SUCCESSION PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: DEVELOPING FUTURE LEADERS

by

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Abstract

Succession planning and situational leadership are two concepts that have yet to be explored in the same study as a strategy to address the significant challenge of employee turnover in the federal government. Retirements, an aspect of employee turnover, can have a negative impact on federal agencies if leaders are not well prepared to fill vacant positions. The use of a descriptive quantitative research design in this study allowed statistical data to be analyzed using means and frequencies. As no study has been conducted to determine the correlation between succession planning and situational leadership, a survey was created, and a pilot study was used to determine the validity and reliability of that survey.

Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to all my friends, family, and mentors. Many individuals have supported and motivated me to complete this challenging degree. I am blessed to have had such an inspirational group of individuals who wanted to see me succeed.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge God. He has been my rock throughout this entire process. When I thought I would not make it through, God blessed me with the right people to inspire and motivate me to keep going.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the problem the government will face when many employees reach retirement and vacate their positions. Chapter 1 comprises 12 sections, including: (a) the background of the study, (b) a problem statement, (c) the purpose of the study, (d) research questions, (e) the conceptual framework for the study, (f) the nature of the study, (g) definitions, (h) assumptions, (i) scope and delimitations, (j) limitations, (k) significance, and (l) a summary.

Introduction to the Problem

A report produced by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) indicated 34% of federal employees, or 583,965 individuals, would be eligible to retire by the year 2020 (Goldenkoff, 2017). This 34% decrease in the workforce could mean federal agencies will lose intellectual knowledge and experience a critical number of vacancies. It also means that even if the personnel shortage is not a concern today, it can still happen soon. If leaders of federal agencies do not prepare for this wave of retirements, there may very well be gaps in the number of persons needed to fulfill their missions. These gaps can occur in mission-critical occupations (MCOs), or job positions that are critical to the operations of federal agencies. By strategically monitoring and managing employee turnover, particularly retirement eligibility, and through succession planning, leaders of federal agencies may prevent these gaps (Goldenkoff, 2017; Miller, 2016).

A decrease in personnel can have a negative impact on federal agencies and their success in achieving their missions. Factors such as the workforce expansion between the 1960s and 1970s have led to increased competition between the private and nonprofit

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sectors in terms of talent (Goodman et al., 2015). Because of the massive number of federal agencies, the focus in this study was narrowed to the Veterans Administration (VA), specifically the Office of Information and Technology information technology (IT) MCOs. According to a report from the GAO:

> The use of information technology (IT) is crucial to helping VA effectively serve the nation's veterans. The department annually spends billions of dollars on its information systems and assets—VA's budget for IT now exceeds $4 billion annually. However, over many years, VA has experienced challenges in managing its IT projects and programs, raising questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of OI&T and its ability to deliver intended outcomes needed to help advance the department's mission. (Harris, 2019, p. 1)

Business leaders are responsible for planning to fill future positions. As their organizations expand, more pressure is placed on them to ensure they have fully trained employees (Ballaro & Polk, 2017). In comparison to the private sector, federal agencies have a larger population of employees who are eligible for retirement, which will affect their public service capabilities (Colley, 2014). However, private sector organizations such as Nike, Disney, and Microsoft are well known for emphasizing succession planning and internal talent development (Cavanaugh, 2017).

Leaders of federal agencies rarely engage in succession planning because of the guidelines of the civil service system. These guidelines stress that employees must have the knowledge, skills, and experience needed to get a promotion to a position with higher responsibilities. Leaders of federal agencies must ensure employees compete for positions and are proficient in their jobs. However, agency leaders can solve the leadership development challenges caused by employee retirements through thoughtful planning (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007; Trahant et al., 2007).

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Background

Leaders play an essential role in leading their followers to help fulfill their organizations' goals. Leadership is not particularly about the leader. It involves the behaviors of those involved in leadership and the circumstances of different situations (Brooks & Chapman, 2018). The act of leading has not been tied to any particular job position, but rather to individuals' behaviors (Fiaz et al., 2017; Kesting et al., 2016). Any efforts made by leaders of federal agencies to succeed are meaningless if leadership development is ignored and personnel are inadequately prepared to take on leadership roles. Overlooking the opportunity to resolve agency training gaps can disrupt employees' transition into positions that require more responsibility (Collins & Collins, 2007). Leaders of federal agencies should recognize this to succeed in a complex economy and have well-trained employees. They can do so by identifying future vacant positions that have been defined as MCOs (i.e., occupations that are critical to the operations of federal agencies; Saadat & Eskandari, 2016).

With the threat of a massive wave of retirements, federal leaders should focus on retirement eligibility and the potential vacancies retirements will create. They can then use this information to determine the focus for their succession planning efforts (Green et al., 2017; Martins & Meyer, 2012). With this potential wave of retirements, leaders of federal agencies should consider implementing leadership development programs to ensure they can fill MCO vacancies.

Problem Statement

The number of retirements that will occur from 2020 to 2025 will harm the capabilities of federal agencies to provide services because of the possible severe and

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sudden loss of knowledge and personnel. If this occurs, then the ability of public sector organizations to provide public service may decrease (Colley, 2014). Some leaders are opposed to succession planning because they perceive it to generate false expectations. Those who are opposed believe they do not always get the desired promotion when employees are developed. However, the main objective within succession planning is to create a surplus of employees who have been developed for the next level of their careers (Colley, 2014; González, 2013).

Federal agencies benefit by having more developed employees instead of an insufficient number of developed employees (González, 2013). Leaders of federal agencies continue to be concerned with the retirement possibilities of current leaders. Some employees who qualify for retirement are still working because they are experiencing financial difficulties. When the economic conditions improve, the expected wave of retirements may occur, causing a surplus of vacant positions. Nevertheless, leaders of many agencies are ill-prepared for changes in employees' long-term development at all levels (Rothwell, 2011). Agency leaders are confronting a variety of leadership development challenges, including an aging workforce. Conger and Fulmer (2003) found research evidence that those challenges can be overcome by integrating leadership development and succession planning (Groves, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover the concepts of succession planning and situational leadership in relation to the projected wave of retirements as well as developing future leaders. To date, no study has integrated these concepts to help agency leaders be better prepared to fill vacant positions. The current study was designed to

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explore this gap with the VA, particularly with its IT positions, because these positions are critical not only to the mission of the VA but to that of many federal agencies. Agency leaders need to create a surplus of trained personnel with the potential to fill these vacancies. However, many are struggling to do so (Arora, 2014). Federal agencies benefit more from a surplus of developed employees than a high number of underdeveloped employees (González, 2013).

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

RQ1. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, what are the best leadership behaviors for entry-level, intermediate-level, advanced-level, and expert-level employees?

RQ2. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is a leadership development program an effective method for developing future leaders?

RQ3. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is knowledge transfer an effective strategy for federal agencies to develop their workforce?

RQ4. Based on the agency's employment data evaluation, what percentage of VA employees in IT positions are eligible for retirement within the next 2 years?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Previous researchers, such as Denker et al. (2015), Marbury (2012), and Zuleger (2016), discovered that there was a correlation between succession planning and leadership development. However, few researchers have evaluated succession planning efforts in conjunction with a leadership development program. Succession planning

allows for an agency's leaders to evaluate employee turnover. In doing so, these leaders will be able to discover what positions will be vacant in the future.

Knowledge management becomes critical, because a succession plan should include a way for retiring personnel to transfer knowledge to new personnel. One way this transfer of knowledge can occur is through the use of knowledge management strategies within leadership development programs. To address the need for leadership development training, the situational leadership model II (SLM-II) may serve as a model for leaders to further develop their subordinates. The conceptual framework is explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The current study's key variables were: (a) the participants' preferences for leadership behaviors, (b) perceptions of leadership development, (c) knowledge transfer, and (d) retirement eligibility. This study was guided by a quantitative research method using a descriptive research design, which allowed for the use of two data sets to examine the correlation between succession planning and situational leadership. The first data set was information gained through a survey involving the perceptions of subject matter experts (SMEs). The second data set was secondary data representing published employment data for the VA. These data allowed for the analysis of information to determine what leadership vacancies the agency may have within the next within the next 2 years (i.e., 2020–2022). Additional information regarding the methodology is discussed in Chapter 3.

<center>**Definitions**</center>

Employee turnover: Loss of personnel (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016).

Knowledge transfer: A process that involves transferring knowledge from one individual or source to another (Schmidt & Muehlfeld, 2017).

Leadership development: The process of development, which encompasses multiple individuals, such as followers, leaders, and teams (Day et al., 2014).

Office of Personnel Management (OPM): A federal agency responsible for personnel policymaking for the entire federal government (OPM, n.d.).

Situational leadership model II (SLM-II): A leadership model that can be used in any organization or agency and at all levels. It contains an emphasis on the task and relationships with people (Ali, 2017).

Subject matter expert (SME): An individual with a particular set of skills, experience, and knowledge within a specified field (Hopkins & Unger, 2017).

Succession planning: A system used to identify the future needs for organizational talent. This system allows leaders to be better prepared for contingencies (Kochanowski, 2011).

<center>**Assumptions**</center>

The first assumption was potential biases were eliminated by the online survey link being sent to employees' email addresses instead of the survey being conducted via face-to-face interactions. Another assumption was the secondary employment data provided by FedScope were gathered via effective strategies and processes.

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Scope and Delimitations

One delimitation related to the fact that succession planning involves many components, and not all components of succession planning were explored in the study. For this study, the focus was on employee turnover, and specifically on predicting future vacancies based on retirement eligibility. The other aspects of succession planning included in the study were knowledge transfer and leadership development. Individuals without specialized skills, experience, and knowledge in leadership development could not participate as they were not considered SMEs. The sample was limited to VA employees within the Office of Information and Technology who had specialized skills, experience, and leadership development knowledge.

Limitations

No in-person contact with the participants occurred during the study. This limited the researcher from asking follow up questions.

Significance

One significant contribution of this research is strategies to prepare leaders of federal agencies to fill vacancies within areas identified as MCOs. Another contribution of this study is raised awareness of the preferred leadership behaviors within the SLM-II and the determination of whether leadership development programs should incorporate these behaviors for future personnel.

Summary

This chapter contained an introduction to the problem, the background of the study, a problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, limitations, and significance. Chapter 2 reflects an

extensive review of the literature in the areas of succession planning, leadership

development, and situational leadership.

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CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this study was to explore the concepts of succession planning and situational leadership behaviors. This chapter is divided into five sections: (a) the literature search strategy, (b) conceptual framework, (v) key variables and concepts, and (e) a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted by examining academic journals, including the *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, the *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, and the *Journal of Leadership Studies*. The key terms used were succession planning, employee turnover, knowledge transfer, leadership development, and the situational leadership model-II.

Conceptual Framework

The key concepts of this study were succession planning and situational leadership behaviors. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the framework begins with succession planning. *Succession planning* involves agency leaders identifying the retirement eligibility of personnel and how many vacancies they will need to fill in the future. This connects to the concept of *knowledge management* and the transfer of knowledge from one employee to the next. The framework is completed with *situational leadership*, which is when leaders display behaviors that can aid in personnel development.

These concepts have been applied and articulated in previous research studies. Research evidence indicates that many successful agency leaders overcome the challenges shown in this study by integrating leadership development and succession

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planning concepts. Bank of America, Sonoco Products, and Dow Chemical are examples of organizations with leaders who have preferred to use a long-term approach to develop and manage talent within their organizations (Groves, 2007).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework
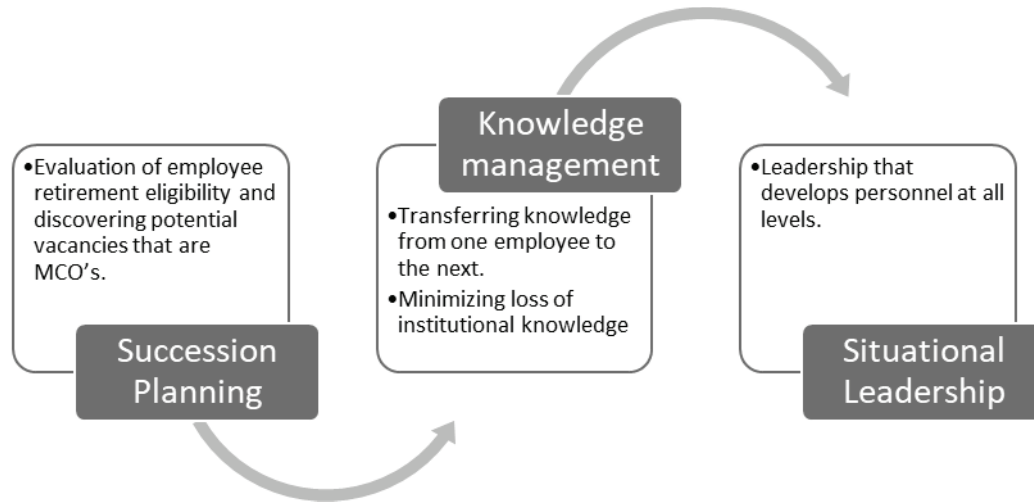
Key Variables and Concepts

Succession planning goes beyond the creation of a guiding document, becoming a continuous plan that enables agency leaders to be adequately prepared to fill vacant leadership positions by incorporating an assessment process that involves analyzing organizations and employees (Calareso, 2013). Before an employee's exit, planning for succession is a proactive approach to ensure leadership within the agency is not disrupted (Van Vactor, 2011). The purpose of succession planning is to ensure the agency has the employees needed to contribute to positive organizational effectiveness outcomes (Barnett & Davis, 2008).

The SLM-II serves as a guide for agency leaders to lead and develop others, which can be achieved by using different leadership behaviors for employees at different

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proficiency levels. Blanchard et al. (1993) explicitly declared the SLM-II a practical model that can be used rather than a theory (Graeff, 1997). Succession plans are the core of leadership development and are considered critical strategies, because they enhance the ability of agency leaders to facilitate transitions while maintaining productivity levels (Kim, 2012). Developing a clear connection between succession plans and leadership development is necessary. In doing so, agency leaders will be focused on the competencies needed to fill leadership positions and a leadership process that can aid in development (Leskiw & Singh, 2007).

Leadership development goes beyond enhancing individual effectiveness and should expand beyond individuals by involving the entire agency. The primary objective of development is to develop as many employees as possible (González, 2013; Roberts, 2015). To replace unoccupied positions and close competency gaps, agency leaders must exploit the benefits of succession planning. Doing so while considering leadership development is not well understood (Mehrabani & Mohamad, 2015). An analysis of an agency's current state can give an agency's leaders a sense of what leadership positions they will have to plan for in terms of employee retirement eligibility. The development of knowledge management strategies, along with leadership development program analysis, can aid in the creation of a succession plan.

Succession Planning

Succession planning involves selecting and training employees for future leadership positions and retaining potential leaders or talented individuals through the use of developmental opportunities (Lin-Ching & McLean, 2011). Kasper, 2008 defined succession planning as a plan or process an organization's leaders develop to meet

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critical employment needs. Succession planning is frequently used in the private sector and is rarely employed in the public sector (Jarrell & Pewitt, 2007). Over time, leaders have refined the concept to meet their mission. This process should be used to identify employee turnover, future vacant positions, and other measures based on agency needs (Fulmer et al., 2009; Nissan & Eder, 2017). Succession planning enables leaders to focus on developing employees who may take on more responsibilities in the future (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

By engaging in this process, leaders can ensure they have qualified staff as needed. This can typically be done through leadership development programs (Patidar et al., 2016). The plan should be designed to meet the agency's future needs and be linked to the strategic plan. Current leaders should be actively involved by participating in the planning process and making decisions. The plan should allow for flexibility and improvement (Barnett & Davis, 2008).

Barnett and Davis (2008) surveyed leaders in over 900 organizations regarding their perceptions of their succession plans. Of those surveyed, 34% of the leaders did not trust the effectiveness of their succession plans. This percentage corresponded with the low confidence levels revealed when leaders were asked to report on their succession plans (Barnett & Davis, 2008).

Succession planning helps to diminish gaps in personnel needs, as the goal is to create a talent pool from which to select leaders at various levels when a vacancy occurs (Cavanaugh, 2017). It also assists current agency leaders with providing opportunities for employees to enhance their competencies to fill anticipated gaps. In the public sector, gaps in competencies can hinder the government from serving the public and attaining

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results (Chaturvedi, 2016; Goldenkoff, 2017). Agencies have competency gaps for a variety of reasons, one of which is personnel lacking the appropriate competencies or abilities needed to accomplish their work. Another reason is the potential increase in the number of personnel who intend to retire, thus producing gaps in institutional knowledge and creating more vacancies (Goldenkoff, 2017; Jones, 2015).

Voluntary employee turnover occurs when an employee decides to exit an agency. If personnel loss is not strategically planned for and observed, it can be the basis for gaps to develop in both leadership and institutional knowledge (Goldenkoff, 2017). An agency is at risk of decreased productivity when it has vacant positions (Cho & Lewis, 2012). A predictor of employee turnover is employee intentions (Wim et al., 2004). Those employees who receive some form of development tend to have lower intentions to leave the agency, as well as high levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Cho & Lewis, 2012). When an employee perceives their agency's performance appraisal systems to be fair and accurate, it reduces turnover intention (Cho & Lewis, 2012). A significant aspect of voluntary employee turnover is an employee's decision to retire.

Retirements have a negative impacted on the vital experience and knowledge needed among the workforce (McKinnon, 2010). The number of employees who are expected to retire each year will fluctuate depending on the agency. This trend can lead to a lack of agency knowledge and trained personnel entering these agencies may not be fully prepared to step up to leadership positions (Kochanowski, 2011).

High turnover rates are a challenge that is also occurring in the private sector and an indicator that businesses in both sectors will be competing for talent (Ng et al., 2016).

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Business leaders who work in government sectors will face higher employee turnover rates without succession plans (Ballaro & Polk, 2017).

If agency leaders meticulously plan their personnel, they will already have developed employees who can be promoted or hired into vacant positions. The GAO indicated gaps in competencies would prevent federal agencies from executing their missions. Retirements will lead to yet more shortages of personnel (Datt & Rivera, 2013). To address this issue, agency leaders should engage in knowledge management to ensure employees have the knowledge they need to assist with achieving the agency's mission.

Knowledge Management

Knowledge is considered essential within all organizations because it can provide a foundation for organizational operations (Abhishek & Divyashree, 2019). *Knowledge management* involves the process of creating value from intangible assets and is perceived to be the creation of knowledge (Hussain et al., 2019) using a mixture of different concepts that have been borrowed from several areas of intelligence (Wickramasinghe, 2003). Knowledge management relates to finding ways to store, interpret, create, and distribute knowledge (Palacios-Marques et al., 2011).

Knowledge can be classified into two different categories. *Explicit knowledge* is stored, shared, and codified in various written or electronic forms (Nold, 2012). *Tacit knowledge* has not been written down but has been confined in the minds of people. Tacit knowledge can be shared depending on the willingness of the individual. For this type of knowledge to be distributed among employees, they must be willing to share what they know (Carson et al., 2004; Nold, 2012). Professionals best gain knowledge using formal education and learning within their agencies (Hitt et al., 2001). After completing formal

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education, professionals begin their careers with the expectation of learning through organizational development. Ultimately, employees further their development, because they transfer their explicit knowledge derived from formal training to the agency and then build on their tacit knowledge through experience (Hitt et al., 2001). Knowledge transfer includes all actions that allow individuals to disclose their knowledge (Perez-Soltero et al., 2019).

A critical component of an agency's succession plan is knowledge transfer efforts. Knowledge transfer can be facilitated through cross-training, rotational assignments, and sharing best practices (Helton & Jackson, 2007). Rapidly changing workforce demographics and agency changes increase the possibility that agencies will lose some of their institutional knowledge (Helton & Jackson, 2007). Leaders of government agencies are challenged with maintaining knowledge of prior processes and results (Kochanowski, 2011). As agency leaders assess their succession plans, they will understand the competency gaps that will exist by knowing the future vacant positions and the competencies needed to fill these positions.

The loss of institutional knowledge can make agencies more vulnerable in difficult economic times. Every agency has the risk of losing vital knowledge when a retirement occurs, with increased concern about the knowledge that will be lost when employees exit an agency. Changing workplace demographics, such as the aging workforce, lead to unprecedented knowledge retention issues (Martins & Meyer, 2012). Within the next within the next 2 years (i.e., 2020–2022), the rapidly aging workforce will result in the loss of institutional knowledge. If agencies fail to retain knowledge, agency leaders will not be able to keep the knowledge of past experiences and may have

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to reinvent the wheel to solve agency issues (Martins & Meyer, 2012). A strategy for agency leaders to retain this knowledge is through leadership development programs and leadership behaviors.

Situational Leadership

Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) original work was built on Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1958) seminal work concerning a range of leadership behaviors. The original SLM was contingent on the relationships between task behaviors and relationship behaviors. The model involved four leadership behaviors of directing, selling, participating, and delegating (Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Graeff, 1997; Lynch, 2015). The SLM has undergone cosmetic changes in the sense that some labels of the model have been renamed. Blanchard et al. (1993) revised the language in the model and renamed the model the SLM-II. The term "maturity level of a subordinate" was changed to "development level of a subordinate." The components of development were identified as "competence" and "commitment" as opposed to "willingness" and "ability." The SLM-II contains a focus on the interaction between a leader's behaviors and the developmental levels of subordinates. This modification of the model also included renaming the four leadership behaviors as coaching, supporting, delegating, and directing (Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Gozukara, 2016; Graeff, 1997; Lynch et al., 2011). This model supports the need for flexibility by allowing leaders to use different leadership behaviors with different subordinates. A major tenet within situational leadership is that different situations require different leadership behaviors (Berg & Karlsen, 2016; Gozukara, 2016).

Avery and Ryan (2002) acknowledged that many researchers and academics had criticized the SLM-II because it lacked a theoretical basis. They also acknowledged that

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the SLM-II is problematic for determining some research outcomes because of the changing measurement instruments over time (Avery & Ryan, 2002). Given the paucity of research into the SLM-II, their study was exploratory. Avery and Ryan surveyed 17 managers who had been in SL-II training and had used the model in practice. In Avery and Ryan's study, all respondents pointed out the SLM-II was an easy-to-use tool because of its practicality and flexibility, as well as being easy to remember and effective. Avery and Ryan claimed they did not have any reports of difficulty with the model, and the success stories they received were plentiful. Avery and Ryan concluded their respondents proclaimed the model to be a valuable management tool, because it provides a framework for how to manage people. The managers who participated in Avery and Ryan's study conveyed no extreme difficulty in determining subordinates' developmental levels. Avery and Ryan believed further research was needed around the concept of subordinates' development.

Impact of situational leadership on an agency. Talented employees are the foundation of the public sector. It is essential to develop them to reach their full potential. Developing employees has been viewed as a critical challenge for leaders when they are strategically planning. Scholars have determined leaders should continuously attempt to improve their employees' skills and capabilities (Ingraham et al., 2000; Memon et al., 2009). A lack of skills is a disservice to the employee who will have to make informed daily operational decisions while in a leadership role (Garavan et al., 2001).

Understanding leadership behaviors in the public sector is a vital issue (Mohamed & Bakri, 2019). Situational leadership enables leaders to modify their behaviors to suit their subordinates instead of using just one approach. It allows leaders to recognize that

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new needs will arise (Walls, 2019). Situational leadership can guide leaders to empower and transform their followers into high-performing employees (Perna, 2016). Not every employee requires the same type of leadership. With this leadership model, no single method is used to influence the behaviors of individuals. The choice of leadership behavior is based on the task at hand and the situations that arise (Hersey et al., 1982).

Leadership behaviors. The four leadership behaviors result from combining low- and high-supportive behaviors with low- and high-directing behaviors and then conforming them to subordinates' developmental needs. Leaders have two different leadership behaviors: directive and supportive. Under *directive behavior*, leaders are responsible for giving subordinates direction and monitoring their status. Leaders make the decisions regarding what tasks need to be done and when they should be completed. The complexity of tasks can vary. *Supportive leadership behavior* is determined by the leaders communicating, encouraging, recognizing, and listening. The behavior is based on trust, understanding, and openness. The different degrees and combinations of these behaviors represent four different leadership behaviors (H. E. Ali et al., 2018; Irgens, 1995; Lynch, 2015). Different situations may occur that require different leadership behaviors, and leaders will have to decide which is most appropriate for their subordinates (Silverthorne & Wang, 2001).

Leadership behavior 1: Directing. The *directing* dimension involves low-supportive and high-directive leadership behaviors. At this level, the subordinate should be a beginner and have not developed the competencies needed to do the job. The communication that occurs with this leadership behavior is one-way, as the leader communicates specific instructions on how and when to perform the task. The leader also

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carefully monitors the subordinate to ensure the tasks are being completed. The leader helps the subordinate by demonstrating real-life work experiences and by providing direction and close supervision (Luo & Liu, 2014; Lynch, 2015; Lynch et al., 2011).

Leadership behavior 2: Coaching. The *coaching* leadership behavior ensures the subordinate receives both high-directing and high-supporting leadership behaviors. With this behavior, the leader takes on a coaching role and seeks ideas and suggestions from the subordinate. This leadership behavior allows the subordinate to build confidence while working alongside the leader to get guidance and clarification on the task. Although the leader has full control over decision making, this leadership behavior allows for two-way communication (Luo & Liu, 2014; Lynch, 2015; Lynch et al., 2011).

Leadership behavior 3: Supporting. *Supporting* leadership behavior involves low-directing and high-supporting leadership behavior. This behavior allows the leader to provide more support than direction to the subordinate, fostering collaboration between the subordinate and the leader. It allows the leader to support the subordinate's decision-making abilities and empower them to realize their full potential. The leader's primary role is to facilitate decision making and problem-solving (Luo & Liu, 2014; Lynch, 2015; Lynch et al., 2011).

Leadership behavior 4: Delegating. *Delegating* leadership behavior has both low-directing and low-supporting leadership behaviors. Delegation refers to getting the task done through others. Delegation involves collaboration between the subordinate and the leader when a task is assigned. This leadership behavior enables the leader to be involved in decision-making and problem-solving, with low support or supervision. This leadership behavior allows the subordinate to demonstrate both competence and

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commitment. In addition, the subordinate can take responsibility to make decisions and implement those decisions. The leader should recognize the subordinate's achievements and challenge the subordinate to be more innovative (Brown & Barker, 2001; Luo & Liu, 2014; Lynch, 2015).

Leadership development. A benefit of the SLM-II is that it can contribute to leadership development. Day (2000) noted the distinction between developing leaders and developing leadership. *Leader development* has a focus on developing individual leaders, whereas *leadership development* focuses on the process of development and encompasses multiple individuals, such as followers, leaders, and teams. As the 21st century approached, leadership researchers emphasized leadership skills that can be obtained through the process of development (Day et al., 2014).

A study was conducted with the Human Capital Institute and the University of North Carolina. In this study, results showed 85% of respondents believed there to be a sense of urgency in leadership development. The senior leaders who responded to this study were concerned their employees with high potential might not have the ability to meet the future needs of the business. The SLM-II has been widely adopted as a model for leadership development and behavior (Johansen, 1990; Phillips et al., 2016). Leadership behavior should shift with the changes that occur with a subordinate's competence and commitment (Avery & Ryan, 2002).

Commitment. Previous researchers (Chen, 2004; Dale & Fox, 2008; Lok & Crawford, 1999, 2004; Rowden, 2000) have claimed subordinates' commitment levels are influenced by leadership behaviors (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Commitment can be affected in a positive way if subordinates perceive their competencies are reasonably

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assessed (Sanı et al., 2016). In the SLM-II, "commitment" replaced the term

"willingness" to avoid misinterpretation. *Commitment* references an individual's

motivation and confidence in their performance of a task without supervision, or the

extent to which subordinates trust themselves to work independently (Avery & Ryan,

2002; Lynch et al., 2011). Commitment has a positive correlation with many favorable

work outcomes. This is the force behind an agency's overall performance and is also

related to increased motivation and employee satisfaction. In addition, other researchers

have specified that decreased commitment can negatively affect turnover rates (Yahaya

& Ebrahim, 2016). A committed workforce is a critical factor that can help agency

leaders achieve the agency's goals. A committed workforce is significant because

employees have fewer intentions to leave the agency (Fiaz et al., 2017).

  Competency. In addition to introducing the term "commitment" as opposed to

"willingness," the term "ability" was replaced with the term "competence." *Competency*

refers to both the skills and knowledge of the subordinates that are developed after they

obtain the leadership behaviors they need from their leaders (Lynch et al., 2011).

Blanchard et al. (1985) stated knowledge and skills are expanded through training.

Leadership competencies are critical, because they give direction, are measurable, and

can be learned. Competent leaders emphasize quality improvement and strategies as well

as motivate and empower their subordinates. They also have interpersonal skills that

enable them to bring the best out of people. In addition, they increase their capability for

team building, developing employees, motivating subordinates, and communicating

sharing a vision (Das et al., 2011; Graeff, 1997). Competencies have been identified as

sources of data related to employees' qualifications, which are essential for training and

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development, performance evaluations, and career development. Competencies distinguishes high performance from average performance and helps leaders identify employee potential (Sanı et al., 2016).

Expectations of employees at various grade levels. The General Schedule (GS) pay system covers the majority of white-collar civilian federal employee professions. According to the standards, within the system, leaders of each agency are accountable for categorizing positions and compensating employees based on OPM and legal principles (OPM, 2017). Agency leaders also establish the grade of each position based on the level of qualification, difficulty, and responsibility required (OPM, 2017). The Department of Energy (DOE) has further defined the proficiency levels identified by the OPM. These levels reflect the proficiency an employee should have at different grades in conjunction with identified skills. The proficiency level should reflect a progression from awareness to more advanced achievement as employees develop in their careers. The objective of this correlation between grade level and proficiency is to develop individuals to be more competent (Department of Energy, 2012).

At the *awareness level*, grades 1–4, extensive direction is required as a result of the employee having limited understanding and skills. At this level, the employee should have a predominant focus on learning. At the *basic level*, grades 5–8, experiences are gained through on-the-job training, classrooms, or experimental situations. The employee must have extensive support and direction. At the *intermediate level*, grades 9–12, an employee should complete the task with less direction from the leader but more support. At the *advanced level*, grades 13–14, the employee should be able to perform without any

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assistance and be capable of coaching others. In addition, this employee would be responsible for providing new ideas and making decisions (Department of Energy, 2012).

Summary

Succession planning is a critical tool needed to reduce the time and effort agency leaders will be required to spend to fill vacancies with qualified employees at all levels (Rothwell & Poduch, 2004). When agency leaders are involved in this type of planning, they can identify and develop strategies to reduce or eliminate anticipated or current gaps created by vacant positions (Van Vactor, 2011). Research conducted on succession planning in government agencies has been scarce and has tended to focus on work plans developed years ago. The financial, in 2007, crisis has required agency leaders to concentrate on reductions in force with hiring freezes, attrition, and furloughs, causing less attention to be given to succession planning. It has also caused leadership development to become a low priority, which indicates leaders of federal agencies are not embracing methods to further leadership development (Kochanowski, 2011).

Emerging trends emphasize the crucial need to invest in leadership development. Much has been written in the literature pertaining to leadership development methods and practices. Such a framework needs to be applied to agencies to fill in leadership gaps (Leskiw & Singh, 2007). Employees are in high demand, and because not all agencies have the funding to hire new employees, agency leaders are attempting to develop their employees internally. In addition, organizational leaders are now recognizing the need for leadership development efforts in the early career stages of high performing employees (Gusain, 2017). Leadership is increasingly becoming a scarce resource due to the shortages in many organizations. Traditionally, leadership development has focused on

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the highest echelons of an organization. However, in response to a complex economy and workforce, it has become clear that leadership is valuable at every level (Goldberg, 2017).

Employees may be promoted to future vacant positions without being prepared for their new role as a leader. If employees have excellent technical skills, it may justify why they would be promoted. However, technical skills do not always convey that an employee has leadership capabilities. A significant number of high-performing employees tend to be overwhelmed in their new leadership positions because they lack leadership training (Collins & Collins, 2007).

The SLM-II has been specified as having a vital role in agency training (Silverthorne & Wang, 2001). Ken Blanchard operates a training organization that focuses on the SLM-II and has helped train leaders in many top organizations. Two examples of those organizations are Gap, Inc. and LensCrafters. Leaders at Gap surveyed direct reports of those who attended SL training and found significant improvement in training areas (Brown & Barker, 2001). Leaders at LensCrafters also conducted a study regarding the success of the Situational Leadership training and store profits. They discovered managers scored high in monitoring performance and feedback. In addition to this success, they had higher sales profits (Brown & Barker, 2001). Hambleton and Gumpert (1982) researched situational leadership and determined that when leaders apply this model appropriately, their subordinates will have higher performance levels than when the model has not been applied appropriately (Johansen, 1990).

The current study was conducted in an attempt to fill the gap in the literature that pertains to succession planning and leadership development primarily by gaining the

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perceptions held by employees who have been identified as SMEs. This insight enabled an analysis of relationships and trends to help close this gap. Ultimately, this study contributes to the leadership community by providing recommendations on preparing future leaders for vacant positions with a higher level of responsibility. Chapter 3 provides more insight into the study's methodology.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter orients the reader to the methodology used to conduct this study. A full discussion of the research design contains information regarding the use of quantitative research within the study. Subsequently, thorough discussions of the population, sampling procedures, pilot study, secondary data, data instrument, data analysis plan, threats to validity, and ethical procedures are included in this chapter.

Research Design

The present study's independent variables were the participants' (a) preferences of leadership behaviors, (b) perceptions of leadership development, and (c) knowledge transfer. The dependent variable was the retirement eligibility of employees in the VA who were in IT job positions. A descriptive research design was used to explore the concepts of succession planning and situational leadership. Descriptive research is designed to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. With this type of research, survey tools and observation are used to gather data. This type of research involves the use of percentages, averages, and other analyses to determine relationships (Nassaji, 2015). This research design answered the research questions by describing the quantitative data shown from the survey results and public employment data provided by FedScope. Descriptive quantitative research allows for advancements in existing knowledge in the leadership community (Nassaji, 2015). The new data shown in this study enhanced the leadership community's knowledge of the conceptual frameworks that were used.

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<center>**Methodology**</center>

This section describes the methodology used in the current study. These include population, sampling and sampling procedures, procedures, pilot study, secondary data, and operationalization.

Population

The target population for this research was individuals identified as SMEs in the area of leadership development who worked in the Office of Information and Technology at the VA. These participants had to have specialized skills, experience, and knowledge in leadership development to be identified as SMEs (Hopkins & Unger, 2017).

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

The sample was limited to employees within the Office of Information and Technology at the VA. The secondary data sample was solely based on IT positions and age groups. The target sample size was 60 SMEs. Non-probability sampling was needed to gain all perceptions of the SMEs in this department. These employees were directly involved in creating and implementing the leadership development program for IT employees. This type of sampling is best for exploratory research (Alvi, 2016).

Procedures **for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Participants received an invitation to participate via email that included information regarding the study and the survey link used to respond to the survey questions. The use of web-based data collection tools has increased in light of the speed with which researchers can collect data and their cost-effectiveness (Lesser et al., 2016). The participants gave consent by answering the first question of the survey. To ensure the participants were SMEs, they had to answer two questions. The survey was voluntary,

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and if participants did not wish their responses to be used in the study, they could opt out of the survey.

Pilot **S**tudy

A pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the survey. The pilot study participants were responsible for designing the IT Workforce Development Department's leadership development program in the VA. These individuals reviewed each of the questions related to the key variables of leadership behaviors, leadership development, and knowledge transfer. They also reviewed two questions about the qualifications of those who answered the final survey. Once the survey had been tested for validity and reliability, the survey was used with those who were responsible for instructing the leadership development program for the IT Workforce Development Department.

Secondary **Data**

FedScope data were the secondary data set for the present study. These employment data are published quarterly. FedScope allows customers such as federal agencies, the media, researchers, and the public to access employment data (FedScope, 2018). Thus, no permissions were necessary to gain access to the data. FedScope is a database that allows any user to analyze human resources data from the Office of Personnel Management's Enterprise Human Resources Integration-Statistical Data Mart (EHRI-SDM; FedScope, 2018).

This information system's primary purpose is to support the statistical analysis of various federal personnel management programs, including succession planning. These data provided current information on the VA regarding the number of emplyees in IT and

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their age ranges (FedScope, 2018). The purpose of gathering these data was to extract the information needed to predict future IT vacancies in 2020.

Operationalization

Four variables were identified in this study. Averages, percentages, and other employed analyses were used to help determine relationships.

Variable 1: Participants' perceptions of leadership behaviors. This variable was used to measure the best leadership behaviors for entry-level, intermediate-level, advanced-level, and expert-level employees. The variable was measured by asking the participants to answer three questions.

Variable 2: Leadership development. This variable was used to measure effective methods for developing leaders in the federal government, the benefits of leadership development programs, and the perspectives of those in non-leadership positions. The variable was measured by asking the participants to answer five questions.

Variable 3: Knowledge transfer. The purpose of this variable was to measure perceptions of transferring knowledge and strategies of transferring knowledge. The variable was measured by asking the participants to answer two questions.

Variable 4: Retirement eligibility. This variable's purpose was to measure what leadership positions may be vacated within the next 2 years because of retirements. The variable was measured using employment data in FedScope.

<center>**Data Analysis Plan**</center>

The data analysis method was quantitative. Quantitative methods are used to recognize and separate variables within a study to discover correlations and relationships. This type of data analysis is non-statistical. Importance is placed on numerical data that

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are collected under controlled conditions. This contributes to ruling out the possibility that other variables will account for the correlations or relationships the researcher is attempting to identify (Park & Park, 2016). Secondary data analysis encompasses the use of quantitative data derived from previous research. Formal data sharing permits researchers to access data stored in public archives, and they can be re-used in secondary research (Heaton, 2008).

The first data set was an online survey issued through SurveyMonkey to employees who were SMEs in leadership development. SurveyMonkey allowed data to be tracked based on real-time responses. This data collection platform enabled participants to answer web questions from their personal computers and web devices. SurveyMonkey allows researchers to retrieve reports to analyze the various data collected and export the data into SPSS software.

The SPSS software enabled the researcher to use two descriptive statistical tools: frequencies and means described in percentages. The percentages were used to help to explain the statistical analysis of the data, and the frequencies provided insight into the number of participants who selected a survey answer choice (Mmaduabuchi et al., 2016; Nassaji, 2015; Shiati et al., 2014). These data were used to answer the following research questions:

RQ₁. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, what are the best leadership behaviors for entry-level, intermediate-level, advanced-level, and expert-level employees?

RQ₂. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is a leadership development program an effective method for developing future leaders?

RQ₃. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is knowledge transfer an effective strategy for federal agencies to develop their workforce?

The second set of data was quantitative data gained from FedScope, which reflected secondary data. Secondary data analysis encompasses quantitative data derived from previous research that are re-used in a new study. This style of analysis can be used to explore new research questions. Formal data sharing permits researchers to access data stored in public archives, and they can be re-used in secondary research (Heaton, 2008). After the data were collected from the surveys, the FedScope data were then analyzed. FedScope allowed for the identification of vacant leadership positions within the agency to answer the following research question:

RQ₄. Based on the agency's employment data evaluation, what percentage of VA employees in IT positions are eligible for retirement within the next 2 years?

This data analysis plan allowed for new and existing knowledge in the leadership community to be advanced. The new data shown in this study will enhance the leadership community's knowledge of the study's concepts.

Threats to Validity

A threat to validity would have been participants not being SMEs. However, to prevent this threat, two survey questions were created based on Hopkins and Unger's (2017) definition of a SME to ensure the participants were SMEs. In terms of quantitative data, the OPM retrieves and publishes data from each agency. Data that are submitted and do not meet the minimum requirements are rejected. Agencies are held responsible for submitting data corrections (FedScope, 2018).

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Ethical Procedures

This study was not conducted until approval was received from both Keiser University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the dissertation committee. Neither data set included personal identifying information, thus eliminating the possibility of identifying individual employees. Participants were aware their participation in the study would not produce any compensation and their participation was voluntary.

Summary

This descriptive research study involved the use of two data sets to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the results of the pilot study and the results of the study. In addition, the chapter contains information regarding the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of the present study was to discover the gap between succession planning and situational leadership with the VA, particularly as it applies to IT positions, because these positions are critical not only to the mission of the VA but to the missions of many federal agencies. This study was designed to answer the subsequent research questions:

RQ1. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, what are the best leadership behaviors for entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level employees?

RQ2. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is a leadership development program an effective method for developing future leaders?

RQ3. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is knowledge transfer an effective strategy for federal agencies to develop their workforce?

RQ4. Based on the agency's employment data evaluation, what percentage of VA employees in IT positions are eligible for retirement within the next 2 years?

This chapter is composed of three major sections, including information regarding the pilot study, data collection, and results. Included are answers to the survey questions.

Pilot Study

The purpose of the first data source was to measure SMEs' perceptions regarding situational leadership behaviors, leadership development, and knowledge transfer. A pilot study was used to determine the validity and reliability of the 14-question survey. Inter-rater reliability was used to measure the consistency between all of the independent raters. Kappa values are the values calculated by the percentage of agreement that occurs

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between all the raters (Bhattacherjee, 2012). McHugh (2012) provided guidelines for interpreting Cohen's kappa values for inter-rater reliability: "Values ≤ 0 as indicating no agreement, 0.01–0.20 as none to slight, 0.21–0.40 as fair, 0.41–0.60 as moderate, 0.61–0.80 as substantial, and 0.81–1.00 as an almost perfect agreement" (p.276. The recommended agreement between raters is 80% (McHugh, 2012).

Content validity was used to assess how well the categories matched the content domain (Bhattacherjee, 2012). The participants were asked to offer their perspectives on four constructs: (a) participant qualifications, (b) situational leadership, (c) leadership development, and (d) knowledge management. For each construct, the number of SMEs who gave a rating of either a 3 or a 4 was divided by the total number of SMEs. The Content Validity Index (CVI) average, which was used to determine validity, emphasized the average of the content quality instead of the SMEs' average performance. For the construct to be considered valid, it had to rate 78% or above (Shrotryia & Dhanda, 2019).

Pilot Study Results

The pilot study was sent to 10 individuals who were responsible for designing leadership development programs within the Office of Information and Technology at the VA. The study yielded a 40% response rate. The pilot study was divided into four sections: (a) participant qualifications, (b) situational leadership, (c) leadership development, and (d) knowledge management. Kappa values were used for reliability, and the CVI was used to determine the survey's validity. The first category, participant qualifications, received a kappa value of .67 and a CVI value of 100%.This category was considered to have substantial reliability and to be valid. However, many participants suggested defining what specialized skills and knowledge would make the survey more

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reliable. Therefore, the wording "to include developing, designing, and delivering leadership development programs" was added to Questions 2 and 3.

The second category, situational leadership, received a kappa value of .33 and a CVI value of 0%. The reliability for this category was considered fair, and this section was not regarded as valid. For Questions 4 through 7, the participants suggested that, to make the survey questions more reliable and valid, the different levels of positions should be clarified. This was done, and a note was added to elaborate on the federal general schedule pay grade levels for each position. In addition, participants believed the word "best" should be replaced with a word that was not subjective. The word "best" was then changed to "most effective" in all questions within this section.

The third category, leadership development, received a kappa value of 1.00 and a CVI value of 67%. This section was considered as having almost perfect reliability but was not valid. Again, participants believed the word "best" should be replaced with a word that was not subjective. In Question 9, this wording was changed to "most effective."

The fourth category, knowledge transfer, received a kappa value of .67 and a CVI value of 67%. This section was substantially reliable but not valid. To make the survey more valid, participants suggested the word "best" should be changed. This change was made in Question 14.

The changes made based on the results of the pilot study had no impact on the data analysis strategies or data collection, though some wording in the questions was altered. However, that did not change what the survey questions were intended to measure, as they were simply more defined for the participants. Once the pilot study was

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completed, the updated survey was sent to Keiser University's IRB board for additional approval. The updated survey was approved, and data collection began.

Data Collection

A descriptive research design allowed for an exploration of leadership development and knowledge management, two concepts of succession planning, and situational leadership. The current study involved the use of two quantitative data sets to answer all research questions. The first set of quantitative data was gathered through participant responses to a 14-item survey hosted by SurveyMonkey. The survey results were analyzed with SPSS software and shown using descriptive statistics, which included frequencies and means represented by percentages to describe participant responses. Additionally, frequency distribution tables and graphs were used to provide a graphic visualization of the data.

Results

A survey link was sent to VA employees, and participants were provided 3 weeks to complete the survey. A total of 55 instructors received the survey, and 32 instructors responded, reflecting a response rate of 58%.
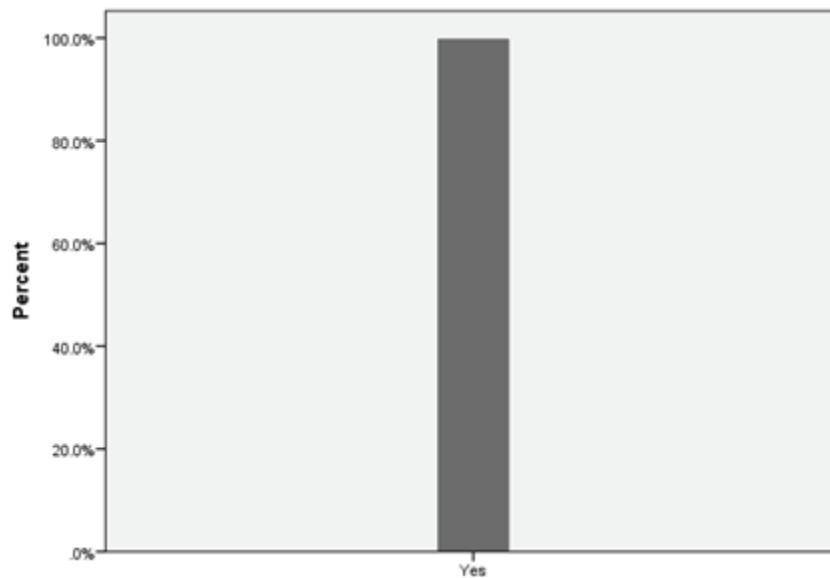
Survey Question 1

In Survey Question 1, participants were asked whether they consented to participate in the study. Those who declined participation in the survey were not able to continue. However, out of the 55 participants who received the survey, 100% agreed to participate, and their results were analyzed.

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Survey Question 2

This question was used to ensure participants were considered SMEs. Participants were asked the following question: Do you have specialized skills and knowledge in leadership development, including developing, designing, and delivering leadership development programs? As depicted in Figure 2, all participants agreed they had specialized skills and leadership development knowledge.

Figure 2

Specialized Skills and Knowledge

Survey Question 3

This survey question was used to examine the years of experience the participants had in leadership development. Participants were asked the following question regarding their experience: How many years of experience do you have in the field of leadership development to include developing, designing, and delivering leadership development programs? Results are displayed in Table 1.

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Table 1

Experience in the Field of Leadership Development

Experience	*n*	%
1–2 years	7	21.9
3–4 years	6	18.8
5–9 years	9	28.1
10 years or more	10	31.3

The majority of the instructors had an experience level of 10 years or more (31.3%), followed by instructors with 5–9 years (28.1%) and 3–4 years of experience (18.8%).

Survey Questions 4 through 7 were used to answer Research Question 1. These questions pertained to the key variable of situational leadership.

Survey Question 4

Participants were asked the following question regarding entry-level positions and situational leadership behaviors: Based on the content provided on situational leadership, in this section, and on your experience with leadership development, which leadership behavior would be most effective for entry-level positions? Note: Entry-level positions are typically grades 5–8. Results are depicted in Figure 3.

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Figure 3

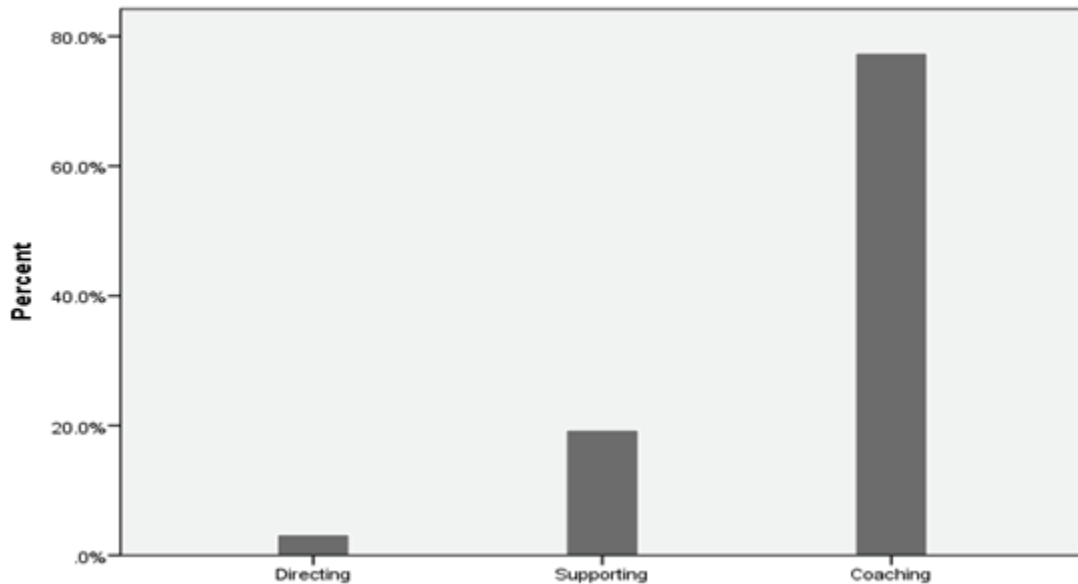*Leadership Behaviors Effective for Entry-Level Positions*
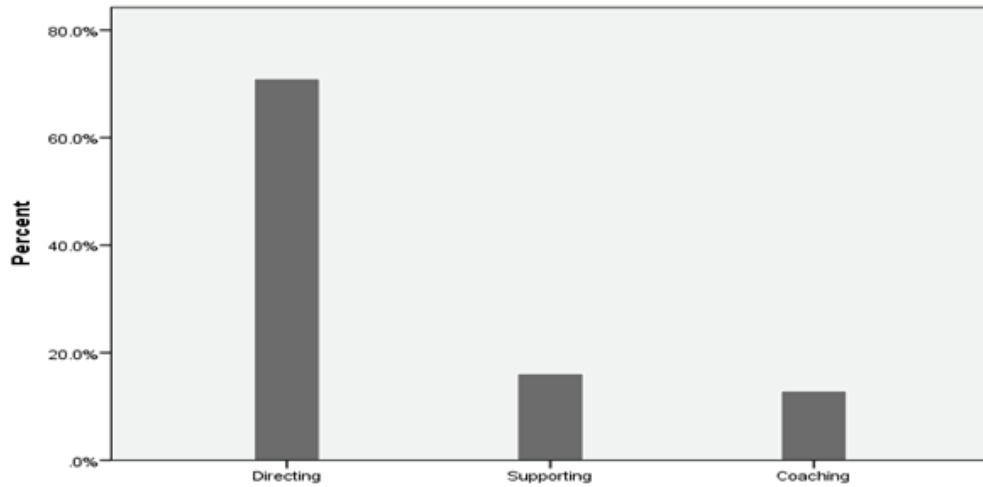
The instructors were asked to comment on the leadership behavior that would be most effective for entry-level positions based on their experience with leadership development and the content on situational leadership. More than two-thirds (71%) of the participants stated directing is the most effective leadership behavior and few cited coaching (12.9%).

Survey Question 5

Participants were asked the following question regarding intermediate-level positions and situational leadership behaviors: Based on the content provided on situational leadership, in this section, and on your experience with leadership development, which leadership behavior would be most effective for intermediate-level positions? Note: Intermediate-level positions are typically grades 9 to 12. Results are depicted in Figure 4.

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Figure 4

Leadership Behaviors Effective for Intermediate-Level Positions
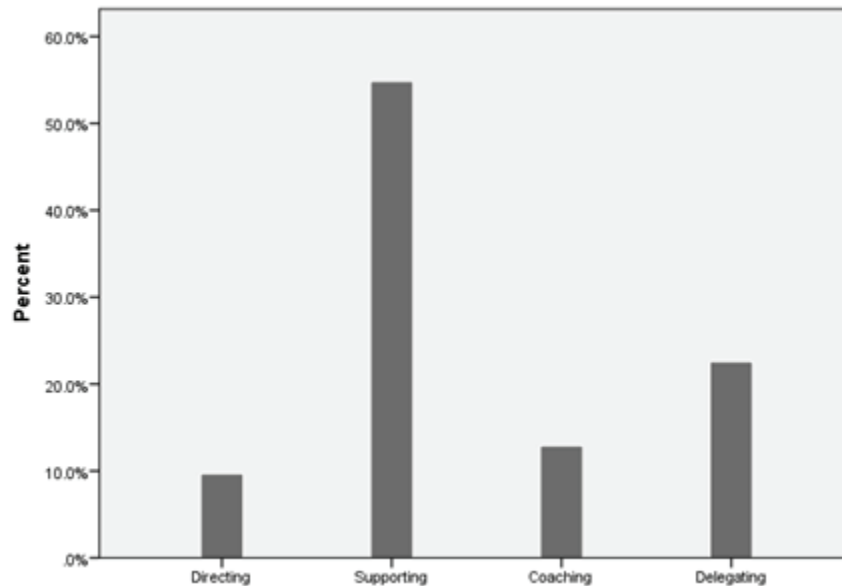

The instructors were asked to comment on the leadership behavior that would be most effective for intermediate-level positions based on their experience with leadership development and the content on situational leadership. Results depicted that more than three-quarters perceived coaching (77.4%) as the most effective leadership behavior and few indicated directing (3.2%).

Survey Question 6

Participants were asked the following question regarding advanced-level positions and situational leadership behaviors: Based on the content provided on situational leadership, in this section, and on your experience with leadership development, which leadership behavior would most effective for advanced-level positions? Note: Advanced-level positions are typically grades 13 to 14. Results are depicted in Figure 5.

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Figure 5

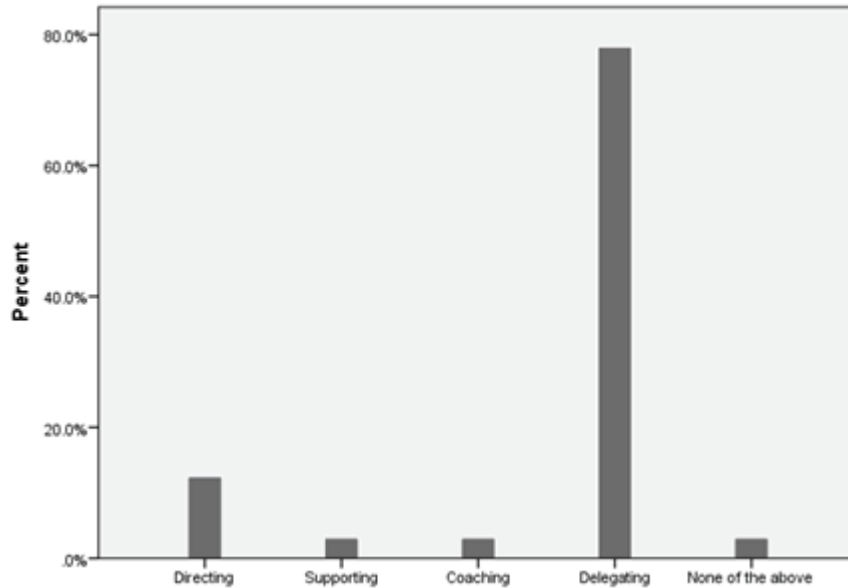*Leadership Behaviors Effective for Advanced-Level Positions*

The instructors were asked to comment on the leadership behavior that would be most effective for advanced-level positions based on their experience with leadership development and the content on situational leadership. More than half (54.8%) viewed supporting as the most effective leadership behavior, followed by those stating delegating (22.6%) and directing (9.7%).

Survey Question 7

Participants were asked the following question regarding expert-level positions and situational leadership behaviors: Based on the content provided on situational leadership, in this section, and on your experience with leadership development, which leadership behavior would most effective for expert-level positions? Note: Expert-level positions are typically grade 15. Results are depicted in Figure 6.

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Figure 6

Leadership Behaviors Effective for Expert-Level Positions

The instructors were asked to comment on the leadership behavior that would be most effective for expert-level positions based on their experience with leadership development and the content on situational leadership. More than three-quarters (78.1%) indicated delegating was the most effective leadership behavior, followed by directing (12.5%), supporting (3.1%), and coaching (3.1%).

Survey Questions 8 through 12 were used to answer Research Question 2. These questions pertained to the key variable of leadership development.

Survey Question 8

Participants were asked whether they agreed with the following statement regarding leadership development programs: Leadership development programs are the most effective methods for developing future leaders in the federal government. Results are depicted in Table 2.

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Table 2

Perceptions of Leadership Development Program Effectiveness for Developing Future

Leaders

Degree of agreement that leadership development programs are the most effective method for future leader development	*n*	%
Strongly agree	13	40.6
Agree	13	40.6
Neither disagree nor agree	2	6.3
Disagree	4	12.5

The instructors were asked to respond to whether leadership development

programs are the most effective methods for developing future leaders in the federal

government. Results revealed the majority of the instructors *strongly agreed* (40.6%) or

agreed (40.6%) with the statement and few (6.3%) were neutral about the statement.

Survey Question 9

Participants were asked the following question about effective delivery methods

for leadership development programs: What delivery method is the most effective

method for leadership development programs? Results are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Most Effective Method for Leadership Development Programs

Effective delivery methods	*n*	%
Other (please specify)	5	15.6
Blended learning	11	34.4
Face-to-face learning	16	50.0

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The results revealed half of the instructors indicated face-to-face learning was the most effective delivery method for leadership development programs. Few respondents (15.6%) indicated other methods are effective, such as blended learning and on-the-job training, on-the-job development, online, blended, and lots of mentoring, and hands-on, partnering, and demonstration. The respondents also noted the other effective method was a leadership development program within an organization that builds a cross-sectional cohort to expand a person's network.

Survey Question 10

Participants were asked about the benefits of leadership development programs: What are the benefits of a leadership development program? Please select all that apply. Results are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4

Benefits of a Leadership Development Program

Benefits of a leadership development program	n	%
Increases the possibility of promotion or transition to a new job	19	59.4
Helps to improve team/unit performance	24	75.0
Helps to improve an agency's performance	29	90.6
Other (please specify)	4	12.5

In this question, participants were provided an opportunity to select all the benefits relevant to them. The most significant benefit selected by participants was that these programs help improve agency performance (90.6%) followed by the benefit of helping to improve team/unit performance (75.0%); very few selected other benefits (12.5%). Those who selected other benefits mentioned the following: cross-pollination of

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an individual's set of ideas/solutions to a problem; the fact that benefits depend on the level of leadership being addressed; and entry-level or skills enhancement for existing leaders developing a sense of mutual commitment, thus improving retention, satisfaction, and effectiveness within the organization; and the need for leadership development to be modeled.

Survey Question 11

Participants were asked whether they agreed with the following statement regarding leadership development: Employees who are not currently in leadership positions can participate in leadership development programs to develop their skills in non-leadership job positions. Results are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Perceptions of Leadership Development Programs' Effectiveness in Developing Skills for Employees Not Currently in Leadership Positions

Degree of agreement that leadership development programs can develop skills for those in non-leadership positions	*n*	%
Strongly agree	16	50.0
Agree	13	40.6
Neither disagree nor agree	3	9.4

The instructors were asked to provide their opinions regarding whether employees who were not currently in leadership positions could participate in leadership development programs to develop their non-leadership job position skills. The results indicated the majority *strongly agreed* (50%) or *agreed* (40.6%) with the statement, whereas very few *neither agreed nor disagreed* (9.4%) with the statement.

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Survey Question 12

Participants were given the following statement to determine whether they were in agreement: Leadership is not connected to a job position, but to individuals' behaviors. Results are depicted in Table 6.

Table 6

Perceptions that Leadership is Not Connected to a Job Position

Degree of agreement that leadership is not connected to a job position	*n*	%
Strongly agree	23	71.9
Agree	8	25.0
Neither disagree nor agree	1	3.1

Results revealed the majority of the respondents *strongly agreed* (71.9%) or *agreed* (25.0%) with the statement, and very few *neither agreed nor disagreed* (3.1%) with the statement.

Survey Questions 13 and 14 were used to answer Research Question 3. These questions pertained to the key variable of knowledge transfer.

Survey Question 13

Participants were given the following statement to determine whether they agreed or not: Federal agencies should place more emphasis on transferring knowledge from one employee to the next in order to develop their workforce further. The results, which are depicted in Table 7, illustrated all the participants supported the statement; 68.8% *strongly agreed* and 31.3% *agreed*.

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Table 7

Perceptions of Emphasis Placed on Transfer of Knowledge from One Employee to the

Next

Degree of agreement that knowledge transfer should be emphasized more	*n*	%
Strongly agree	22	68.8
Agree	10	31.3

Survey Question 14

Participants were asked the following question regarding effective strategies for

transferring knowledge within federal agencies: What is the most effective strategy for

federal agencies to transfer knowledge? (please select one). Results are depicted in Table

8.

Table 8

Most Effective Strategy for Federal Agencies to Transfer Knowledge

Effective strategy	*n*	%
Other (please specify)	6	18.8
Mentorship programs	15	46.9
Coaching programs	7	21.9
Utilization of a knowledge library	4	12.5

The most effective strategy selected by participants was mentorship programs

(46.9%) followed by coaching programs (21.9%), and the least effective strategy was the

use of a knowledge library (12.5%). A significant number of participants (18.8%)

indicated other strategies, including delegating responsibility with varying degrees of

oversight; mentorship and coaching programs; unofficial mentoring and coaching; and

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formalized, specifically developed cross-training programs that include leadership

awareness and the commitment of time and resources.

Secondary Data

The second data set was secondary quantitative data derived from FedScope. This

database was used to analyze VA employees currently in IT positions who can retire

within the next 12 years. Figure 7 reflects these data.

Figure 7, Retirement Eligibility

Figure Title

GS Level	50-54 (8 to 12 Years)	(55 to 59) (3 to 7 years)	60-64 (within the next 2 years)	65 or more (can retire at anytime)
5	0	0	0	0
7	12	0	0	0
9	38	25	19	0
11	349	329	186	76
12	201	267	131	64
13	445	506	284	132
14	156	167	116	44
15	28	37	23	0
Total IT employees in each age group	1229	1331	759	316
Total employees in IT Positions	6879	6879	6879	6879
	18%	19%	11%	5%

According to FedScope data, 5% of VA employees who hold IT positions can

currently retire, 11% can retire within the next 2 years, 19% are eligible to retire within

the next 3 to 7 years, and 18% can retire within the next 8 to 12 years.

Summary

RQ1. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, what are the best

leadership behaviors for entry-level, intermediate-level, advanced-level, and expert-level

positions?

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Survey Questions 4 through 7 were used to answer this research question. In summary, results showed directing was the best leadership behavior for entry-level positions, and coaching was the best leadership behavior for intermediate levels. Supporting was the best leadership behavior for advanced-level positions, and delegating was the best leadership behavior for expert-level positions.

RQ2. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is a leadership development program an effective method for developing future leaders?

Survey Questions 8 through 12 were used to answer this research question. A total of 81.2% of the participants agreed that leadership development programs are the most effective method for developing future leaders in the federal government, 34.4% believed blended learning is the most effective method for leadership development programs, and 50% believed the most effective method is face-to-face learning. Participants stated the benefits of leadership development programs include an increased possibility of promotion or transition to a new job to improve individual, team, and agency performance. Finally, 90.6% agreed that leadership is not connected to a job position, but to individuals' behaviors.

RQ3. Based on the perceptions of subject matter experts, is knowledge transfer an effective strategy for federal agencies to develop their workforce?

Survey Questions 13 and 14 were used to answer this research question. All participants (100%) believed leaders of federal agencies should place more emphasis on transferring knowledge from one employee to the next in order to develop their workforce further. Additionally, 46.9% of the participants believed mentorship programs

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are the most effective strategy for transferring knowledge in federal agencies and 21.9% believed coaching programs are more effective.

RQ4. Based on the agency's employment data evaluation, what percentage of VA employees in IT positions eligible for retirement within the next 2 years?

Within the next 2 years, 16% of VA employees in IT positions are eligible to retire. Of that percentage, 5% can retire from their positions at any time.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to reveal solutions for the wave of retirements anticipated to occur by the end of 2020 by bridging the gap between succession planning and situational leadership in the federal government. In doing so, results revealed the best leadership behaviors for entry-level, intermediate-level, advanced-level, and expert-level positions; whether leadership development programs are an effective method for developing future leaders; and whether knowledge transfer is an effective strategy for leaders of federal agencies to use to develop their workforce. Last, results showed the percentage of IT positions within the VA eligible for retirement within the next 2 years.

Interpretation of the Findings

Regarding the conceptual framework produced in Chapter 2, the results aligned with the research. Chapter 2 emphasized the concepts of this study, which were situational leadership and succession planning. The findings of the present study significantly contribute to the body of literature that involves these key concepts. The research outcomes serve as a distinctive contribution to the literature, as the study merged the two elements of succession planning and situational leadership. Based on this contribution, researchers can develop best practices, and federal government leaders can begin to develop their workforce.

Limitations of the Study

As stated in Chapter 1, the survey was limited to SMEs within the Office of Information and Technology, and the IT Workforce Development Department of the VA. These SMEs were employees of this department with specialized skills in developing and

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instructing a leadership development program geared toward IT professionals. In efforts to ensure the survey was valid and reliable, a pilot study was conducted. SMEs in developing the leadership development program had the opportunity to participate in the pilot study. Once the pilot study concluded and was validated, those responsible for instructing the leadership development program participated in the final study.

Implications

In terms of positive social change, this study may add to the body of literature on succession planning and situational leadership. Stakeholders, including leaders within the federal government, may deem the results of this study beneficial to the extent they can apply the recommendations to their organizations.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on this study's findings, three recommendations were developed as strategies and concepts for leaders to implement and consider.

Recommendation 1

Agency leaders should consider incorporating training on situational leadership behaviors into their leadership development programs. More than two-thirds of the participants (71%) stated directing is the most effective leadership behavior for entry-level positions. Therefore, agency officials should encourage leaders to use directing behaviors for subordinates in entry-level positions. More than three-quarters perceived coaching (77.4%) as the most effective leadership behavior for intermediate-level positions. Therefore, agency officials should encourage leaders to use coaching behaviors for subordinates in intermediate-level positions. More than half (54.8%) viewed supporting as the most effective leadership behavior for advanced-level positions.

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Therefore, agency officials should encourage leaders to use supporting behaviors for subordinates in advanced-level positions. More than three-quarters (78.1%) indicated delegating was the most effective leadership behavior for expert-level positions. Therefore, agency officials should encourage leaders to use delegating behaviors with subordinates in expert-level positions.

Recommendation 2

Participants *strongly agreed* (40.6%) or *agreed* (40.6%) that leadership development programs are the most effective method for developing future leaders in the federal government. Therefore, agency officials should use this method to develop their leaders. Doing so can increase the possibility of promotion or transition to a new job, improve individual performance, improve team/unit performance, and improve an agency's performance.

Recommendation 3

All participants (100%) believed leaders of federal agencies should place more emphasis on transferring knowledge from one employee to the next to develop their workforce further, 46.9% believed mentorship programs are the most effective strategy for transferring knowledge in federal agencies, and 21.9% believed coaching programs are most effective. Therefore, agency officials should place more emphasis on transferring knowledge by incorporating mentorship programs and coaching programs into their knowledge transfer strategies. It may be more beneficial for agency leaders to develop mentorship programs with mentors with a vast amount of knowledge. Over time, coaching has become a prevalent leadership development practice implemented by internal and externally developed coaches (Iordanoglou, 2018).

Conventional knowledge transfer strategies include mentorship and guided experiences (Krylova et al., 2016). As employees retire, they often take their accumulated knowledge and skills with them instead of passing along their knowledge and skills to other employees. Pre-retirement and mid-career employees can be excellent resources for new employees by serving as coaches and mentors. Agency leaders can use these professionals to promote their employees' professional and personal development (Calo, 2005).

Recommendations for Future Research

The results produced a variety of different directions for further research in the field of situational leadership and succession planning. Although the two concepts differ in many ways, a future study could merge the concepts into a single study. A future researcher could conduct a study to evaluate the different situational leadership behaviors at each level to uncover their effectiveness. There may be a need to duplicate this study on a larger scale to include surveying participants of a leadership development program instead of programming designers and instructors. It may also be advisable to conduct a comparative study using two or more federal agencies with similar leadership development programs to compare the effectiveness of the leadership development programs.

Conclusion

Current leadership development practices have yet to be proven to meet the challenges of today. According to Deliotte (2016), traditional leadership development has not produced leaders quickly enough to keep up with the high demands within organizations (Iordanoglou, 2018). However, Maheshwari and Yadav (2018) discovered

that leadership development is more effective when aligned with HR processes. Many leadership development programs lack a focus on learning that reinforces the demonstration of leadership behaviors. HR processes, such as succession planning, help meet the need for emerging leaders by providing additional learning, including mentorship and leadership opportunities (Maheshwari & Yadav, 2018).

The knowledge obtained through the current study can be used to enhance the understanding of situational leadership, leadership behaviors, and succession planning in terms of knowledge transfer and leadership development. This study was designed to contribute to the knowledge of situational leadership and succession planning in the public sector. The significant conclusions gathered from this study indicate succession planning correlates with situational leadership, because, while succession planning, agency leaders can create a leadership development program that can train individuals to use the four leadership behaviors of situational leadership.

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