell and Poduch (2004) argued that technical succession planning, the inclusion of non-managerial personnel in succession plan programs, such as hands-on development, led to talent development and productivity improvement. Such characteristics allow government programs to operate more effectively, which led to organizations operating more efficiently (Endres and Alexander, 2006). The theme of *Operational Efficiency* emerged through categories such as proactive, organizational objectives, and strategic workforce plan. When organizations are proactive about succession plan implementation, specifically by aligning succession practices with organizational objectives, the organization as a whole operates more efficiently, with the ability to immediately fill vacancies with qualified individuals, and achieve organizational resiliency (Endres and Alexander, 2006; Kim, 2003; Rothwell & Poduch, 2004).

The theme of *Knowledge Management* emerged through categories such as knowledge community, knowledge exchange, and knowledge retention. This aspect of succession planning was considered a top priority within nearly every case study. Rothwell and Poduch (2004) noted that personnel must have tacit knowledge, an understanding of past practices to operate efficiently in future practices. This is an understanding of application, determining what previously worked in programs and what did not work. To achieve knowledge management an organization must develop knowledge communities incorporating baby boomers, incumbents, and key employees, so that an exchange in information can occur (Bagley, 2010; Ballenstedt, 2008; Marbury & Mayer, 2013). Finally, the theme of *Human Capital Management* emerged through categories such as leadership development, career development, and upward mobility. Human Capital Management, often used interchangeably with the term succession planning, encompasses management of federal personnel in all facets. Human Capital Management is the basis of succession planning, where the focus is the individual employee rather than the organization. By using mechanisms such as coaching, mentorship, competency building, and competitive benefits, organizations can develop and retain key personnel.

Triangulation. The final level of coding, triangulation, involved examining data from different sources, including the primary and secondary levels of coding. The purpose of this level of coding is to add validity to emerging information (Creswell, 2014). This entailed that the researcher compare data at each level. The data revealed from thematic coding (Effective Performance, Operational Efficiency, Knowledge Management, and Human Capital Management) are compared with emerging categories from the descriptive level of coding and the raw data.

The findings indicated that each of the emerging themes impacted one another. If personnel within an organization performed their tasks effectively, it may lead to organizations operating efficiently and meeting mission requirements. The methods personnel utilized to operate efficiently may be retained and updated accordingly as a method of knowledge management. In addition, the key personnel operating federal programs must receive trainings on the appropriate competencies required for a particular position as a method of human capital management.

Based on data from the literature review, primarily the demographics information, and the succession plan implementation section, compared with data found within the case studies; it is implied that succession planning must be made available to non-managerial, and non-leadership employees to sustain organizational resiliency. In addition, diversity must exist, and programs must be inclusive of, and beneficial to, all participants.

Summary

In this chapter the researcher examined scholarly and peer reviewed case studies and assessed data using descriptive coding, thematic coding, and triangulation. The findings indicated that data can be classified into four major themes: Effective Performance, Operational Efficiency, Knowledge Management, and Human Capital Management. The themes indicated that emerging data discussed in this chapter is valid based on comparisons with the findings and literary data. The Discussion chapter utilized the raw data and findings to answer the research questions identified in the Research Methods chapter.

Discussion

This study was conducted to gain insight into the succession planning practices of federal organizations in preparation for baby boomer retirement. The study assessed agency practices, efficiency, and employee perceptions of organizational programming. This chapter utilized the case studies and journal articles discussed in the Findings chapter to answer the research questions in an effort to determine if the federal government proactively engaged in succession planning to prepare for the retirement of baby boomers, in addition to revealing employee perceptions about succession planning.

Research Questions

Research question one (RQ1). How is the federal government implementing succession planning activities in response to the departure of the baby boomer generation from key positions within government agencies?

Sub question one a. Have agencies identified baby boomer retirement as a threat?

Sub question one b. What types of succession planning programs and initiatives are agencies taking to prepare for the retirement of their baby boomer population?

Sub question one c. Are organizational initiatives generally considered best practice and/or effective?

Proposition one. Though the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) may recognize the need for succession planning, limited action has taken place at the agency level to prepare for departure of baby boomers. In individual case studies the agency may consider facets of succession planning incorporated into regular HR functions as proactive. Agencies may operate in this manner because they do not identify the mass departure of baby boomers as a threat to their organizations. In addition, the facets of succession planning incorporated within regular HR functions may not be considered as best practice.

Table 2. *Organizational succession plan practices*

Government Organization(s)	**Succession Plan Practices**	**Author(s)**
Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT)	Documented knowledge transfer, mentorship programs, employee training, and identification of key employees.	Rothwell and Poduch. (2004).
Department of Energy – Nevada Operations Office (DOE)	Employee assessment, mentorship, organizational assessment, strategic workforce plans, training, employee development, fully qualified applicants, employee work plan.	Kim. (2003).
Department of Veteran Affairs – Veteran Health Administration (VHA)	Web trainings, documented succession plan, incorporation into strategic and operational plan, mentorship, leadership development (for younger workers), retirement plan, annual plan enhancements.	Ballenstedt. (2008).
US Department of Agriculture – Food Safety Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) / US Postal Service (USPS)	Documented succession plan, leadership competency model, succession plan evaluation, workforce assessment, web-based, executive coaching program, program evaluation, oversight committee.	Endres and Alexander. (2006).
***Office of Personnel Management, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Internal Revenue Service**	Adjusted retirement plans, talent management, hiring practices, coaching, workforce analysis, mentorship, workforce planning, recruitment tools, benefits, workforce projection, database, monitoring, feedback, coaching, and training.	Kochanowski. (2011).
***Various undisclosed Executive level departments.**	Knowledge management, leadership training, coaching, early mentoring.	Marbury and Mayer. (2013).
Department of Homeland Security – Customs and Border Protection (CBP)	Recruitment, employee development, retention, benefits package, trainings, fellowships.	Cole. (2010).
National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) / National Institute of Standards Technology (NIST)	Retirees: retirement buyouts, part-time reemployment, phased retirement, limited term appointment, mentoring, emeritus programs, knowledge sharing.	Liebowitz. (2004).
Department of Navy – Program Executive Office - Ships	Documented succession plan activities unavailable.	Bagley. (2008).
Federal Managers Association (Primarily employees from the Department of Defense and the Department of Treasury)	Details of specific succession plan activities within organizations were not available.	Marbury. (2012).

Table 2 provides a general overview of organizational practices that are discussed throughout the chapter. The table includes the organizations relevant to each study, along with organizational succession plan practices. In the cases in which a government organization is identified with an asterisk (*), the name of a specific organization was not identified, or the authors provided a general overview of government practices without aligning the practices to a particular government entity.

Baby boomer threat. Many of the agencies discussed in the findings section acknowledged baby boomer retirement as a threat to their respective organization, and took the necessary precautions to combat the negative impact. Agency stance on succession planning varied. This study reflected cases where agencies had operable succession plans in place, but findings from oversight committees deemed the plans insufficient or lacking in certain areas. Other agencies recognized baby boomer retirement as a threat and utilized guidelines from political administrations to benchmark and streamline the succession planning process. There were also cases where organizations indicated an official succession plan was not in place; however, the organization implemented human capital mechanisms to supplement succession activities.

Of the case studies reviewed, there were three organizations that completed preliminary assessments that resulted in the recognition of the baby boomer retirement threat. A study of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) confirmed the organization recognized the imminent threat of baby boomer retirement. A workforce assessment completed in the early 1990's revealed the average employee age was 48.3 years, and approximately 86,500 personnel would become eligible for retirement in 2013 (Ballenstedt, 2008, p. 11). This type of attrition also imposed a threat to the number of senior executive officials within the organization. Having this knowledge early on allowed VHA to plan accordingly by incorporating a succession plan into the organization's strategic and operational plans (Ballenstedt, 2008).

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) completed a workforce analysis before the first wave of baby boomers reached retirement age. It was revealed that retirement attrition was expedited due to comprehensive retirement package offerings. The impact was that "twenty one percent of the PennDOT workforce was eligible for retirement between July 2004 and June 2009" (Rothwell & Poduch, 2004, p. 412). In response the organization created the Position Analysis Workbook (PAW) for succession planning. In a review post-implementation, human capital officers within the organization deemed the PAW to be effective and successful.

The USDA Food Safety Inspection Service completed a workforce assessment and determined the number of GS-13's through SES positions with the ability to retire was in the seventieth percentile (Endres & Alexander, 2004). As a response to reduce the impact the agency "established a succession planning system to identify top candidates with managerial and leadership qualities and to prepare them, through select developmental opportunities to assume executive or managerial position in the future" (Endres & Alexander, 2004, p. 25). Though there were instances of success, not all organizations had a complete succession plan in place.

The assessed case studies reflected three instances of organizations working toward succession planning activities. In a survey of executive branch departments findings indicated that organizations were in the early developmental stages of succession planning (Marbury, 2012). It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of respondents within this study were personnel from the Department of Defense, and the Department of Treasury. The second study, a study of organizational practices, revealed:

> The U.S Department of Agriculture was in the process of implementing its new human capital strategic plan and has already completed a gap analysis for its mission-critical positions, initiated an executive development program and a mentoring program, and established an accountability program to assess human capital progress (Liebowitz, 2004, p. 423).

Lastly, in preparation for the attrition of nearly a quarter of employees, and 70% of SES employees, the Department of Energy – Nevada Operations Office made significant strides to strategically incorporate workforce development and succession planning into the organization's infrastructure (Kim, 2003, p. 536).

Several cases within this study indicated that personnel were unaware of their organization's practices toward succession planning, or were not kept abreast of organizational efforts. In an evaluation of practices from several organizations Marbury and Mayer (2013) acknowledged that the departure of baby boomers was somewhat the 'perfect storm'; whereas, 54% of managers were unaware that their agencies had implemented succession plan practices (p. 54). Marbury's (2012) study uncovered that several survey respondents were unaware of their organizations succession plan activities because personnel had not received information from their respective organizations, let alone a few instances reflected that managers within the organization did not support the development of a succession plan (p. 66).

In the case where employees misperceived organization actions, Bagley's (2008) study revealed a succession plan had not previously existed within the Department of Navy Program Executive Office - Ships, and was the first action item on the Strategic Workforce Plan Agenda (p. 119). However, personnel thought the organization had a succession plan in place. The parent organization, Naval Sea Systems Command, indicated the organization's human resource policy did not include appropriate succession plan components such as addressing retention and development (Bagley, 2008, p. 109). In addition, Bagley (2008) noted the Program Executive

Office – Ships, was strictly mission oriented and the workforce management plan was mission specific, rather than for the purpose of sustaining personnel. Hence, managements perceptions toward succession planning.

There were also cases where succession plan development or evaluation was influenced by oversight organizations and political agendas. Bagley (2008) cited the FY2002 Presidents Management Agenda as the driving force behind succession planning at the Department of Navy Program Executive Office – Ships. Endres and Alexander (2004) also cited the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service effort to comply with the Presidents Management Agenda from a previous administration, showing indications to comply with the political agenda. There were instances of oversight audits that assessed succession plans and identified flaws within the process. In 2007 the Government Accountability Office audited the Department of Homeland Security's Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which was cited for not developing adequate succession plan functions such as a long-term strategic workforce plan, and means for developing and retaining its existing workforce (Cole, 2010, p. 3). The second case, the US Postal Service, had their succession plan audited by the Office of the Inspector General, and was cited for having gaps within the implementation process (Endres and Alexander, 2004).

Programs and initiatives. In preparation for baby boomer retirement, organizations have taken on several initiatives to adequately prepare. The aforementioned examples include VHA's incorporation of its succession plan with its strategic plan (Ballenstedt, 2008), and PennDOT's development of the Position Analysis Workbook (Rothwell & Poduch, 2004). However, there were other initiatives implemented by various organizations. The initiatives included technology based practices, bringing retirees back to the organization, employee recruitment and retention, leadership development, and knowledge management. Each initiative was a response to a particular organizational need, or a resolution to an organization's flawed practice.

Technology is a major factor in both public and private industry, helping organizations to operate more efficiently. The Veterans Health Administration incorporated technology into its succession activities by streaming training for healthcare workers through a web infrastructure, podcasts, in-person trainings, and development of an intranet that offered a communication space for employees (Ballenstedt, 2008). The VHA's succession plan incorporated trainings, a mentorship program, employee evaluations, consideration of young employee preference, and retirement options; all of which were aligned with the organization's strategic and operational plan (Ballenstedt, 2008). With the implementation of the succession plan in 2001, VHA documented workforce projections and knowledge retention methods up until 2013, with evaluations and updates occurring on an annual basis (Ballenstedt, 2008).

It was shown that government agencies were also encouraging retirees to return to their organizations in formal and informal roles. Beginning in 2003 OPM allowed agencies to practice direct hire authority and categorical ranking to streamline the hiring process in an effort to fill vital vacant positions (Liebowitz, 2004, p. 429). Citing the Department of Defense, Defense Authorization Act as an example, Liebowitz (2004) suggested organizations allow retirees to return to employment without impacting their pension, overhauling the required civil service rule that entailed the requirement of a reduction in pension for returning workers (p. 425). Former OPM Director Kay James echoed this practice by encouraging organizations to implement buyout retirement programs if a bona fide need existed for personnel; and organizations such as the Central Intelligence Agency and the former Immigration and Naturalization followed suit (Liebowitz, 2004, p. 426). Liebowitz (2004) also indicated the practice was encouraged by oversight bodies such as the Office of Management and Budget, General Accounting Office, and the Comptroller General.

There were many re-acquirement mechanisms to allow retirees to return to an organization to work on important projects. For example, in an effort to acquire a Knowledge Management Officer NASA Goddard Space Flight Center utilized a four-year limited term appointment, in addition to creating an emeritus program, to retain a Chief Information Officer (Liebowitz, 2004, p. 429). Liebowitz (2004) also cited the Naval Research Laboratory which allowed a retired Contracting Officer, with 27 years of experience at the organization, to return as a part-time retired annuitant to assist as a subject matter expert on the development of a pre-award contracting system for Contracting Officer's Technical Representatives (p. 435).

Though re-acquirement was an effective practice, organizations were occasionally unsuccessful in reacquiring retirees. So, the recruitment and retention of individuals became very important. An often overlooked component of succession planning- recruitment, ensures that agencies offer competitive and comprehensive benefits packages that attract the demographic the organization is looking to acquire. In many instances organizations made an attempt to recruit younger individuals to sustain the knowledge base. Cole (2010) identified CPB's recruitment benefits package, like that of the rest of the government, included vacation leave, insurance, and a retirement package. But, to attract younger employees CBP determined the concern of younger workers was maintaining a work/life balance, which CPB began to market as one of the benefits of working with the organization. Though this example cited external recruitment, organizations have developed methods to enhance internal recruitment amongst existing employees for vacant and soon-to-be vacant positions.

Ongoing internal recruitment was another method to retain an adequate workforce. For example, Endres and Alexander (2006) examined the US Postal Service's creation of a comprehensive four stage recruitment process that allowed the organization to identify, select, and develop key employees: In the *Application Stage* employees were responsible for conveying experiences that were in line with organizational competencies generated by a leadership assessment (Gallup Organizations SRI index). The results allowed managers to determine if an employee qualified to be included within the succession plan as a key employee. The *Assessment and Selection Stage* consisted of Committee Officers and managers review of application information such as experience, education, competencies, and leadership assessment results to distinguish the best qualified individuals from the rest, while feedback was provided to those not selected. In the *Final Selection and Approval Stage* USPS's Executive Committee made selections based on feedback by generating the necessary approvals in a web-based system, and personnel not selected for participation within the succession plan received career management guidance. The *Developmental Stage* included career development activities that were incorporated into the selected employees work plans, and progress was tracked within the web-based system on a quarterly basis (Endres & Alexander, 2006).

Incorporating career development activities into an employee work plan was significant to building competencies and skills. The USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) set up an oversight council to monitor and assess career development within the organization's succession plan practices (Endres & Alexander, 2006). By USDA FSIS aligning its leadership development activities with the organizations leadership competency model, individual employee development plans were created for managers (Endres & Alexander, 2006, p. 28). Endres and Alexander (2006) noted that managers selected for program participation received a minimum of 15 hours of coaching from senior personnel, each paired with the individual based on level of experience. As part of the succession plan, USDA developed a New Supervisor Program, and the Leadership Assessment Development Program, which focused on expanding the skills of current employees. In addition, The USDA Legacy Program was a pilot program that provided training to organizational leaders based on existing competencies as they related to emotional intelligence (Endres & Alexander, 2006, p. 30). For stability purposes, the Transitioning Leader Program provided coaching to new managers for the first 180 days in the position (Endres & Alexander, 2006, p. 31). Each of these efforts were created to insight knowledge transfer amongst employees.

An emerging factor in this research was knowledge management. Organizations have begun to understand how significant it is to retain organizational knowledge, and to ensure that knowledge is transferred from retiring incumbents to replacement employees. These efforts were occasionally driven by a need or an anticipated increase in positions. Ballenstedt (2008) recognized the significance of knowledge management at VHA, considering the shifting workforce and the Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting that the number of available healthcare positions would receive a significant increase in 2014 (p. 11). There were many instances where organizations lost a knowledgeable individual and made efforts to reacquire the knowledge because a knowledge transfer did not take place before the retiree departed from the organization. Liebowitz (2004) cited NASA's knowledge transfer actions which included the creation of the NASA Academy of Program and Project Leadership Knowledge Sharing Initiative where workshops, forums, and discussions were held to ensure the transfer of important organizational knowledge to managers and teams, and to create "reflective practitioners" (p. 430). Rothwell and Poduch (2004) also cited the creation of PennDOT's

Position Analysis Workbook (PAW) which incorporated many of the technical succession planning components to ensure adequate knowledge transfer. PAW was considered a success for PennDOT because it served as a resource for practical knowledge of how to complete tasks, and through the process of its creation identified areas of improvement. Per the human capital officer, PAW's implementation also reduced the amount of time that newcomers were dormant and without work. Many of the example initiatives can be considered as best practice approaches based on proven success.

Best practice and effectiveness. Many of the organizations reviewed in this study implemented best practice approaches towards succession planning. However, there were facets of succession planning that were overlooked, often creating flaws within programming. Though situational and related to the respective organization, many of the researchers offered recommendations for organizations to improve in specific areas. The recommendations are specific to bringing retirees back into the workforce, adequately tracking employee progress, and enhancing human capital management.

Liebowitz's (2004) research of re-acquiring retirees revealed several indicators that influenced or impacted the return of retirees to organizations. The first impediment was a set of rules associated with civil service retirement that impacted retirement plans by reducing annuities for retirees that chose to return to work. The second impact, organizations had not made effort to retain knowledge from those retiring, nor did they maintain a relationship with the retiree that would result in access to the retiree to acquire organizational information upon request. Finally, the workforce within various organizations was considered inflexible, which translated to limiting personnel opportunities. In response Liebowitz (2004) offered the following recommendations:

> (1) Congress should pass legislation giving all agencies the authority to reemploy annuitants similar to the recent Department of Defense bill and should develop formal phased retirement programs for federal workers. (2) Federal retirees should be brought back into workforce for knowledge sharing and knowledge management roles, such as mentoring, knowledge retention, and application of key knowledge to critical problems. (3) Each federal agency or department should have a Retirees and Alumni Association to allow quick access to a talented knowledge base for filling skills and knowledge gaps. (4) The US government must have a more flexible workforce to meet ensuing human capital concerns, and the federal retirees should be an integral part of this flexible workforce (p. 436-439).

The recommendations provided by Liebowitz (2004), though specific to retirees, do not cover human capital management for the existing workforce.

Based on Kochanowski's (2011) research, a five step process was developed as a recommendation to government agencies in an effort to enhance human capital management amongst existing employees. The overview of the comprehensive plan was meant to provide a framework for practitioners to begin a succession plan: *Strategic and Tactical Plan*- Incorporated within an organizational chart, the plan should identify operation projections for the upcoming year that include programs, efforts, and services available to employees. This should also include a workforce assessment to gain an understanding of existing personnel demographics. Noting the influence of political agendas and changes in administration, Kochanowski (2011) recommended an examination of potential short-term effects and long-term effects in order to plan accordingly; *Position/Skills Inventory*- In addition to the workforce assessment, the organization must catalog the competencies amongst existing employees including time-is-service, performance evaluations, and demographics. Consolidating this information into a central location would increase the likelihood of producing capable individuals; *Workforce Plan*- Based on the strategic and technical plan outcomes, organizations would be able to compare the information for those positions in which employees anticipated retiring from to appropriately meet organizational needs; *Career Development and Succession Plan*- Based on selection of qualified employees by application of the previous steps, organizations should begin developing personnel. Development should include facets of succession planning such as training, coaching, and mentoring opportunities that would allow personnel to expand existing skills. It's important to note that plans should be specific to the individuals rather than standardized; *Feedback and Monitoring* – serving as the checks and balances component, it allows the organization to assess projections, measure anticipated outcomes and benchmarks, and make adjustments to functions as necessary (Kochanowski, 2011, pp. 95-103).

Endres and Alexander (2006) noted that findings from a 2002 Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit indicated flaws in USPS's succession plan tracking mechanism for employee progress, lacked identification of impact on minorities, and failed to adequately monitor costs (p. 24). OIG recommended USPS generate a system to track data, in addition to assessing data for employees that may replace retirees and those that depart from the organization due to attrition. This prompted the organization to implement a committee that developed a web-based succession plan program. Under the assumption of a best practice approach the program was to be transparent, equitable in cost and fairness, in addition to serving as framework for assessment criteria, competencies, and development (p. 25). USPS's succession plan was centered on the following facets:

> (1) Provide a link to the overall business strategy, use technology to facilitate the process, (2) Engage in succession management activities below the executive level, (3) Have a structured, formalized approach to managing succession activities and use a wide array of tools and techniques, (4) Evaluate employees

> using core competencies, (5) Ensure that specific and individualized development plans are in place, (6) Engage in active learning by placing high-potentials across the organization and in special job assignments, (7) Use the three main readiness indicators (ready-now, ready-in-one-year, and ready-in-the-future) as decision-making guides for assigning development, (8) Provide some form of coaching, (9) Employ qualitative and quantitative measures to ensure that the succession management process is on track (p. 25).

Adequately tracking employee progress is significant to human capital management. Rothwell and Poduch (2004) made the argument that technical succession planning ensured continuity of operations by having the right information available to the right people at the right time, which in turn served as the framework for potential efficiency (p. 409). Where general succession practices are focused on executive leadership and managers, technical succession planning is focused on the resiliency of non-managerial personnel that complete everyday tasks to sustain organizational function. The technical succession planning framework described by Rothwell and Poduch (2004) included the following:

> (1) *Make the commitment*: Making the transfer of organizational knowledge an objective before the departure of key individuals;
> (2) *Clarify what work processes are key to the agency's mission*: structure processes and anticipated outcomes;
> (3) *Clarify who possess specialized knowledge about those work processes gained from experience*: Develop an understanding of employee work assignments, and identify those with relevant expertise;
> (4) *Clarify how those work processes are performed by those possessing specialized knowledge*: Document employee methods and resolutions to issues they may face. There are conventional and unconventional methods to document information including employee desktop operation manuals, storytelling, developing flowcharts, mentorship programs, and on-the-job training;

(5) *Capture and distill the specialized knowledge about those work processes that are possessed by those possessing specialized knowledge*: Develop a synopsis for each method, or a problem-solution scenario;

(6) *Consider how to maintain and transmit specialized knowledge and who needs it to ensure the efficient and effective continuity of operations*: Develop a formal means of capturing data such as cataloging, training programs, and brown bag lunch sessions to present information;

(7) *Continuously assess knowledge gaps, evaluate the action strategies taken to address them, and the results achieved*: Utilize the formal process to assess individual understanding of workflow processes and organizational knowledge. Make improvements when necessary, and evaluate outcomes (pp. 409-410).

In summary, this section examined how the federal government has implemented succession planning activities in response to baby boomer retirement. To be effective, organizations must have first recognized baby boomer retirement as a threat and respond accordingly. This includes the incorporation of a succession plan that is aligned with an organization's human resource infrastructure and strategic plan. Organizations also implemented initiatives that included bringing retirees back to the organization, adequate employee recruitment and retention, and knowledge management. Though a few organizational practices were flawed, several cases recommended effective ways to re-acquire retirees, adequately track employee progress, and enhance human capital management.

Research question two (RQ2). What are the perceptions of federal employees in regards to their agency's implementation of succession planning activities, and are activities perceived to be beneficial?

Sub question two a. Do pre-retirement and promotion potential federal employees perceive the initiatives as beneficial?

Sub question two b. Have federal employees identified areas of improvement within their agency's succession plan?

Sub question two c. Are there perceived demographic disparities (gender, age, race) within agency implemented succession plans.

Proposition two. Federal employees may perceive their agencies succession planning activities as beneficial as long as they are participating in developmental trainings, mentorship activities, and work-share programs. The hands on aspect reassures the experience is positively perceived. However, those that are not participating in such activities, whether through personal choice, management choice or lack of access to programs, may not deem succession planning activities as beneficial. In addition, the quality of the activities may influence the employee's perception. There may also be demographic indicators which affect access to programs based on political or managerial choices.

Perception of federal employees. Programs implemented by organizations discussed within the Findings Section rarely indicated employee perceptions. However, there were two minor cases based on personnel perception, one focused on generation demographics, and the other focused on retirees. In a survey of generational cohorts, Cole (2010) indicated Millennials and Generation Xers were more likely satisfied with pay over other benefits such as leave and work-life programs. The same generations were also more likely to 'sacrifice' professional advancement opportunities, and preferred flexible work environments to gain a better work-life balance (Cole, 2010, p. 209). In relation to retirees, Liebowitz (2004) survey findings implied that ninety-one percent of National Institute of Standards Technology (NIST) and NASA retirees would consider working part-time, fifty-six percent considered coming back to the organization in a mentorship role, and thirty-five percent were willing to participate in knowledge capture activities (p. 432). Of the program options the top three preferences amongst retirees were phased retirement, retiree job bank participation, and emeritus programs (Liebowitz, 2004, p. 432).

Areas of improvement. There were two cases where employees identified areas of improvement within NIST, NASA, and DOE – Nevada Operations Office. Liebowitz (2004) survey findings indicated that retirement aged employees of NIST and NASA identified several factors that influenced their decision to not return to an organization:

> "The main obstacles that frequently surfaced [that would potentially impede retirees returning to their respective organizations] in the responses were pay limitations, budget limitations, turnover of upper management (which reduces the continuity with the retiree), political infighting, lack of desire to share power, egos of those remaining/power structure of the organization, perceived competition with younger people in line for promotion, difficulty in maintaining currency when not fully engaged, senior management support and commitment (unclear to management it's worth the cost and the effort), high salary expectations of many retirees, red tape, and promotion expectations of remaining staff members"(p. 432).

This list represents areas of improvement within NIST and NASA. These flaws are indicators that organizational change has to occur to improve succession plan practices in relation to retirees.

In the results from Kim's (2003) survey responses from personnel at the Department of Energy – Nevada Operation Office (DOE/NV), the assumption was that the mentorship program and succession planning activities may be reserved, or specifically marketed to higher level personnel. The assumption was made because 76.3% of survey respondents believed that lower grades, specifically those at the GS-13 and GS-15 levels, should be included in succession planning activities, and only 31.7% believed the succession planning programming was available to all employees (p. 540). However, 67.1% of respondents believed that workforce diversity was incorporated into succession planning programs (p. 540). Additional t-test indicators reflected significance in several areas of participation. Those that participated in activities more than likely had a positive perception of career development ($p<.001$), support for career development ($p<.05$), and due-diligence on promotion timing ($p<.001$); whereas non-participants believed their skills were underutilized ($p<.05$), and believed performance assessments were unfair ($p<.05$) (p. 541). In relation to the effectiveness of the mentorship program, one of DOE/NV's major succession plan components, only 27% of respondents believed it to be effective (p. 540). Employee responses yield improvement in many areas including succession plan inclusion, diversity, and improvement of the mentorship program.

Demographic disparities. There were indications of demographic disparities within the Customs and Border Protection, and DOE/NV. CBP indicated disparities amongst generations, while DOE/NV indicated disparities amongst gender. Cole's (2010) study of the Customs and Border Protection had significant findings amongst generational cohorts:

> (1) Early boomers and Traditionalist believed their organization was less likely to hire individuals with the appropriate skills and experience (p. 210);
> (2) Millennials and Generation Xers believed that their supervisors could do better job at providing constructive feedback in employee evaluations (p. 220);
> (3) Early boomers and Traditionalist believed CPB could improve the way training needs were assessed, competency development opportunities, and increasing available leadership opportunities (p. 221);
> (4) Millennials and Generation Xers did not believe that supervisors supported a work/life balance, let alone life outside of work. Early boomers and Traditionalist believed their talents were underutilized (p. 231).

Kim's (2003) survey of DOE/NV was given to respondents ranging from GS-12 to SES. In addition to the collection of demographic data, the questionnaire focused on career development, mentorship programs, employee skills, diversity, and retirement plans. T-test results for perception based on gender differences reflected statistical significance where males felt their skills were underutilized within their current positions ($p < .05$); whereas, females were more likely to participate in self-improvement initiatives and professional growth opportunities such as workshops and conferences ($p < .10$) (p. 538). This gender correlation is representative of participation in succession planning activities at 94.4% female participation concentrated at the GS-14 through SES levels, and 64% male participation at GS-14 through SES levels; Specifically relating to the agency mentorship program 43% of female respondents participation and 27% of male respondent participation, with a remaining 34% expressing interest in participation (p.539). Kim's (2003) study results showed that male respondents were more likely to retire within a 5 year period than their female counterparts (p. 542). More importantly, the majority of male respondents anticipated retiring within 3 years. The survey responses are significant because they may provide indicators as to how to structure programming to retain organizational knowledge. In this case, for example, a mentorship or shadowing program may include the pairing of senior level male personnel with lower-grade female personnel to retain organizational knowledge.

Conclusions

For this study the overarching research question was: "Is the federal government proactively engaging in succession planning to prepare for the retirement of baby boomers?" The answer: yes, federal agencies are generally engaging in succession plan practices to prepare for the exodus of baby boomers; but, that does not come without some reservation. Prior to the findings of this study, it was believed that organizations had only incorporated some functions of succession planning into their human resource infrastructure on the grounds that baby boomer retirement was not a recognized threat. The research implied that many organizations recognized baby boomer retirement as a threat based on the outcome of workforce assessments (Ballenstedt, 2008; Endres & Alexander, 2004; Liebowitz, 2004). Succession planning proactivity was also prompted by audit findings from oversight organizations such as the Office of the Inspector General, and Government Accountability Office (Bagley, 2008; Cole, 2010; Endres & Alexander, 2004). The findings indicated that several organizations had official succession plans in place, while others had incorporated some succession plan functions into the human capital component of the human resource infrastructure.

Though specific organizational initiatives varied, the empirical research indicated a proactive approach. There were cases where organizations documented succession plans, such as PennDOT with the Position Analysis Workbook (Rothwell & Poduch, 2004), and the VHA with the succession plan's alignment to organization's strategic plan (Ballenstedt, 2008). Several organizations incorporated short term and long term approaches to succession planning (Cole, 2010; Kochanowski, 2011). However, organizational approaches to succession planning varied. VHA and USDA FSIS took an eGovernment route and developed a web-based infrastructure to track and monitor succession plan activities (Ballenstedt, 2008; Endres & Alexander, 2006). While Liebowitz (2004) approached succession planning with the intention of altering civil service retirement regulations to retain organizational knowledge by utilizing retirees and building retiree networks. Kochanowski (2011) recommended creating plans that were specific to individuals, rather than mission driven as mentioned in Bagley's (2008) research. While Kim (2003) and Rothwell and Poduch (2004) suggested the inclusion of all employees, including non-managerial, that play a role in organizational operations, in addition to tracking individual employee progress.

There were indicators within the findings that reflected the flawed approach of many organizations. There were inferences in Liebowitz's (2004) case study that identified retiree re-acquirement can only be effective if civil service and retirement regulations were eased so that returning retirees are not penalized financially for choosing to return to the organization. In relation to knowledge transfers, Kochanowski (2011) responded to the organizational gap by recommending a simple knowledge management outline, which entailed identifying position competencies, creating a skills inventory, and creating individual workforce plans that included developmental opportunities such as coaching and training. While Rothwell and Poduch (2004) stressed the importance of having the right people in the right place at the right time by developing a system of checks and balances for succession planning.

Prior to the findings it was also believed that only employees participating in succession plan activities would perceive the overall plan to be beneficial, and quality of programming would impact employee perceptions. The case studies provided limited information about employee perception, but indicating that differences existed amongst age demographics (Cole, 2010). There were also minor indications about gender preferences, specifically males feeling underutilized, and females preferring self-improvement initiatives. However, the literature in the area of gender demographics revealed the glass ceiling concept may negatively impact female perceptions of succession plan programs, with Fenner (2005) indicating female employees felt as though they did not have enough support from their senior leadership to participate.

There are still unknowns based on the evidence, meaning that further research is required. Though an overview of succession practices was provided for several organizations, the specificity of the practices remain unclear. For example, details about how organizations implement coaching activities, how organizations complete leadership development, if the practices implemented are the best approach for the organization's environment, etc. Acquiring this information may have been achieved through interviews or succession plan program evaluation.

Emerging information exist within the empirical research. Further evaluation of the data revealed four areas that impact succession planning within the federal environment: Strategic Plan, Human Capital Management, Generational Cohorts, and Knowledge Management. First, the research indicated that aligning the succession plan with organizational goals would help streamline the process. Ballenstedt (2008) indicated the alignment would allow organizations to remain mission driven and plan programs according to the mission. Second, Human Capital Management is the heart of succession planning. Human Capital Management consists of managing the workforce by identifying skills and competencies need for roles, and ensuring that employees have access to developmental opportunities. But, to ensure that opportunities are effective, organizations must understand the characteristics of existing generational cohorts in the public sector. Understanding the characteristics allow organizations to plan and create adequate programs that are considered effective. Finally, Knowledge Management is the driving force behind succession planning. Baby boomer retirement remains a threat as long as organizational knowledge is retained by older employees. Nearly all case studies mentioned the importance of incorporating some form of knowledge management into organizational practices (Ballenstedt, 2008; Endres & Alexander, 2006; Liebowitz, 2004; Rothwell & Poduch, 2004). For organizations to improve succession program efficiency, each component must be considered in the development of succession activities. Each of the aforementioned facets is intertwined with one another, collectively impacting federal succession planning.

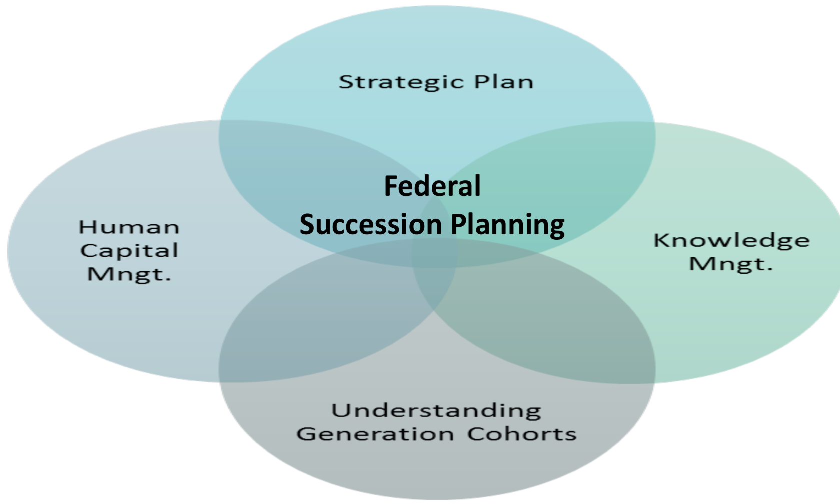

Figure 4. Federal succession planning approach

Recommendations and Implications

This findings of this study infer federal entities should do a better job at creating and implementing succession programs. Though a succession plan outline of best practices exist (Noe et el., 2013), a standard best practice approach detailing activities such as mentorships, training, etc., cannot be applied to every organization. Each organization must understand the demographics and preferences of its existing workforce to implement programs that are suitable and beneficial to employees. This will in turn enhance organization programming and overall efficiency.

The research and analysis from this study may be used to support future succession studies or considered within the development of a best practice outline. The analysis within this study may be applied to organizations with an existing succession plan, and those that are within the developmental stage. The research indicated that it is important to consider generational cohorts, knowledge management, human capital management, and alignment of the succession plan with the organization's strategic plan. Therefore, it is recommended that federal organizations consider this approach in an effort to ensure effective performance and operational efficiency.

The time limitation to complete this study yielded the inclusion of only ten case studies and scholarly journal articles. It is important to note that the research was exhausted based on the fact that database searches repeatedly reported the same resources. In addition, there were many cases where the scholars cited one another within their respective research. However, it is recommended that further research be conducted to investigate current succession planning practices of federal entities, and evaluate whether or not practices are beneficial to employees within the federal environment. This is recommended because the research provided limited detail about employee perceptions linked to succession planning. This might have been corrected with interviews, rather than Likert scale questionnaires and yes or no questions. The findings and the literature did not imply specific areas of improvement, but indications within the cases identified flawed practices and perceptions. Also, the findings did not indicate disparities based on race, but minor gender and age disparities were revealed. This data may be supplemented by the information found in the literature review.

Summary

The federal government has been impacted by baby boomer retirement. The solution, succession planning. Succession planning, often utilized in both public and private industry, is an important mechanism that contributes to organizational resiliency. When succession planning has not been incorporated within an organization's human resource infrastructure, and aligned with the organizations strategic plan, the organization may not be able to recoup from loss of key employees. The collateral damage is that organizational knowledge is lost. The purpose of this research was to identify whether or not federal organizations were implementing succession plans, and if succession plan activities were positively received by government employees. Based on the available literature, succession plans should include official plan implementation with a best practice approach, identification of high potential employees, training opportunities, and leadership development opportunities. These functions are impacted by employee participation, retirement eligibility, and organizational preparedness.

This research, driven by Collins and Mellahi's (2009) theory of strategic talent management, was focused on retrieving organizational data that would reveal employee perception and agency effectiveness in an effort to answer the question: "Is the federal government proactively engaging in succession planning to prepare for the retirement of baby boomers?" This was achieved through the review of scholarly material such as case studies within dissertations and trade journals. It was proposed that limited organizational action had taken place, and only certain aspects of human capital functions were in place. In addition, it was believed that federal employees would only have a positive perception of practices as long as they were included in programming.

The data retrieved from the case studies was assessed by utilizing descriptive coding, thematic coding, and triangulation. The findings indicated four emerging themes: Effective Performance, Operational Efficiency, Knowledge Management, and Human Capital Management. The themes implied that succession plan programs should not be exclusive, and must include employees that play a functional role within the organization. However, research question responses indicated the following: (1) Generally speaking, government agencies responded to baby boomer retirement threat after workforce assessments were completed; (2) Several agencies had implemented succession plans or human capital initiatives; (3) Programs need to be further developed; and (4) Government agencies must understand generational characteristics and perception to better plan programming efforts. The emerging data within this research implied that if the Strategic Plan, Human Capital Management, Generational Cohorts, and Knowledge Management functions were considered when planning programs, federal succession plans would be more efficient.

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