

# Nonprofit Governance as Succession Planning

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## Abstract

Nonprofit governance is considered to be the lifeblood of nonprofit organizations regardless of size and operational locale. Whether in developed and/or developing economies, local, state and national levels, governance of nonprofit organizations enables provision of essential complementary services to the state to foster governance of peoples' affairs. The essential role of the nonprofit sector has renewed scholarly attention on governance of nonprofit organizations, especially, the governance-related roles of nonprofit board of directors. This paper highlights the important role of nonprofit governance for nonprofit organizations' success by framing nonprofit governance as succession planning with emphasis on the critical role that human resources play in realizing the intents and purposes of nonprofit organizations. The authors buttress their argument by integrating the extant literature on nonprofit governance with a conceptual model that relates various nonprofit governance roles and show the inextricable connectedness and interconnectedness to succession planning. The authors conclude by advancing the argument that nonprofit governance is not only about leadership at the moment, but also promotes succession for beneficial outcomes for organization and society with human resources at the core which translates into organizational effectiveness and service to the community.

**Keywords:** nonprofit governance, succession planning, governance, board of directors, governing board, working board.

## 1. Introduction

Nonprofit organizations play a critical role in various sectors of a country's economy, especially, the social sector. The invaluable services that are rendered by these organizations help address the concerns of various segments of a population. Whether at the local, state, national, and international levels, the impact of nonprofit organizations on social and general wellbeing of citizens, including helping mitigate challenges associated with natural disasters cannot be underestimated (Saidel, 1991; Smith & Lipsky, 1993; Salamon, 1989; Anheier 2014). One key aspect that enables the contributions of nonprofit organizations to a society is through governance.

Generally, governance in the nonprofit sector or what is also termed as nonprofit governance deals with deliberate efforts by nonprofit board of directors in making sure that an organization is able to realize its stated intents and purposes (Herman, Renz, & Heimovics, 1997; Hoye & Inglis, 2003; Purdy & Lawless, 2012). In most cases, the board of directors of nonprofit organizations have the sole responsibility of promoting organizational wellbeing, including the responsibility for assets and liabilities. As Herman and Renz (2004, p. 696) have argued, board of directors of nonprofit organizations are "ultimately legally responsible for the affairs and conduct of the organizations they head." In effect, the board of directors have the legal responsibility to the overall interest, viability, and the sustainability of an organization. While the centrality of board of directors to the overall interest and sustainability of an organization is well known, especially, in their decision-making roles, it should also be noted that the chief executive of a nonprofit organization also play key and important roles in decision making. In other words, one could argue that board of directors and a chief executive are mutually involved in major decisions that affect a nonprofit organization.

As the literature underscores, when nonprofit board members are effective in their roles, particularly, in the area of governance, there are positive implications for the organization and the community it serves. The nonprofit board through its effective oversight responsibilities of organizational assets and liabilities can also foster the realization of vision and mission of the organization. Similarly, any neglect on the part of the board in carrying out its roles and responsibilities can negatively impact the organization. For instance, scholars such as Preston and Brown (2004), Holland and Jackson (1998), Herman and Renz (1999), and Brudney and Murray (1998) highlight how nonprofit board's effectiveness results in effective organizational performance. The authors of this paper concur, as other scholars have argued that nonprofit governance is strategic, internal, deliberative, actionable, and result-oriented and mostly driven by the efforts of nonprofit board of directors who steer and complement executive and management undertakings of an organization. Such efforts which can manifest in various roles tend to enhance nonprofit organizations in achieving their purpose in the short and long term.

There is no doubt that nonprofit governance, particularly, the roles of board of directors, fosters continuous existence and service to various publics and/or communities. However, a careful review of nonprofit governance

through the lens of a board seems to suggest that succession planning is a critical responsibility of the board as their various efforts tend to culminate in ensuring continuous viability of a nonprofit organization through personnel/peoples' actions which is contingent on deliberate recruitment strategies. In all intents and purposes, people/organizational personnel, including board members, are responsible for every facet of the organization including acquiring material resources and even additional personnel for the organization. This paper therefore focuses on making a case for nonprofit governance as succession planning in view of the conventional expectations of nonprofit governance roles, especially, per the efforts of board of directors are geared toward mission fulfillment as a conduit to promote organizational viability and service to the community. The paper integrates the extant literature with a formulated conceptual model to explicate the various nonprofit governance roles in buttressing the argument and in an attempt to answer the question: how does nonprofit governance enables succession planning? While the authors acknowledge the various roles of nonprofit governance as advanced by various scholars over the years as essential for effective management of nonprofit organizations, the authors extend the argument by relating those roles as evidence of succession planning for the greater good, especially, in furtherance of organizational and societal wellbeing.

## **2. Conceptual Framework of Nonprofit Governance**

The continuous relevance of nonprofit organizations in both developed and developing economies, especially, as essential partners to the state in governance points to the nonprofit/Third Sector's important role in helping meet needs and expectations of citizens in various communities. The nonprofit sector's complementary role to the state in the management of peoples' affairs has reached such a threshold of indispensability which has been acknowledged by various political actors in different locales. For instance, in the U.S., the nonprofit sector employs close to 11 million people which constitutes about 11 percent of the workforce as it relates to private sector employment (Anheier, 2014). In 2010 alone, the sector contributed about \$14.5 trillion to the gross domestic product (Roeger et al. 2012; Anheier, 2014). Scholars such as Salamon (1989), Sidel (1991), Smith & Lipsky (1993), Anheier, 2005; Salamon & Anheier 1996; Sidel & Harlan, 1998; Giddens, 1998 among others, have underscored the contributions of the nonprofit sector to governance in various economies.

As commendable as the invaluable contributions of the nonprofit sector is to various economies, such contributions can be easily negated if the various nonprofit organizations are not properly governed. Thus, the importance of the nonprofit sector to the state has necessitated renewed attention on how such entities are governed and their day-to-day implications for management and services. It is in this regard that nonprofit governance has become such a cutting-edge topic among scholars, practitioners, law makers, and other critical community stakeholders (Herman & Heimovics, 1990; Carver, 1997; Drucker, 1990; Herman and Renz 1999). The fundamental questions of 'what and why' of nonprofit governance have therefore become a subject worthy of scholarly investigation.

Scholars and professionals of various backgrounds and persuasions have attempted to define nonprofit governance as a conduit to establishing its importance to nonprofit organizations. In his piece on governance within the context of nonprofit organizations, Renz (2007, p.1) asserts that "governance is the process of providing strategic leadership to a nonprofit organization. It entails the functions of setting direction, making policy and strategy decisions, overseeing and monitoring organizational performance, and ensuring overall accountability." Renz's conceptualization points to the unique and essential role of nonprofit governance in promoting organizational effectiveness and mission fulfillment for mutually beneficial outcomes to the organization and community. Such governance efforts through various nonprofit board roles enable effective utilization of human and material resources in a manner that advances causes of the organization for the greater good. Admittedly, the perspectives of other scholars and professionals on nonprofit governance relate to Renz's (2007) conceptual explication.

BoardSource (2010, p.15), which is the foremost scholarly and professional entity on nonprofit governance whose perspective on the concept relates to that of Renz's (2007) argues that nonprofit governance falls within "the board's legal authority to exercise power and authority over an organization on behalf of the community it serves." BoardSource adds that a board's major role is to formulate policies and make decisions that will impact the life of an organization. Nonprofit governance in this viewpoint, is more of a collaborative effort with more collective responsibilities for both an organization and society's wellbeing. Chait, Ryan & Taylor (2004) see governance as the collection of tasks by nonprofit boards in a strategic manner geared toward achieving the organizational purpose. The board, in this context, is versatile in carrying out expected responsibilities even if some of the tasks are repetitive in nature. The relevant and intentional composition of nonprofit boards enable effective fulfillment of the various tasks for mutual benefits to organizations and community stakeholders.

O'Donovan (2003, p. 29) conceptualizes governance as "an internal system encompassing policies, processes, and people which serves the needs of shareholders and other stakeholders by directing and controlling management activities with good business savvy, objectivity and integrity." This definition underscores the strategic use of human and material resources in line with established methods to achieve organizational

purpose. And in the case of nonprofits with the board serving in needed capacities to fulfill established mission for societal benefits. Furthermore, scholars such as Herman & Renz (1999; 2004), Green & Griesinger (1996), Carver (1997), Hudson (1999), Drucker (1990), Axelrod (1994), Houle (1997), Block (1998), Drucker (1990), Herman & Heimovics (1990; 1994), Houle (1960: 1997), Jegers (2009), Wellens & Jegers (2014), Pointer & Orlikoff (2002), Purdy & Lawless (2012), Preston & Brown (2004), McFarlan (1999), Herman, (1989), Cornforth (2001), BoardSource (2004 a & b), Gill (2005), Holland & Jackson (1998), Zimmermann & Stevens (2008), Brudney & Murray (1998), Steane & Christie (2001), Connelly (2004), Tricker (1984), McCambridge (2004), Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin (1992), share their perspectives on governance within the context of nonprofit organizations and other sectors. However, there are some variations in governance as it pertains to sectors which will be highlighted in the following paragraph.

As this article examines the concept of governance, it is important to underscore the point that the term governance, as used in this paper, which is consistent with the broader literature in the field of non-profit sector is different from the concept of governance in the general field of political science. While nonprofit governance brings together diverse stakeholders from various backgrounds and professional persuasions in an attempt to achieve established social objectives of a particular nonprofit organization for communal benefits, governance within the political context focuses on engaging political actors in administering peoples' affairs at a particular or various locales. Renz (2007, p.1) actually reminds us of this distinction by stating that the "public sector governance refers to the political process of policy and decision making for communities and political jurisdictions, whereas nonprofit governance refers to the process of providing leadership, direction, and accountability for a specific nongovernmental, not-for-profit organization." Similarly, nonprofit governance is different from corporate governance although there are some elemental commonalities. We should also note the differences between for-profit or corporate governance and nonprofit governance. For-profit governance focuses on maximizing profit and dividends for shareholders while nonprofit governance aims at achieving social ends without profit and/or dividend connotations (Jegers, 2009; Drucker, 1990b; Taylor, Chait, & Holland, 1996; Hoye & Inglis, 2003). However, the similarities between nonprofit and corporate governance is more pronounced than the case with public sector governance (Purdy & Lawless, 2012; McFarlan, 1999).

Nonprofit governance, as the above discussion shows, focuses on major organizational issues. In other words, nonprofit governance deals with the big picture, thus, policy and substantive issues as compared to the day-to-day organizational operational issues which is the domain of management. Nonprofit governance focuses on issues such as setting organizational direction; determining mission, vision, and values; engaging in strategic thinking and planning; ensuring necessary resources; selecting the chief executive; enhancing the organization's public standing; providing oversight (organization and chief executive); protecting assets; monitoring and strengthening programs and services; and ensuring legal and ethical integrity among others (Boardsource, 2010, p.32-44). These governance roles as referenced above are not necessarily performed in a sequential manner, but integrated in a way that enhance effective performance of a nonprofit organization. Furthermore, these roles complement nonprofit management functions which is spearheaded by the chief executive and other essential staff who are also part of the board and are integral to the board's roles. Thus, roles by the board and management concertedly enable realizing the intents and purposes of the organization.

The delineation of board's roles as conceptualized by scholars and practitioners underscore the multifaceted nature of nonprofit governance in promoting effectiveness of nonprofit organizations. For instance, setting organizational direction, strategic thinking and planning, and ensuring resources suggest how proactive nonprofit boards' roles are and/or expected to promote organizational effectiveness. This paper frames nonprofit governance as succession planning as the board's roles ensure continuous relevance and existence of nonprofit organizations. Additionally, succession planning as observed, manifest in every facet of nonprofit organization's governance undertakings with human resources as the critical variable. Thus, people matter: whether board members, the chief executive, and other strategic personnel, people are the lifeblood of nonprofit organizations and attendant acquired resources for achieving the organizational purpose. The authors advance the argument of nonprofit governance as succession planning by explicating the various nonprofit governance roles in the remaining sections of the paper. The underlying assumption of nonprofit governance as succession planning thereby serves as the key framework in our attempt to answer the question: how does nonprofit governance enables succession planning? In the interim, the authors will explicate the concept of succession planning in the next segment of the paper.

### **3. Explicating Succession Planning in Nonprofit Organizations**

Every nonprofit organization directly and indirectly intends to make a difference in a particular locale which could be at a town, city, municipality, county, state, regional and/or international level for the greater good. The explicit and/or implicit intents are usually guided by the mission of the organization which translates into actionable efforts with attendant impact on the community of focus. And the commitment to continuously impact a community positively necessitates intentional efforts such as succession planning among others.

Succession planning has become an integral part of nonprofit governance in relation to nonprofit boards and its roles in achieving the mission of nonprofit organizations. Scholars have conceptualized and operationalized succession planning in ways that highlight its relevance to continuous operation and realization of organizational goals. The purpose-driven nature of the various conceptual explications further elucidates the essence of succession planning to nonprofit governance and management. Rothwell (2001, p. 6) defines succession planning as “a deliberate and systematic effort by an organization to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement.” This definition points to the intentional efforts that are required on the part of an organization to enable succession planning. Furthermore, the definition highlights organizational sustainability and human resource development expectations associated with succession planning. Of course, nonprofits and other organizations have the option to grow talent within the organization and/or acquire talent from outside to occupy key and strategic positions. Succession planning in this context is not only limited to filling the position of the chief executive, but includes key strategic areas.

Deshwal (2015, p.59) relates succession planning “as identifying future potential leaders to fill key positions” which further points to the future-oriented nature of succession planning by nonprofits and other organizations. Hirsh (2000, p.4) on her part conceptualizes succession planning as “a process by which one or more successors are identified for key posts (or groups of similar key posts), and career moves and/or development activities are planned for these successors.” Hirsh’s definition also underscores an intentional and systematic effort by an organization geared toward filling essential position(s) as a conduit to promoting organizational continuity and continuous impact on the community. Relatedly, the definition of succession planning by National Academy of Public Administration (1997) as “an ongoing process of systematically identifying, assessing and developing organizational leadership to enhance performance”(see Kim 2003, p.533) points to deliberate and procedural efforts by organizations which is very relevant to nonprofit sector’s context.

Succession planning as relevant and strategic nonprofit governance function is essential to fulfilling the intent and purpose of the organization. The essence of succession planning is highlighted by efforts of board of directors regardless of the size of the organization to take measures that will ensure continuous viability of the organization and to ensure provision of needed services to the community. Whether it is the full board, working board or a committee of the board such as a governance committee and/or executive committee, succession planning has become such an integral function of a nonprofit board. However, the literature suggests instances of succession planning not receiving the needed attention in some organizations (Moradi, 2014; Santora et al., 2015; Klein & Salk, 2013; Santora et al., 2007; Berchelman, 2005). The emergent need for a new crop of leaders to take the realm of affairs for most organizations, especially, nonprofit organizations in view of apparent retirement of baby boomers, has drawn much needed attention and attendant action on succession planning (Froelich, McKee & Rathge, 2011; Santora et al., 2015).

The emergent and essential nature of succession planning to nonprofit organizations’ overall wellbeing has generated interest among scholars. Scholars such as Hamm (2004), Fredericksen (2010), Conger & Fulmer (2003), Fletcher (1992), Kim (2003), Elkin et al., (2012), Austin & Gilmore (1993), Adams (2006), Deshwal (2015), Price (2006), Comini et al.,(2009), Bell et al.,(2006), Santora et al.,(2007), Tierney (2006), Behn et al., (2005), Wolfred et al.,(1999), Allison (2002), Herman & Heimovics (1989), Richie & Eastwood (2006), Laff (2008), Hodgetts et al.,(2007), Teegarden (2004), Froelich et al.,(2011), and Sambrook (2005) among others examined various nonprofit organizational efforts with a particular attention to succession planning. Such scholarly endeavors have implications for effective governance and management of nonprofit organizations in various jurisdictions.

Succession planning in organizations, especially, nonprofit organizations is not just a mere exercise for management purposes only, but is driven by emergent and existing organizational realities. Scholars such as Gibelman & Gelman (2002), Hamm (2004), Simoneaux & Stroud, (2013), Froelich et al., (2011), Sambrook (2005), Deshwal (2015) and others have identified death of essential organizational personnel i.e. chief executive officer (CEO), founder of a nonprofit, retirement, resignation, promotion, illness, need for new crop of leaders or growth management among others as the major rationale necessitating succession planning in most nonprofits and other organizations. These organizational realities thereby necessitate the relevancy and urgency of action on the part of nonprofits, especially, the board of directors to devote time and resources to succession planning.

Succession planning can thus be an intentional and/or emergent organizational undertaking. Whether intentional or not, succession planning entails measures to ensure organizational viability, continuous relevance and service to the community at large. Such measures will embody engaging all relevant internal and external stakeholders including the governing board/board of directors. In fact, scholars have alluded to some key elements as rudimentary to succession planning regardless of size of a nonprofit organization.

A review of Hamm (2004); Berchelman (2005), and Deshwal (2015) perspectives on elements of succession planning suggests the following: establish the standards for selection of successor(s); require promptness in selecting the successor(s); use succession planning to promote strategic direction of the

organization; enlist support of board of directors and existing management team which includes chief executive officer of the organization; provide professional and skillset growth opportunities for successor(s); benchmark related best practices that align with organization's mission and values; establish procedures for continuous leadership development within the organization; effectively communicate the nonprofit organizational realities and expectations to all potential successors; establish criteria for recruiting leaders for all key organizational strategic positions including, but not limited to the chief executive officer's position; and embrace transparency, probity and accountability in process and outcomes. These elements further underscore strategic relevance of succession planning for organizational viability and the attendant continuous impact on society for the greater good. Furthermore, these elements connect process, human and material resources to outcomes within the context of nonprofit governance as essential for growth and sustainability of nonprofit organizations.

As an emergent effort by nonprofit organizations, succession planning is gradually becoming a subject of serious consideration by nonprofit entities and stakeholders. Doing so allows to put measures in place to enable uninterrupted operation of the organization in terms of human resources, leadership, management, and governance. For instance, Froelich et al., (2011); Santora et al., (2015); Fredericksen, (2010) reiterate succession planning as strategic effort for organizational viability. Nonetheless, resource constraints appear to be a challenge to nonprofit efforts to develop succession plans and consistently execute such plans (Berchelman, 2005; Klein, Salk & Raintry, 2013; Simoneaux & Stroud, 2013). In general, corporate entities appear to be more proactive with succession planning than their nonprofit and local government counterparts (McFarlan, 1999; Alexander & Weiner, 1998; Bradshaw, 2001).

The realization of the fierce urgency of succession planning by nonprofit organizations highlights its critical role to mission fulfillment for organizational and societal benefits. Succession planning thus become a core governance function of most nonprofit organizations. In fact, one can argue that most, if not all, of what nonprofit organizations do as it relates to governance is inextricably intertwined with succession planning. It is even more so as nonprofit organizations in all of their governance efforts remain committed to organizational viability and continuous service to the community with people/personnel at the core. This paper thereby makes the argument that nonprofit governance could be conceptualized as succession planning. To buttress the argument, the paper integrates the extant literature on nonprofit governance with a specific focus on governance roles and uses a model to pinpoint connectedness to succession planning as a conduit to achieving the goals and objectives of nonprofit organizations. The next section of the paper provides further explanations of the above assumption.

#### **4. Why Nonprofit Governance as Succession Planning**

Nonprofit governance is essential to health and wellbeing of nonprofit organizations, and succession planning as a critical nonprofit governance function is central to the eventual viability and sustainability of nonprofit organizations. Without succession planning, a nonprofit organization is likely to experience disruptions due to unforeseen contingencies such as illness, sudden resignation and even death of, at least, a core management team member (Gibelman & Gelman, 2002; Hamm, 2004; Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014; Froelich et al., 2011). This segment of the paper is geared toward relating the inextricable connectedness of various nonprofit governance roles to succession planning as a conduit to ensuring organizational viability and sustainability, and to provide some answers to the question: how does nonprofit governance enables succession planning? The rationale is to make the case that succession planning which is a core rudiment of nonprofit governance roles as the essence of nonprofit governance in all intents and purposes, especially, as almost every other nonprofit board's undertaking is reflective of continuous existence and service to the community with human capital as a critical component.

This segment of the paper relies primarily on Boardsource (2010, p. 31-45) articulation of various roles of nonprofit governance boards such as setting organizational direction; determining mission, vision, and values; engaging in strategic thinking and strategic planning; building competent and sustainable board; selecting, supporting, and evaluating the chief executive; ensuring adequate financial resources to fulfill mission; providing oversight of assets and liabilities; monitoring and strengthening programs and services; ensuring legal and ethical integrity/compliance; identifying and mitigating risks; and enhancing organization reputation and public outreach to buttress the argument. The paper is relying on BoardSource's (2010) publication as the principal resource for two reasons: firstly, not only is BoardSource a leading authority on nonprofit governance, but secondly, BoardSource publications have essentially served as foundational resources for many other scholars who have done work on the subject matter. Also, scholars such as Herman & Renz (1999), Drucker (1990), Herman & Heimovics (1990), Carver (1997), Hudson (1999) among others have addressed some of these nonprofit governance roles in their publications as well. The paper draws on the ideas of these scholars to explicate the connectedness of nonprofit governance roles and their interconnectedness to succession planning as a conduit to ensuring viability, sustainability and mission fulfillment of nonprofit organizations. The next segment examines nonprofit governance roles: it starts with how organizations set direction and ends with how they identify and mitigate risks.

#### *4.1 Set Organizational Direction*

Setting organizational direction is imbedded in short, medium and long term commitments of a nonprofit organization, particularly, as it relates to making a difference for communal and organizational benefits. In context, the outcomes that a particular nonprofit organization intends to achieve in consonance with its mission is reflected in decisions and actions of the organization and the eventual impact on the community. BoardSource (2010) has identified establishing collective vision, formulating actionable plans, communicating intended efforts based on values that guide the organization, and mapping out approaches to realize established goals and objectives of the organization as some of the rudiments associated with setting organizational direction (pp.32). Scholars such as Herman (1989), Pointer & Orlikoff (2002), Chait et al.(2004), Axelrod (1994), Bowen (1994), Gill (2005), Carver (2010), Herman et al.(1997), Cornforth (2001) and others have shared their insights on setting nonprofit organizational direction. Setting organizational direction is no doubt critical to realizing the mission of the organization and certainly such an essential role of the board. Admittedly, setting organizational direction is inextricably connected to succession planning as the nonprofit board alongside the chief executive who is part of the core management team of a nonprofit organization are very involved in measures to promote purposeful existence of the organization even through hiring practices. For instance, Klein et al. (2013), O'Bannon (2002), Moradi (2014), Inglis & Graff (1997) point out how intentional measures to acquire essential personnel help set direction and secure the future of the organization.

#### *4.2 Determine Mission, Vision, and Values*

Mission, vision, and values embody the organization in its entirety in terms of what it intends to achieve, stands for and outcomes for societal and organizational benefits. Statement of the organization's mission conveys purposes and intentional efforts toward achieving those ends and is complemented by outlined medium-to-long term outlooks and associated beliefs as essential to fulfilling organizational goals and objectives for the greater good. In the words of BoardSource (2010, p.33) "statement of vision, mission and values also serve to guide and benchmark such undertakings as organizational planning, assessment, board and staff decisions about programs and services, volunteer initiatives, and priorities among competing demands for scarce resources" which to a large extent points to the interconnectedness to succession planning and overall organizational efforts in mission fulfillment. Scholars such as Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin (1992), Herman & Renz (2000), Epstein & McFarlan (2011), Taylor, Chait & Holland (1996), Connelly (2004), Peppiatt (2015) highlight how a nonprofit board's attention to mission, vision and values promotes organizational success. The board is undoubtedly responsible for crafting, revising and accentuating the organization's mission statement and upholding its vision and associated values. Such efforts are connected to the organization's succession plans which basically aims at positioning the organization through strategic personnel efforts to continuously fulfill its stated mission and vision which are reflected in the espoused values of the organization. Scholars such as Connelly (2004), Nadler-Moodie (2012) among others elucidate how nonprofit board's commitment to organizational mission enhances succession planning for sustainability purposes.

#### *4.3 Engage in Strategic Thinking and Strategic Planning*

Strategic thinking and strategic planning embody innovative approaches toward fulfilling the organization's mission in a proactive and well thought-out manner. Strategic thinking promotes creative ways of examining and taking advantage of challenges and opportunities, and strategic planning enables effective measures based on careful assessment of organizational realities to foster realization of organizational goals and objective (BoardSource, 2010; Bryson, 1994). Together, strategic thinking and strategic planning position the organization to create needed impact on the community through continuous rendering of services to target populations. Scholars such as Anheier (2014), Andreason & Kotler (2007), Weaver & Inglis (1999), Hoye & Inglis, (2003), Bradshaw et al., (1992), Drucker (1990), and Connelly (2004) articulate how strategic thinking and strategic planning foster proactive efforts that promote organizational viability and mission accomplishment. Admittedly, succession planning is a key part of strategic thinking and strategic planning as promoting organizational and societal wellbeing underlie such nonprofit governance roles. For instance, Drucker (1990) reiterates the essential role of nonprofit organizational personnel in executing strategic plans to ensure accountability and beneficial outcomes to both organization and society. Strategic thinking and strategic planning measures to acquire key personnel for operational purposes by the board and management are certainly critical components of a nonprofit organization's succession plans.

#### *4.4 Build Competent and Sustainable Board*

Building a competent board for a nonprofit organization is an intentional effort to sustain the organization and service to the community. The board is tasked with ensuring the overall wellbeing of the organization with governance as its key role. The board alongside the organization's chief executive establish management and

operational structures to ensure organizational viability. BoardSource (2010, p. 35) considers nonprofit board as “talents the organization can draw on to further its mission”, and building of such boards through well thought out processes and engagements is tantamount to building effective organizational capacity that promotes sustainability. Scholars such as Hoye & Inglis (2003), Drucker (1990), Axelrod (1994), Sturgeon (1994), Herman et al. (1997) emphasize nonprofit board’s collective responsibility in ensuring effective leadership and in promoting realization of organization’s established purpose. As the governance mechanism of the organization, a competent nonprofit board enables effective succession planning as a conduit to organizational viability and sustainability (Elkin et al., 2012; Santora et al., 2007; Comini et al., 2009; Bell et al., 2006). Whether through recruitment of board members, organization and participation in board events, retreats, orientation, and innovative leadership pipeline efforts among others, a nonprofit board sets the stage for organizational, program and service continuity as part of their succession planning efforts. For instance, by building a competent management team as part of their governance roles, the nonprofit board fosters succession that promotes continuous organizational relevance for societal benefits.

#### *4.5 Select, Support, and Evaluate the Chief Executive*

A nonprofit chief executive occupies a unique and a strategic role within the organization and selecting the qualified candidate fosters organizational growth and sustainability. Selecting such a competent and capable chief executive through collective efforts of the board, staff and other organizational stakeholders sets the stage for mission enhancement and fulfillment in the short and long term. For instance, selecting a chief executive who understands the organization’s wherewithal and vision could steer proactive measures to promote organizational viability for service purposes and for organizational benefits. Scholars such as Herman (1989), Cornforth (2001), BoardSource (2004; 2010), Gill (2005), Houle (1997), Pointer & Orlikoff (2002), Epstein & McFarlan (2011), Axelrod (1994), Chait et al. (2004) point out the essence of chief executive’s role to a nonprofit organization by affirming how impactful such recruiting effort is next to establishing the intents and purposes of the organization and to promoting effective succession. Thus, selecting the chief executive is not just a mere nonprofit governance role, but critical to the eventual success of the organization. In fact, there is more to succession planning than just selecting the chief executive as other strategic organizational personnel are recruited from time to time to help carry out the intents and purposes of the organization. Nonetheless, by selecting a suitable nonprofit chief executive, supporting programs and evaluating performance of such executive while ensuring adequate compensation, a nonprofit board promotes effective organizational performance and succession in ways that advances realizing the purpose of the organization (Lynn, 2001; Comini et al., 2009; BoardSource, 2010; Elkin et al., 2012; Santora et al., 2015).

#### *4.6 Ensure Adequate Financial Resources*

Financial resources, especially, when adequate enable a nonprofit’s continuous operation and service to the community. In fact, adequate financial resources promote the organization’s value creation, mostly to the community even as it establishes the organization as trusted partner in development and/or service provision. The nonprofit board places such a critical role in securing resources through various forms of fundraising and in ensuring additional relevant resources by other means for the organization (Greenfield, 2008; Sternberg, 2008; Martinelli, 1998; Pointer & Orlikoff, 2002, Chait et al., 2004; Carver, 2006; Axelrod, 1994; Sieverdes, 2002; Young, 2007). Whether through board member’s personal giving, participation in nonprofit’s fundraising events, using personal network to raise funds for the organization, providing leads to chief executive and staff for fundraising purposes, making judicious financial decisions that will enable multiple funding streams (i.e. via investments, income generating activities among others), underscore the nonprofit board’s essential role in organization’s resource development (BoardSource, 2010, p.37-38). The nonprofit board’s role in ensuring adequate financial resources certainly enables focusing on the big picture while empowering the chief executive and rest of staff to handle day-to-day operational details of the organization. Admittedly, adequate financial resources promote a nonprofit entity’s succession plans as it fosters investment in strategic human resource development, recruitment of qualified and well-credentialed personnel, preparedness in dealing with unforeseen organizational resource challenges and consistency in mission fulfillment among others. Scholars such as Santora et al. (2007); Froelich et al. (2011); Hamm (2004) point out how planning for executive succession promote leadership, resource adequacy, financial wellbeing, and adaptability of nonprofit organizations.

#### *4.7 Enhance Organization Reputation and Public Outreach*

Enhancing the nonprofit organization’s public standing promotes the overall wellbeing of the organization. A nonprofit organization with a good reputation that is intentionally cultivated through board members’ professional behavior and engagements with the community fosters beneficial coexistence and attendant mutual benefits. The board members, in this context, serve as essential key representatives of the organization and the community it serves as part of awareness creation in line with improving public standing of the organization

(BoardSource, 2010). Other scholars such as Purdy & Lawless (2012), BoardSource (2004a), Herman and Renz (2000), Peppiatt (2015), Martinelli (1998), and Gill (2005) reiterate the positive impact that nonprofit board members' conduct and effective engagement with community stakeholders have on the organization's overall wellbeing. The public awareness creation by board members has elements such as narrating the nonprofit organization's accomplishments, impact of services on the community, transparency and accountability as it relates to usage of resources, and board members' representation of the nonprofit organization in various community projects and programs (BoardSource, 2010, p. 39). A nonprofit board members' good representation of the organization in the community creates general positive impression for the organization and thereby fosters acceptance of succession planning efforts. For instance, such a good reputation could enable qualified members of the community and those from outside to accept positions in the organization to enhance continuous positive contributions of the organization to the community. Scholars such as Tierney (2006), Dalton and Dalton (2007), Giambatista et al., (2005) expatiate on how the board and current executive director of a nonprofit organization are instrumental in succession planning through multiple engagements to avoid organizational and leadership shortfalls, and Miller-Millesen (2003) conveys how a nonprofit board behavior has implications for organizational viability. To some extent, a nonprofit organization's good public standing can enhance trust with the community and support for programs even if it involves bringing in a new chief executive from outside as part of implementing succession plans.

#### *4.8 Provide oversight of assets and liabilities*

Oversight is very important to protecting and sustaining the organization in the short and long term. Nonprofit board's oversight in areas of organizational assets and liabilities including financial and human resources points to a sense of responsibility, commitment and accountability on the part of the board to ensure the organization delivers services to enhance mission fulfillment. BoardSource (2010, p. 39) asserts that board's oversight is "not only of finances and programs, but also of an organization's legal and moral conduct and its overall effectiveness." Thus, a nonprofit board's effective execution of its oversight responsibilities enhances the organization's public image and agency role in society, particularly, in program areas. For instance, oversight of organization's resources, particularly, human resources fosters continuous recruitment and retention of key talents as part of the organization's succession plan undertakings. Peppiatt (2015), Connelly (2004), Epstein & McFarlan (2011), Purdy & Lawless (2012), BoardSource (2004b), O'Donovan (2003) and other scholars expound on the important role that oversight of nonprofit resources plays in promoting organizational health and purpose realization. A nonprofit board's oversight as it relates to succession plans enables sometimes recruiting additional talents from outside the organization to occupy key and strategic positions within the organization as a conduit to realizing established goals and objectives for societal and organizational benefits (Froelich et al., 2011; Bell et al., 2006; Tierney, 2006; Bowen, 1994). Making available via public domain all relevant information and documents in line with the organization's established policies and procedures to various stakeholders including the general public/community promotes better understanding of the board's oversight efforts.

#### *4.9 Monitor and strengthen programs and services*

The nonprofit board is responsible for ensuring programs and services that are rendered by the organization are in conformance with established goals and objectives. Such programs and services are regularly reviewed by the board against anticipated outcomes to ensure mission fulfillment. BoardSource (2010, p. 42) perspective that "board responsibility begins with ensuring that current and proposed programs and services align with the organization's stated mission and purposes" captures the essence of the board's role in meeting organizational expectations. Perspectives of scholars such as Pointer & Orlikoff (2002), Gill (2005), Axelrod (1994), Houle (1997), and Chait et al. (2004) relate to the views expressed by BoardSource on the governance role in the area of programs and services. A nonprofit board's effort in evaluating programs and services on regular basis which includes conducting cost effectiveness analysis, authorizing programs, service and personnel improvement measures, and establishing program and service specific metrics in relations to the organization's mission are some of the ways the board fulfills its programs and service monitoring and strengthening role (Purdy & Lawless, 2012; Chait et al., 2004; Pointer & Orlikoff 2002). Such efforts, especially, as it relates to monitoring personnel performance is inextricably connected to succession plans of the organization as intentional efforts are exerted by the board and management to ensure all resources are effectively utilized to achieved the organization's mission.

#### *4.10 Ensure legal and ethical integrity*

Legal and ethical integrity are necessary to ensure a nonprofit organization is trustworthy player in society, particularly, in its area(s) of operation. Whether in its internal and external engagements, the organization is expected to comply with established legal procedures, rules and regulations, and conduct itself in ethically



responsible manner, especially, in its day-to-day operations. The board of directors as well as the rest of organization's staff and other critical stakeholders are expected to comply with various stipulations in a manner that enhance the organization's reputation and fulfilment of its mission for society. The nonprofit board's role in ensuring legal and ethical integrity cut across its various activities, events, and representations. Thus, the board's intentional efforts in promoting transparency, accountability and compliance to various local, state and federal stipulations, statutes and even internal policies and practices among others are critical to ensuring legal and ethical integrity/compliance (BoardSource, 2010; Silk, 1994; Jeavons, 1994; Bidet, 2010; Purdy & Lawless, 2012; Preston & Brown, 2004; Herman & Renz, 2004; Peppiatt, 2015; Connelly, 2004). For instance, a nonprofit organization's compliance efforts as it relates to labor-management relation issues, especially, in recruiting personnel and treating such personnel in consonance with local/state stipulations is a key part of succession planning efforts and help establish the organization's standing as a good and socially responsible entity in society.

#### *4.11 Identify and mitigate risks*

Identifying and mitigating risks associated with a nonprofit organization's efforts is paramount and has become an area of key interest to nonprofit boards. In fact, such a role is important to a nonprofit organization's viability and continuous operation. Identifying and mitigating risks relates to several areas that necessitate all-encompassing knowledge and experience of board members with attendant responsibilities. Traditionally, identifying and mitigating risks is associated with application in legal documents, providing insurance, safe transportation, ensuring appropriate checks and balances, and providing a safe and clean working environment among others (Young, 1998; Peppiatt, 2015). However, expectations of nonprofit boards as it relates to mitigating risks has evolved in today's complex and dynamic dispensation to include protection of information/data, computer and network systems, emergency planning and response, comprehensive human resource policies and practices, infrastructure investments as well as building maintenance and security, sound financial policies and close oversight of investment and cash funds, and ongoing oversight in general among others (Tremper, 1990; 1994; Tremper & Kostin, 1993; Peppiatt, 2015). The various scholarly perspectives on the subject matter emphasize the importance of risk management measures to protect and promote quality of nonprofit organization's services. Admittedly, identifying and mitigating risks associated with organizational personnel and volunteers is a key part of a nonprofit organization's succession plans and related undertakings (Allison, 2002; McFarlan, 1999). Such intentional and structured efforts to prevent and/or manage risks as it relates to personnel and other resources promote goodwill and long term viability of the organization.

### **5. Attendant Model and Perspectives**

The model below depicts the connectedness and interconnectedness of nonprofit governance and succession planning. Specifically, the model highlights nonprofit governance roles from setting organizational direction to identifying and mitigating risks as earlier discussed to point out the uniqueness and contributions of each nonprofit governance role and how the performance of each role is inextricable intertwined with other roles, and how concerted performance of the various roles by the board enables realization of the organizational purpose. Furthermore, the model depicts the centrality of succession planning to nonprofit governance as it relates to the performance of the various governance roles and conveys how a nonprofit organization's board endeavors culminate in harnessing human and material resources and how strategic utilization of such resources promote the realization of the organizational purpose. Thus, nonprofit governance roles which integrate succession planning as exemplified by efforts of nonprofit board of directors would enable mission fulfillment for organizational and societal benefits with a particular attention to the rudiments of each local system in which the nonprofit organization operates and the impact it creates.

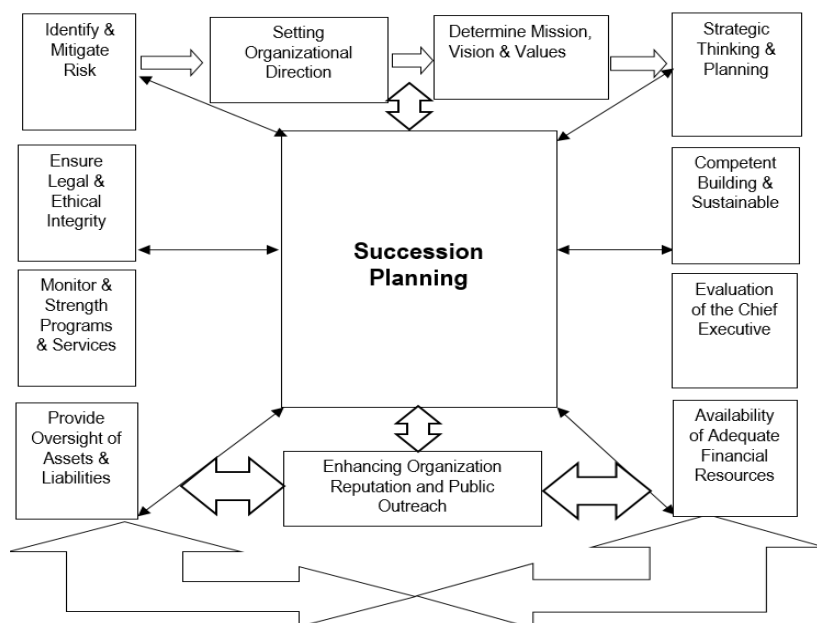


Figure 1. *Nonprofit Governance Model*

**Source:** Model designed by the authors with insights from BoardSource, 2010

In an attempt to buttress their argument of nonprofit governance as succession planning, the authors rely on the extant literature on nonprofit governance and succession planning with particular attention to definitions and associated conceptual explications. Nonprofit governance is conceptualized as structured and intentional efforts of board of directors to promote mission fulfillment for organizational and societal benefits. Relatedly, succession planning is conceptualized as strategic decisions to sustain organizational endeavors by acquiring needed personnel, but not limited to just the chief executive. For instance, when it comes to setting direction for the organization, the nonprofit board assiduously work with the chief executive to set measures including strategically acquiring personnel and other resources that will promote the organization's viability. Furthermore, the board's efforts in monitoring and strengthening programs and services in ensuring adequate financial resources, and providing oversight among others are inextricably connected to the nonprofit organization's succession plans. Similarly, when a nonprofit board makes a decision on who is most qualified to lead the organization and promote it values, raises financial and other resources which includes adequately rewarding personnel, and assesses various organizational undertakings including assets and liabilities among others, all of such efforts are inextricably connected to succession plans as part of the organization's strategic initiatives with a focus on the key role of human resources in realizing its mission. In fact, scholars such as Santora et al. (2007), Froelich et al. (2011), and Drucker (1990) among others accentuate how strategic planning and strategic use of personnel resources by nonprofit organizations through board's initiatives promote organizational viability and mission fulfillment for the greater good.

The authors are of the view that nonprofit governance as succession planning augments the existing perspective of nonprofit governance as leadership. This is more so because a nonprofit board alongside the chief executive as key leaders are very involved in succession planning as a conduit to keeping a nonprofit organization viable and making a difference in a community (Santora et al, 2015; Hoyer & Inglis, 2003; Inglis & Graff, 1997; MacKenzie & Moore, 1993). The board and management efforts to recruit essential personnel to occupy various key positions and to help acquire other resources while providing oversight as it relates to utilization exemplify the strong interconnectedness of nonprofit governance and succession planning for organizational and community benefits. Additionally, an effective nonprofit board is a consequence of succession planning even as it relates to recruiting board members as a strategic decision to sustain the organization is borne out of intentional efforts of critical stakeholders.

What the authors try to convey is that human resources such as board members, chief executive and other key and strategic personnel of nonprofit organizations, are for the most part outcomes of intentional and structured efforts to acquire key personnel to steer the affairs of the organization through various roles. Thus, succession planning that ensures harnessing relevant and integral talents for the organization has become such a strategic undertaking by nonprofit boards and management. In fact, a proactive measures taken by nonprofit organizations nowadays as it relates to the issue of succession planning underscores the point that people matter and are critical to any nonprofit organization's overall viability and effectiveness, especially, as it relates to efforts to fulfill established organizational mission for mutually beneficial outcomes.

For the critics who might be wondering whether the authors are trying to negate cogent arguments

postulated by previous scholars who framed nonprofit governance as leadership, the answer is certainly no. What these authors attempt to do is to extend nonprofit governance conceptualization. These authors advance the argument by highlighting leadership as a product of succession planning which is an intentional endeavor to acquire essential personnel to occupy relevant roles in a nonprofit organization to carry out its vision and mission (Froelich et al., 2011; Klein & Salk, 2013; Bradshaw, 2001). Similarly, the authors argue that various nonprofit governance roles as exemplified by board members undertakings whether by recruiting fellow board members, organization's chief executive, volunteers, and other strategic personnel are thereby inextricably connected to ensuring success of the organization through personnel succession plans and attendant efforts which for instance even enable acquiring material resources to foster realization of the purpose of a nonprofit organization. Thus, succession planning is not a minimal nonprofit governance role, but represents every facets of board governance and to some extent organizational management endeavors for both organizational and societal benefits.

## 6. Conclusion

Nonprofit governance is such a critical part of nonprofit organization's viability and provides attendant benefits to society. In fact, nonprofit governance which manifests through the various roles of a nonprofit board of directors fosters fulfillment of organization's mission. Regardless of the size of a nonprofit organization, governance thus remains as its lifeblood toward purposeful ends. The authors in this paper frame nonprofit governance as succession planning in view of the fact that various nonprofit governance roles are inextricably intertwined with succession planning, especially, as people/organizational personnel are critical to every endeavor including acquiring material resources that are necessary for a nonprofit organization's mission fulfillment. The authors relate and explicate the various nonprofit governance roles and highlight areas of connectedness of each role to succession planning. Whether in the areas of hiring the chief executive, providing oversight of assets and liabilities, identifying and mitigating risks, monitoring and strengthening programs, and ensuring resources among others, nonprofit organizations through a board of directors aim to promote viability, relevance, and service to the community which undoubtedly is a consequence of strategic succession plans and the attendant human efforts in executing established intents and purposes of the organization. The authors complement the argument by depicting connectedness of nonprofit governance roles and their interconnectedness to succession planning in a formulated model. Succession planning is centralized in the model whiles connected to the various nonprofit governance roles by diagrammatic arrows. The authors postulate that by placing emphasis on the centrality of succession planning as inextricably intertwined with nonprofit governance through actions of board of directors will necessitate needed attention, especially, in the perception of the central role of organizational personnel in mission fulfillment and associated benefits for both organization and society.

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