

AN INTERGENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON  
ROUTINE ROLE SUCCESSION IN ORGANIZATIONS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I apply an intergenerational perspective to examine succession at all levels of organizations. This perspective suggests that for every organizational role, there are three critical actors: the incumbent, the predecessor, and the successor. Each of these individuals represents a *generation* in that they will occupy the same role at different intervals for a finite period of time, eventually being replaced by the next *generation*. The predecessor may be viewed as the past generation, the incumbent as the current generation, and the successor as the future generation. These generations are linked not only through their shared association with the particular role, but also through the knowledge, skills, and resources that they can potentially transfer to the next generation. I draw from literatures in imprinting, engagement, and temporal focus to better understand the process of routine role succession. While separately these theories provide different views related to role succession, taken together they draw attention to components of role succession that have not received attention to date.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Employees come and go, but roles remain. Individuals born between 1957 and 1964 held, on average, 11 jobs during their first 30 years of employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Given recent changes in the organization of work and the changing global economy, today's *boundaryless* employees will likely experience even more job changes over the course of a career (Tams & Arthur, 2010). For example, in February of 2013, there were 3.9 million job openings, 4.4 million hires, and 4.2 million separations in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). This snapshot of fluidity in the U.S. labor market has real implications for those millions of individuals involved in the routine movement in and out of jobs (i.e., *role succession*: the process of vacating roles and subsequently occupying them with new incumbents [Ashforth, 2001]) on a monthly basis and raises the following important unanswered questions regarding roles and the multiple individuals who occupy the same role over time: *What factors might contribute to the success of succession? How might predecessors be uniquely positioned to benefit the next role incumbent?* In attempting to answer these questions, this dissertation responds to a call made three decades ago: "To assess the significance of the continual processes of role succession we need to look at...how transitions are experienced...and what their outcomes are" (Nicholson, 1984: 173).

While CEO succession is the most highly visible and frequently discussed form of succession in academic and public press (see Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005), it makes up only a small fraction of succession events in organizations. In this dissertation I apply an intergenerational perspective to examine succession at all levels of organizations. This

perspective suggests that for every organizational role, there are three critical actors: the incumbent, the predecessor, and the successor. Each of these individuals represents a *generation* in that they will occupy the same role at different intervals for a finite period of time, eventually being replaced by the next *generation* (Wade-Benzoni, 2002). The predecessor may be viewed as the past generation, the incumbent as the current generation, and the successor as the future generation. These generations are linked not only through their shared association with the particular role, but also through the knowledge, skills, and resources that they can potentially transfer to the next generation. I draw from literatures in imprinting, engagement, and temporal focus to better understand the process of routine role succession. While separately these theories provide different views related to role succession, taken together they draw attention to components of role succession that have not received attention to date. I accomplish this through three primary objectives that I will introduce here, and explore in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

First, I begin the intergenerational perspective of role succession by examining the valuable role of the predecessor in succession. As individuals enter new roles, they seek information from a variety of sources in order to reduce uncertainty and address challenges that arise in the new role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Falcione & Wilson, 1998; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). While there are a variety of sources to which these new incumbents might go, those with previous experience within the particular role may prove to be the most beneficial (Saks, Uggerslev, & Fassina, 2007). Time in a role makes the predecessor knowledgeable about what the role entails and how to be successful in it (Toffler, 1981). In addition, when the predecessor occupied the role, he or she likely

engaged in role-making wherein the role was crafted and modified according to his or her own personal experience or preference (Turner, 1962; Nicholson, 1984) and is therefore in a unique position to pass on this very specific *imprint* to a future incumbent (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). A *predecessor imprint* is the process whereby the predecessor passes along characteristics key to success in the role, to a successor, who is “looking to peers, to mentors, to leaders [for] powerful cues as to how to behave” (Higgins, 2005: 338). The predecessor imprint provides guidance and reduces uncertainty regarding role requirements to individuals who occupy the same role they occupied in the past (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). From this perspective, the predecessor is an active participant in the role transition process and may have a positive impact on the incumbent’s experience and performance in the role.

Thus, my second objective is to focus on the impact of the predecessor imprint on the incumbent. The predecessor imprint includes the transfer of role-relevant knowledge (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Reagans & McEvily, 2003) which may occur through mentoring or other “intense interpersonal exchanges” (Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002; Levinson et al., 1978; Allen, 2004). The predecessor imprint gives the incumbent a solid foundation in the role, meaning the predecessor may need to expend less energy seeking out knowledge and information from other sources in the organization; rather, he or she can focus on placing his or her energies in the enactment of the role. Kahn (1990, 1992) refers to the investment of one’s affective, cognitive, and physical energies into a role as “engagement.” I will examine how a predecessor imprint may lead to higher levels of engagement, thereby impacting incumbent performance, as well as the relationship between predecessor imprint and the incumbent’s propensity to invest in a potential successor (the *third*

*generation* in succession). Research on intergenerational reciprocity suggests that a predecessor's imprint on an incumbent may in turn prompt the incumbent to act in kind to a subsequent incumbent of the same role. (Wade-Benzoni, 2002; Wade-Benzoni, Sondak & Galinsky, 2010).

A third and final objective of this dissertation is to establish the relevance of *temporal focus* in-role succession. Temporal focus refers to differences in how individuals focus more on the past, present, or future (Shipp et al., 2009; Bluedorn, 2002). This focus impacts individuals' attitudes, decisions, and behaviors by anchoring the individual to thinking about memories of the past or expectations for the future (Holman & Silver, 1998; Bandura, 2001; Fried & Slowik, 2004; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). These attitudes, decisions, and behaviors may be positive or negative depending on individual perceptions of what happened in the past or what the future holds (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Because routine role succession is a temporal phenomenon, I propose that the extent to which an incumbent is impacted by a predecessor imprint depends in part on his/her temporal focus.

Thus overall, this dissertation argues and tests the assumption that routine, everyday succession is of critical importance; considering succession through a richer intergenerational lens will allow it to be understood and managed more effectively. The empirical context of this study is a sample of professional university fundraisers. A sample of university fundraisers offers an ideal context to test the theoretical ideas proposed in this study for two primary reasons. First, it is a growing field with high demand (Adams, 2009) given the changing nature of higher education funding, particularly at public universities, which is the location for this sample. As such, fundraisers have opportunities

to move often into new roles and do so with increasing regularity, thereby creating many succession events and increasing the need to better understand them. Second, the knowledge critical to a fundraiser's success resides in relationships with donors, which are often nuanced and established over long periods of time. When a fundraiser leaves a role, the connection the donor feels to the university may be at risk. Links between generations of fundraisers through *imprints* may serve as a critical source of continuity for donors and the organization.

### **Plan of Study**

This dissertation investigates the role played by incumbent engagement and temporal focus in the impact of predecessor imprint on performance and incumbent investment in a potential successor. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature that supports the theoretical framework pertinent to generations in organizations and role succession. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical model I am proposing, provides an overview of the theoretical relationships between the variables literatures I discuss in Chapter 2, and presents the hypotheses I tested. Chapter 4 includes the research sample, data collection, measures, and analysis techniques. The results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will discuss the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. Survey items are included in the Appendix.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will review the various literatures related to generations in organizations and role succession that support the three objectives presented in Chapter 1. First, I will provide the *theoretical framework* for this dissertation by introducing a generational perspective on role succession, identifying what a generation in an organization consists of, and describing how role succession fits within that conceptualization. Second, I will provide an overview of the *key theoretical constructs* utilized in this dissertation: predecessor imprint, engagement, and temporal focus.

#### **A Generational Perspective on Role Succession**

A recently developed framework identified how generations can be specified and measured in organizational settings (Joshi, Dencker & Franz, 2011). This framework presents two distinct critical elements that give *generations* legitimacy in organizational settings – chronology (the idea that a unique location in time creates a *generation*) and genealogy (the idea that generations are linked through the transmission/descent of ideas/values/skills/knowledge). Different *generations* then are based on temporal distinctions between individuals who occupy unique locations in a chronological order. Preceding and succeeding generations may also be linked through the unique *imprints* (e.g., the set of knowledge, skills, and values) that are acquired and can be transferred based on location in a temporal order. In this dissertation, I apply this two-part definition of generations to the study of role succession in organizations. Incumbents who hold the same position at different points in time represent *distinct* chronological generations who are *linked* through the sharing of values/skills/knowledge across generations. In this section I

review the literatures that provide support for *a chronological perspective on roles* and *a genealogical perspective on roles*, thereby specifying role succession as a generational phenomenon in organizations.

#### *A Chronological Perspective on Role Succession*

“A generation can be understood as a single individual while he or she occupies a particular role. The previous generation would be the person who had occupied the role previously, and the succeeding generation would be the person replacing the present generation. Thus, the boundaries of a single generation are demarcated by an individual’s tenure in that role...the time period in that role is limited in the sense that one generation does not occupy the role indefinitely. At some point, generational transition occurs, whereby one generation succeeds another and comes to occupy the role formerly occupied by the generation that it replaced” (Wade-Benzoni, 2002: 1012-1013). Consider the example of the head of a department at a university. During her time as the department head, she occupies the same role as the individual who preceded her as the department head. Assuming the department continues to exist after her departure, she will be succeeded by the next department head. Therefore, each incumbent who occupies the department head role represents a chronologically distinct generation.

Incumbency in a role is also associated with a set of common experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are formed as a result of occupying a job/role for a finite amount of time (Lynch, 2007). These differences in experience vary across generations and are a consequence of the experiences that occur during his or her tenure in the role. Consider the university environment in 1993 compared to the university environment in 2013. These

two markedly different periods likely resulted in two markedly different experiences for the heads of department who occupied the same role at those two different points in time.

### *A Genealogical Perspective on Role Succession*

While generations may be chronologically distinct, another important facet in examining generations is the genealogical link between them. As Kertzer (1983: 135) noted, "No review of the use of the generation concept would be complete...without consideration of how sociologists have employed generation in its genealogical, or descent sense." The genealogical perspective provides insight into how one generation may, or may not, transmit values, ideas, and knowledge to the next generation. This adds an essential factor in conceptualizing generations in organizations; although generations are distinct based on their chronological order, they are also linked to one another through the sharing of values, skills, and knowledge that are acquired based on their location in that chronological order. To revisit the example from above, while the two department heads are distinct based on the period of time in which they led the department, they may also be linked through the knowledge that the 1993 department head shares with the 2013 department head. This section reviews some of the work in sociology referred to by Kertzer (1983) in examining the genealogical linkages between generations.

Aldous and Hill (1965) provide an example of the way in which genealogical connections across generations have been conceptualized and studied. They examined the transmission of cultural values across three-generation triads of children-parents-grandparents and found that these family structures were essential mechanisms for the transmission of cultural values and that transmission was more likely through same-sex lineages (e.g., daughter-mother-grandmother) rather than cross-sex lineages. Kalish and

Johnson (1972) tracked the mothers and grandmothers of 55 women and found only modest differences in values between the three generational groups. Skvoretz and Kheoruenromne (1979) examined whether parents transmit values of their social class to their children, however, the findings were unclear in this regard. More recently, Bengtson (2011) and colleagues have considered multigenerational families and the process of the transmission of values between grandparents, parents and children. Applying a longitudinal qualitative and survey-based methodology, their research tracked 25 multigenerational families and approximately 2,000 survey respondents in eight waves between the years 1970 and 2005. The study identified how different parenting styles, closeness of relationships, and alignments between children and grandparents (rather than parents) positively or negatively impacted the transmission of values (Bengtson, 2011). These studies exemplify kinship-based approaches to the study of generations where each parent, child, and grandparent generation is linked genealogically and functions as a source for the transmission of values or resources.

While these studies are not *organizational* per se, they provide a basis for understanding the intergenerational transmission of values and resources that are acquired based on location in a chronological order. Since incumbency in a particular job-level or functional role is associated with a set of common experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are formed as a result of occupying a job/role for a finite amount of time (Lynch, 2007), incumbents can share those experiences, attitudes, and knowledge with a successor, thereby linking the two generations together through the role they share and the transfer of resources and skills between them. To again revisit the example of the department head, as she leaves the position (whether to take on more administrative

responsibilities elsewhere or return to the faculty), she possesses a wealth of knowledge and experience based on her time in that role. As her successor enters the role, she can actively pass along that knowledge and experience in order to equip her successor for the work in the role of department head. While these two individuals represent distinct generations in the department chair role, the sharing of this knowledge effectively links them together. In the next section, I will examine this particular phenomenon in greater detail, beginning with the role of the *predecessor imprint* in the formation of intergenerational linkages.

### *Key Theoretical Constructs*

#### **Predecessor Imprint**

Predecessors are in a position to share “key pieces of information...that will enable the incoming person to perform his or her new job” (Wade-Benzoni, 2002: 1026). In this section I utilize the term *predecessor imprint* to more fully explain 1) how the set of experiences associated with a role results in the *formation of a predecessor imprint* that is particularly valuable to the successive occupant in the role, and 2) how that *imprint may be transmitted* to the successive occupant in the role. I attempt to further substantiate the concept of imprint; a concept which has garnered a great deal of theoretical attention, but which still lacks empirical exploration (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). In so doing, I shed light on the important role the predecessor plays in the intergenerational process of role succession.

#### *The Formation of Predecessor Imprint*

Marquis & Tilcsik (2013) define an imprint as “a process whereby, during a...period of susceptibility, a focal entity develops characteristics that reflect prominent features of

the environment, and these characteristics continue to persist” (p. 195). Although the focus of this definition is on the transmission of the imprint from one entity to another, it assumes that the transmitting entity has acquired an imprint worthy of transmission. Additionally, while this definition is broad enough to capture various levels of analysis and theory, the authors are quick to point out that at the individual level, “the environment” includes peers, mentors, and leaders who “provide powerful cues as to how to behave” (Higgins, 2005: 338) to other individuals (“focal entity”). Thus, in this section I focus on how one particular imprint—the predecessor imprint—is developed, and how it may be particularly valuable to subsequent incumbents in the same role.

Recently, the study of roles has garnered significant attention from the identity literature; role identity “provides a definition of self-in-role” that contains the “values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons that are typically associated with a role” (Ashforth, 2001: 6). This conceptualization of roles recognizes an interactionist perspective, which proposes that role incumbents negotiate the behaviors associated with a role in a tentative, creative way during the time that the individual occupies the role (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Accordingly, roles are shaped by both personal disposition and situational circumstances that may require (or allow) different behaviors, thereby impacting the eventual enactment by role incumbents (Lynch, 2007). Through this process, role incumbents become acquainted with both the explicit and tacit components of the role. This knowledge, then, allows them to perform what is required in the role (Callero, 1994).

Nicholson (1984) describes this process of actively determining role content and structure as “imprint[ing] the stamp of their identity and unique skills upon the role” (p. 176). In this sense, while a predecessor occupies a role, he or she makes it his or her *own*.

Predecessors imbue the role with a combination of their own personalities and their responses to unique situations that arose during their time in the role. As a result, they leave an indelible imprint upon the role that not only shapes the role but also shapes others' expectations of what the role entails and how each successive role occupant should behave within the particular role.

The concept of *imprint* has been utilized in studies across a variety of contexts and at various levels of analysis (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). The unifying theme across these studies is that one entity (i.e., individual, group, organization) is in the position to develop and pass along prominent features (e.g., knowledge, values, skills) to another entity (i.e., individual, group, organization), wherein those prominent features persist across time. Burton and Beckman (2007) examined whether imprints left by first incumbents in newly created firms constrained subsequent role occupants. This study found that it was difficult to duplicate the initial position holder's imprint (based on educational and functional background) when the subsequent position holder had an atypical background, leading to increased turnover among subsequent position holders. This study emphasizes the reality that predecessors matter; they leave an imprint upon the role based on their active shaping and making of the role. However, in addition to their active role in creating the imprint, they also have the capacity to actively transfer the imprint to future occupants in the role. This goes beyond the transfer of a passive imprint suggested by Burton and Beckman (2007), but rather suggests the active transmission of an imprint based on experience and familiarity with the particular role the predecessor occupied. Thus, the predecessor is in a unique position to transmit his or her valuable imprint to the next individual who occupies that particular role.

### *The Transmission of Predecessor Imprint*

As the previous section demonstrated, organizational research suggests that individuals form unique imprints based on incumbency in roles. In addition to the formation of the imprint, predecessors may also be in the position to transmit that imprint to those who succeed them in a role. Evidence from the imprinting literature suggests that the transmission of an imprint may be particularly beneficial. For example, in a five-decade study of Nashville lawyers, McEvily and colleagues (2012) demonstrate that the early years of lawyers' careers constitute a highly formative learning period during which exposure (i.e., the opportunity to receive an imprint) to more senior lawyers affects the amount of practical knowledge the young lawyers acquire. Many years after this exposure occurs, the law firms populated by the *imprinted* lawyers were more successful than firms who had fewer imprinted lawyers. In addition, the early-career orientation of mentors affects scientists' patenting behavior well into their careers (Azoulay et al., 2011) and the characteristics of early-career mentors continue to shape mutual fund managers' entrepreneurial decisions for years to come (Kacperczyk, 2009).

These studies reveal two important characteristics of the transmitted imprint: 1) individuals received imprints from more senior mentors, and 2) the imprint came at a time when the individuals were more susceptible to the imprint. As Marquis and Tilcsik (2013) explain, "an imprint is stamped onto the focal entity in time intervals during which the entity exhibits intensified receptivity to external influence. During these brief sensitive periods, the focal entity is significantly more malleable by environmental conditions than in normal times" (p. 199). This first characteristic is supported by research from the mentoring literature. Mentoring relationships result in what McEvily et al., (2012) call

“imprinted ties.” These ties provide the opportunity for senior colleagues to mentor, share knowledge, and have an impact on their more junior colleagues. Mentoring relationships represent an “intense interpersonal exchange” between a mentor and a protégé in which the function of the mentor is to provide career and/or psychosocial support to enhance the protégé’s professional and personal development (Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002). Mentors are typically individuals with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing career and/or psychosocial support to—and advancing the careers of—more junior organizational colleagues (Kram, 1985). The bond created in the mentoring relationship makes it an ideal channel for the transfer of both tacit and explicit forms of knowledge (McEvily et al., 2012; Kram, 1985). However, not all mentoring relationships are equal. In a recent meta-analysis of mentoring studies, Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge (2008) concluded that “the time may have passed for research that investigates mentor functions as a primary determinant of the success of mentoring...it may be more profitable to consider the mentor’s position with the organization as an explanatory variable. It may not be especially helpful to one’s career success if a relatively powerless or naïve mentor comes to one’s assistance. If researchers wish to explain career success, they may increasingly have to turn away from mentor-functions scales and toward a more detailed understanding of the mentor process as organizationally embedded” (p. 279). This suggests that some mentors may be more valuable than others. As outlined in the previous section, predecessors are uniquely positioned to pass along their profitable imprint to successors through mentoring relationships.

The second characteristic of the transmitted imprint—that the imprint comes at a time when individuals are more susceptible to the imprint—is consistent with the

socialization literature which notes that uncertainty in a role is reduced through social interactions with individuals who help make sense of the new role (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Individuals who receive a predecessor imprint may be uniquely positioned to *hit the ground running*, given that they do not have to seek out additional sources to reduce uncertainty. They can simply focus on the tasks associated with their role. This idea is further supported by Saks et al's (2007) meta-analytic evidence that individuals who are the most beneficial to those making sense of a new role are those who have "previous experience with that particular job" (p. 440). The predecessor imprint then becomes a particularly valuable way to understand the transfer of knowledge through mentoring relationships between individuals familiar with a particular role and those who are seeking familiarity with the same role.

In this section I have provided an overview of how predecessors shape their roles (Lynch, 2007; Callero, 1994; Turner, 1962) thereby leading to the formation of an imprint. The predecessor's imprint can then be transmitted to the successor, providing knowledge that is critical to that individual's success in the role (Nicholson, 1984; Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013; Saks et al., 2007). This imprint may come in the form of effectively shared explicit and tacit forms of knowledge (McEvily et al., 2012; Kram, 1985; Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002). In the next section I will explore one important mechanism that may be impacted by the predecessor imprint—incumbent engagement.

## **Engagement**

The construct of employee engagement was first introduced by Kahn (1990) to signify the expression of the *self-in-role*, involving physical, cognitive, and emotional dimensions (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Rich et al., 2010). Kahn (1990) originally

described engagement as a unique motivational concept to explain the process of harnessing an employee's *full self* in terms of physical, cognitive, and emotional energies to work role performances. This conceptualization represents an inclusive view of the employee's agentic self, and thus engagement may provide a more comprehensive explanation for job performance effects than is provided by more familiar mechanisms that emphasize narrower aspects of the employee's self (Rich et al., 2010). For example, although engagement appears to be quite similar to job satisfaction (Newman & Harrison, 2008), they have fundamental differences. Engagement connotes activation, as opposed to satisfaction, which is more similar to satiation (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Furthermore, job satisfaction is an evaluative description of job conditions or characteristics (e.g., "I like my pay"), which is a feature of a job attitude (Brief & Weiss, 2002; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), whereas work engagement is a description of an individual's experiences resulting from the work (e.g., "I feel vigorous when working"). In this sense, work engagement is more than just the investment of a single aspect of the self; it represents the investment of multiple dimensions so that the experience is active, simultaneous, and holistic (Kahn, 1992; Rich et al., 2010).

Studies of engagement suggest that people will become engaged with their work through the investment of intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions, and forming meaningful connections with others (Truss, Alfes Soane, Rees & Gatenby, 2010). Similarly, proponents of the group engagement model (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Tyler & Blader, 2003) emphasize the role of social influences (e.g., social support from others in the organization) as fundamental to shaping employee engagement. Engagement emerges when antecedents are in place that signal to employees that they are valued and they have the resources

necessary to perform well in their role (Saks, 2006; Rich et al., 2010). As a result of this engagement, employees are enthusiastic and devote energy to their roles, thereby achieving higher levels of performance (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Christian and colleagues (2011) further parceled the increased role performance among engaged employees into *task* and *contextual* performance. They found that engagement is equally strongly related to both task and contextual performance. Because engaged employees experience a high level of connectivity with their work tasks, they strive toward task-related goals that are intertwined with their in-role definitions and scripts, leading to high levels of task performance. However, the equal relationship between task and contextual performance suggests that engaged employees are likely to perform extra-role behaviors because they are able to “free up” resources by accomplishing goals and performing their tasks efficiently, enabling them to pursue activities that are not part of their formal role descriptions. Additionally, engaged employees may simply consider all aspects of work to be part of their domain (because they commit physical, cognitive, and affective energies to their work), thereby stepping outside of behaviors most proximal to their in-role performance, and helping coworkers and the organization achieve their goals.

Nicholson (1984) notes that successful role transitions are those in which the individual entering the role experiences positive outcomes in three areas: affective, identity/cognition, and behavioral. Therefore, a *helpful* predecessor would be one who positively impacts his or her successor (i.e., the individual who has transitioned into the predecessor’s former role), according to the three areas identified by Nicholson (1984). Indeed, positively impacting a successor in just one of the areas would be insufficient to be

considered a successful transition, according to Nicholson's definition. Accordingly, engagement is a particularly helpful and relevant construct to help explain the mechanisms underlying succession in organizations. As suggested by the research highlighted in this section, employees who have the resources to perform in their roles may be "freed up" not only to engage (cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally) in activities that affect their role performance (Christian et al., 2011). These resources may be provided through the transmission of a predecessor imprint. Furthermore, engagement reveals more about the *self-in-role* (Salanova and Schaufeli 2008) than more narrow constructs such as job satisfaction. Given that role succession explicitly involves the roles individuals occupy within organizations, identifying a construct that is concerned with individual experience within a role is critical. These relationships will be more fully explored in Chapter 3.

### **Temporal Focus**

Shipp and colleagues (2009) define temporal focus as "the allocation of attention to the past, present, or future" (p2). There exists a rich history of research to suggest that individuals differ in their perceptions of the past, present, and future (Bluedorn, 2002; Nuttin & Lens, 1985; Rappaport, 1990). Although unidirectional time progresses forward, individuals can mentally move back and forth between the "settled past" and "shadowy preconceptions of what lies ahead" (Murray, 1938: 49; Wheeler, Stuss, & Tulving, 1997). This reality reinforces the distinction between objective time and subjective time, in which the former refers to the actual passage of time and the latter refers to a perceived notion of relativistic time (Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988; George & Jones, 2000). Subjective time implies that in the present moment individuals may recollect the past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future. Temporal focus is one individual level construct that sheds light

on how individual differences lead some to devote attention to perceptions of the past, present, and future (Bluedorn, 2002).

Temporal focus is important because thinking about the past, present, and future affects current attitudes, decisions, and behaviors. This is demonstrated in studies of goal-setting, motivation, and performance (Bandura, 2001; Cottle, 1976; Fried & Slowik, 2004; Nuttin & Lens, 1985), learning and self-regulation (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Sanna, Stocker, & Clarke, 2003), sense-making (Weick, 1979), affect (Wilson & Ross, 2003), and strategic choice (Bird, 1988; Das, 1987; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). For example, a past focus can enhance learning when previous actions are analyzed for relevant lessons, but it can diminish well-being when thoughts of the past consist of rumination about mistakes, regrets, or traumatic experiences (Holman & Silver, 1998; Sanna et al., 2003). A future focus can promote goal-setting, motivation, and achievement strivings, but it can hinder well-being when the pursuit of these goals creates time-pressure and anxiety (Bandura, 2001; Fried & Slowik, 2004; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

There is also evidence that the development of a general, stable temporal focus is influenced in early years by one's childhood experiences, national culture, socioeconomic status, and parental beliefs about time (McGrath & Tschan, 2004; Trommsdorff, 1983). For example, an individual may be socialized by her national culture to focus on the past (e.g., Asian culture that values tradition and history)(Ji, Guo, Zhang, & Messervey, 2009) and by her parents to focus on the future (e.g., family values of achievement and planning). At a given moment he or she may focus on any period of time due to various work or personal stimuli, but early socialization experiences will produce a general tendency to focus attention on the past or the future (Trommsdorff, 1983). Over time, one's general profile of

past and future focus should be stable, although it could be reinforced or modified through additional socialization experiences such as education, occupational choice, or personal experiences (Shipp et al., 2009).

Because role succession is a temporal phenomenon, the extent to which an incumbent is impacted by a *predecessor imprint* may depend in part on how much he or she is cognitively involved in either the past, present, or future. Temporal focus may be particularly key to succession because each succession event consists of three proximal individuals who represent three distinct points in time: the predecessor (the past), the incumbent (the present), and the potential successor (the future). Since individual differences in the tendency to orient more to the past, present, or future (Bluedorn, 2002) impact individuals' attitudes, decisions, and behaviors (Holman & Silver, 1998; Bandura, 2001; Fried & Slowik, 2004; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), thinking about the past or the future anchors an individual to memories of the past or expectations for the future, which may then lead to positive or negative outcomes depending on individual perceptions of what happened in the past or what the future holds (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Focusing on the past has implications for what was (or was not) transmitted by a predecessor, while focusing on the future may have implications for what will be transmitted to the next generation, the potential successor. Temporal focus as a moderating variable will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

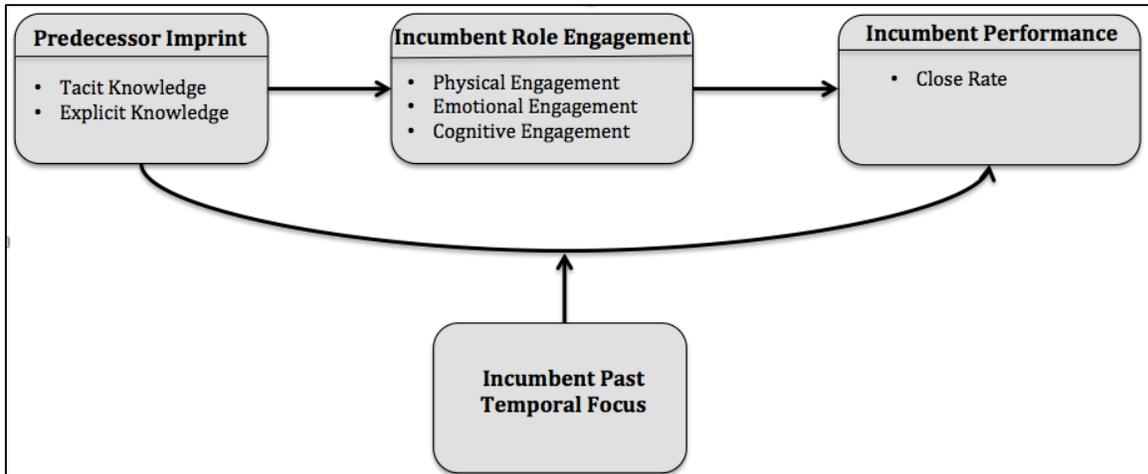
The three objectives I outlined in the introduction of this dissertation—examining the valuable role of the predecessor in succession events, understanding the impact of the predecessor imprint in-role succession, and introducing temporal focus as a relevant variable in succession—provide a rich perspective for understanding routine succession in organizations. This section will meet those objectives by identifying relationships between the concepts I reviewed in Chapter 2 and providing testable hypotheses regarding those relationships (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

#### **Outcomes of Predecessor Imprint**

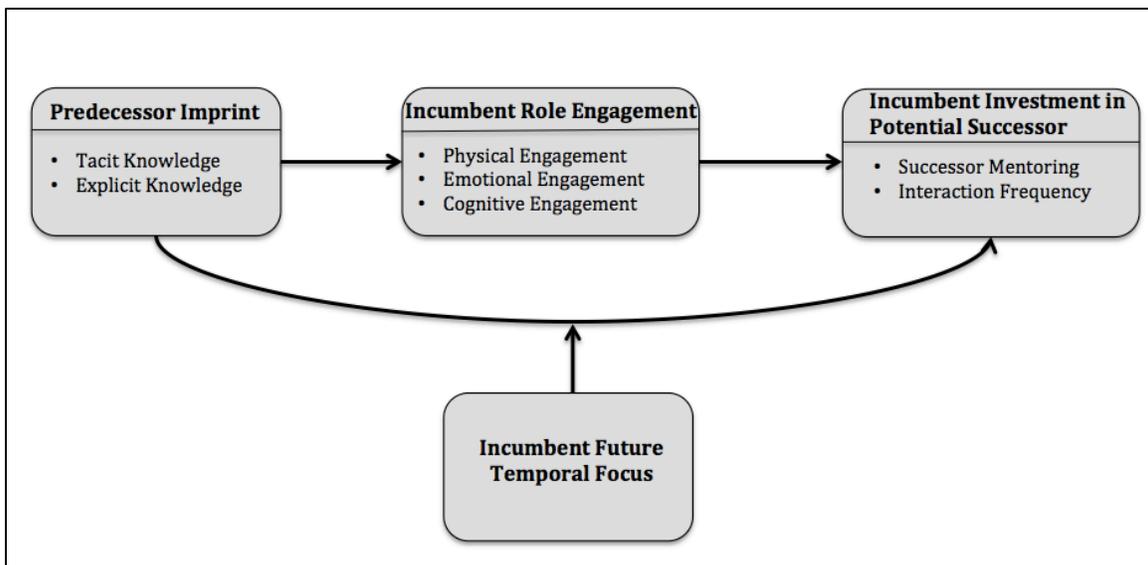
Predecessors may be in a position to share “key pieces of information...that will enable the incoming person to perform his or her new job” (Wade-Benzoni, 2002: 1026). These “key pieces of information” form the basis for knowledge that allows a role occupant to perform what is required in the role (Callero, 1994). This knowledge—explicit and tacit—may be transferred to the successor during times of intense interpersonal exchanges (Kram, 1985; Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002). In this study I measure predecessor imprint as consisting of explicit and tacit predecessor knowledge transfer (as reported by the incumbent).

#### *Predecessor Imprint and Incumbent Engagement*

From the imprint, role occupants gain access to knowledge that reduces uncertainty in order to learn what is required of them in the role (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). As the imprint is transmitted, the role occupant may receive background information necessary to diagnose certain challenges that arise in the new role (Louis, 1980). In situations



**Figure 1: Theoretical Model 1 (Dependent Variable: Incumbent Performance)**



**Figure 2: Theoretical Model 2 (Dependent Variable: Investment in Successor)**

where predecessors mentor successors the potential for a strong bond emerges. It is within these bonds, or *strong ties*, that the motivation to assist is greater, easing the transfer of knowledge between two individuals (Reagans & McEvily, 2003). Specifically, it is with these *strong tie* relationships that complex knowledge (i.e., “process knowledge” or tacit knowledge) is more effectively shared (Hansen, 1999). The tie between the two individuals prompts a common language, thus facilitating the sharing of nuanced knowledge (Uzzi, 1997). More particularly, these relationships may also result in what McEvily et al., (2012)

call “imprinted ties.” This idea suggests that within the strong ties that exist between predecessor and successor, an imprint may be transmitted. Support for this notion comes from studies of early-career orientation of mentors affecting scientists’ patenting behavior and mutual fund managers’ decisions well into their careers (Azoulay et al., 2011; Kacperczyk, 2009).

These knowledge intensive ties with a predecessor may be perceived as a strong form of support by the incumbent and may indeed share commonalities with perceived support. Rich, Lepine, and Crawford (2010) found that organizational support was a significant antecedent of engagement. Organizational support often comes in the form of trusting interpersonal relationships that enable individuals to succeed in their roles and take risks through investment of their energies (Kahn, 1990). When organizational support is low, employees feel less safe and are less inclined to feel safe in their roles. While organizational support can come from a variety of different organizational sources, positive relationships with critical others is a particularly valuable source of support and has been found to relate to engagement in several studies (e.g., Bakker, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2005; Saks, 2006). As Kahn (1990) suggests, when perceived organizational support is low, employees are unsure what to expect of in a role and may, as a result, withdraw. This is consistent with studies that address the broader concept of social support that shows relationships between rewarding interactions with others resulting in resilience and security (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The predecessor imprint is one critical source that provides support for the incumbent.

Within the transfer of knowledge that takes place within a predecessor imprint, values may also be communicated. This provides the incumbent with an understanding of

what is expected of him or her in the role. When individuals recognize and understand the values of an organization, and how those values align with their own values in the role they occupy, they make greater personal investments in their work (Brown & Leigh, 1996; May, Gilson & Harter, 2004). This construct, value congruence, has also been found to be positively to engagement (Rich et al., 2010).

The knowledge received by the incumbent through the predecessor imprint provides support for the incumbent and a may provide a better understanding of organizational values; accordingly, I would expect the predecessor imprint to share a similar relationship as those two concepts with engagement. The predecessor is in a unique position to transmit a valuable resource—an imprint—that will give the incumbent a greater sense of control over his or her work and understanding what the expectations are in the role (since the predecessor is uniquely acquainted with those expectations). Employees who have resources that facilitate their tasks within a role have been found to be more apt to invest energy and personal resources in their work roles (Bakker, van Emmerik, & Euwema, 2006; Salanova et al., 2005).

**Hypothesis 1:** *Predecessor imprint will be positively related to incumbent engagement.*

*Predecessor Imprint and Incumbent Performance: Engagement as Mediator*

While there is a well-supported body of evidence linking knowledge transfer to performance (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1997), and *role imprints* to performance (Burton & Beckman, 2007; McEvily et al., 2012) the role of engagement in further unpacking this relationship has not been addressed. As the previous section indicates, the predecessor imprint provides the necessary resources for the current incumbent to fully immerse himself or herself in the role. Since the imprint

more fully allows the full investment of oneself in the role, incumbents should exhibit enhanced performance because they work with greater intensity, are more focused on responsibilities of the role, are emotionally connected to the role they occupy, and have the knowledge necessary to complete the required tasks (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010).

Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, and Bakker (2002) view engagement as the conceptual opposite of burnout, stating that engagement is “a positive fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74). Schaufeli and Salanova’s (2007) work on engagement suggests that engaged employees are energetically and effectively connected to their work through full investment of one’s self in work activities. This is consistent with Kahn’s (1992) suggestion that engagement involves “the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). When people are psychologically present they feel attentive, and are connected, integrated, and focused in their role performance (Kahn, 1992). Additional research provides evidence that the more persistence and intensity individuals apply to their work in roles, the greater the positive impact on performance (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Burke, 2008; Kansfer, 1990). Put simply, in multiple samples employees who work harder also exhibit higher levels of job performance (Brown and Leigh, 1996). In contrast, employees who are highly disengaged in their work roles withhold their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies, resulting in robotic work in a role that is passive and detached (Goffman, 1961; Hochschild, 1983; Kahn, 1990).

Furthermore, the emotional, affective, and physical properties of engagement as proposed by Kahn (1990) provide a more complete representation of the individual in-role

due to its inclusion of the range of energies necessary to fully perform in a role. Rich et al. (2010) provide support for this argument in their study, which found engagement to be significantly related to performance in a model that included non-significant relationships between performance and the more narrow constructs of job involvement, job satisfaction, and intrinsic motivation.

In this section I have argued that engagement translates into superior performance; in the previous section, I argued that predecessor imprint leads to engagement. Given these two arguments, along with the previously noted relationships between knowledge transfer and performance (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Reagans & McEvily, 2003; Saks & Ashforth, 1997; Gerhart & Milkovich, 1992) and mentoring and performance (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Allen et al., 2004) I have implicitly described a model in which engagement mediates the relationship between predecessor imprint and incumbent performance. To be engaged in a role is to be cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally invested in the specific tasks associated with that role. Because the predecessor imprint provides the resources to do this, I expect the relationship between predecessor knowledge transfer and incumbent performance to be mediated by engagement.

**Hypothesis 2:** *Predecessor imprint will be positively related to incumbent performance.*

**Hypothesis 3:** *Incumbent engagement will mediate the relationship between predecessor imprint and incumbent performance.*

#### *Predecessor Imprint and Investment in Successor: Engagement as Mediator*

Christian and colleagues (2011) found that in addition to task performance being enhanced by engagement, contextual performance also increases. Contextual performance is defined as performance that is not formally required as part of the job, but that helps shape the social and psychological context of the organization (Borman & Motowidlo,

1993); this includes constructs such as organizational citizenship behaviors (Organ, 1988) and extra-role performance (Van Dyne, Cummings & Parks, 1995). As stated in the previous section, because engaged employees experience a high level of connectivity with their work tasks, they strive toward task-related goals that are intertwined with their in-role definitions and scripts, leading to high levels of task performance. However, the equal relationship between task and contextual performance in the Christian et al. (2011) study suggests that engaged employees may simply consider all aspects of work to be part of their domain (because they commit physical, cognitive, and affective energies to their work), thereby stepping outside of behaviors most proximal to their in-role performance, and helping coworkers and the organization achieve their goals.

Engagement is thought to be an indicator of an employee's willingness to expend discretionary effort to help the employer and fellow employees (Erickson, 2005). Kahn (1990) suggested that individuals who invest their personal selves into their work role are likely to carry a broader conception of that role and are more likely to step outside of the formal boundaries of their job to facilitate the organization at large and the people within. For example, Rich et al. (2010) in their study of firefighters found that engaged employees not only invested their energy into executing the tasks involved in fighting fires and dealing with other emergencies, but also tended to be helpful, courteous, and involved in organizational matters.

Given that highly engaged employees expend discretionary effort to help the employer and fellow employees (Erickson, 2005), one way in which they could do so is through investment in a potential successor. As mentioned previously, the succession event involves three generations: the predecessor, the incumbent, and the potential successor.

This potential successor is an individual who at some point in the future may occupy the role currently occupied by the incumbent (and previously occupied by the predecessor). I theorize here that investment in the potential successor involves mentoring and knowledge transfer between the incumbent and an individual which he or she has identified as potentially being a suitable successor for the role (when the incumbent departs the role). This is theoretically consistent with Christian et al.'s (2011) finding that engaged employees may simply consider all aspects of their role (task and contextual performance) to be part of their domain (because they commit physical, cognitive, and affective energies to their work) thereby stepping outside of behaviors most proximal to their in-role performance, and helping coworkers and the organization achieve their goals.

In addition to this relationship between engagement and investment in a potential successor, work on *intergenerational reciprocity* (Wade-Benzoni, 2002) suggests a relationship between predecessor imprint and investments in a potential successor. As distinct generations pass through a role in a clear sequence, they are in a position to first receive a benefit (from the previous generation) and contribute in the future (to the next generation). Consistent across four studies carried out in a laboratory setting, Wade-Benzoni (2002) found that whether or not previous generations pass along benefits to the current generations in the form of *depletable resources* (e.g., environmental resources, money) determines whether resources will be passed along by the current generation to the next generation. These results, carried out in a lab setting as part of a simulation with hypothetical scenarios and generations, provide insight into how intergenerational reciprocity functions, but fails to include how this might play out among generations in organizations that “have the opportunity to interact, some level of interdependence, and

compatible interests as well as conflicting ones” (Wade-Benzoni, 2002: 1025). By addressing this, light can be shed on “what will determine whether or not a departing employee will give an incoming person key pieces of information, such as files and notes, that will enable the incoming person to perform his or her new job better and become acclimated more easily” (p. 1026).

Benefits or burdens that are continuously replicated and transferred across generations of employees within a role may have very real and significant implications for a variety of organizational outcomes. By introducing *predecessor imprint* as a specific benefit that can add to the value of an intergenerational transmission across temporally distinct role incumbents, I am examining the value of a *non-depletable* intergenerational. While focusing on depletable resources (e.g., money) is important in an organizational setting, a focus on the knowledge that is transferred through a predecessor imprint could have important implications (Baum & Ingram, 1998) for the current incumbent as well as future generations which will occupy the same role.

Given the empirical support for intergenerational reciprocity I have outlined in this section, I propose that *predecessor imprint* serves as a non-depletable resource that may be reciprocated by the incumbent to the next generation in the form of an investment in the potential successor. Consistent with the body of work in this area (Wade-Benzoni, 2002; Wade-Benzoni, 2008a; Wade-Benzoni, Sondak, and Galinsky, 2010), I expect that incumbents who receive a predecessor imprint will be more likely to *pay forward* this benefit to the next generation by investing in a potential successor. Engagement plays a role in this relationship because it provides the evidence to an incumbent that the imprint was indeed a benefit; if the imprint leads to engagement, I would expect the benefit to be

reciprocated. Consistent with the previously stated research highlighting the strong link between engagement and contextual performance (under which investment in a potential successor falls), I suspect engagement to mediate the relationship between predecessor imprint and investment in a potential successor.

**Hypothesis 4:** *Predecessor imprint will be positively related to incumbent investment in potential successor.*

**Hypothesis 5:** *Incumbent role engagement will mediate the relationship between predecessor imprint and incumbent investment in potential successor.*

### **Temporal Focus as Moderator**

Because succession into a role is a temporal phenomenon, the extent to which an incumbent is impacted by a *predecessor imprint* may depend in part on how much he or she is cognitively involved in either the past, present, or future. Temporal focus refers to the degree to which an individual focuses his or her attention on the past, present, or future (Shipp et al., 2009). Temporal focus may be particularly key to succession because each succession event consists of three proximal individuals who represent three distinct points in time: the predecessor (the past), the incumbent (the present), and the potential successor (the future). Individual differences have the tendency to orient more to the past, present, or future (Bluedorn, 2002) and impact individuals' attitudes, decisions, and behaviors (Holman & Silver, 1998; Bandura, 2001; Fried & Slowik, 2004; Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). Thinking about the past or the future anchors an individual to memories of the past or expectations for the future, which may then impact outcomes depending on individual perceptions of what happened in the past or what the future holds (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999).

While the majority of temporal orientation studies look for direct links between temporal orientation and outcomes, I propose succession as an ideal context to utilize temporal focus as a moderating variable because succession is inherently temporal; it involves passage through a chronological order and the lens through which an incumbent views his or her predecessor (and a potential successor) and may be shaped by perception. Utilizing temporal focus as a moderating variable also adds to the intergenerational reciprocity literature, which seeks ways to increase the likelihood that generations will *pay it forward* (Wade-Benzoni, 2002; Wade-Benzoni, 2008a; 2008b; Wade-Benzoni, Sondak, and Galinsky, 2010; Wade-Benzoni, Tost, Hernandez, and Larrick, 2012).

*Past Temporal Focus as Moderator of the Relationship between Predecessor Imprint and Performance*

A number of outcomes are linked to the tendency to be anchored to memories of the past. A past-focused person may be more likely to get “stuck in the past,” leading to increases in emotional distress following traumatic events (Holman & Silver, 1998) and tends to experience more negative affect and neuroticism (Shipp et al., 2009). However, reflection on the past may turn an individual’s attention to valuable lessons or experiences from the past, thereby continually drawing on those experience for beneficial guidance (Sanna, Stocker, & Clarke, 2003). The impact, then, of past temporal focus is contingent upon how a particular event from the past is perceived. If an individual is prone to focus on the past, a particularly positive/negative event from the past would likely lead to associated positive/negative associated outcomes. In routine role succession, I propose that incumbents who receive a predecessor imprint will view the transmission as a positive past event. This holds that if a predecessor imprint is transmitted and the incumbent has a tendency to focus on the past, he or she will experience even greater levels of performance.

This also suggests the opposite; a past-focused incumbent who received nothing from his or her predecessor may amplify this slight from the past, thereby leading to decreased levels of performance.

**Hypothesis 6:** *Past temporal focus will strengthen the positive relationship between predecessor imprint and performance.*

*Future Temporal Focus as Moderator of the Relationship between Predecessor Imprint and Incumbent Investment in Potential Successor.*

Compared to individuals who are anchored to the past, future focused individuals tend to be overall more positive (Shipp et al., 2009). They tend to engage in long-term planning (Das, 1987), act as stewards at work (Hernandez, 2012), are conscientious and have a preference for consistency (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999), and adjust more effectively following traumatic events (Holman & Silver, 2005). At work, they exhibit more goal-orientation behaviors, help in the formulation of long-term plans, and allow for the consideration of future consequences (Ashkanasy, Gupta, Mayfield & Roberts, 2004). While intergenerational reciprocity would predict that if the imprint was indeed beneficial to the incumbent—and he or she is therefore highly engaged—investment in a potential successor is likely (Wade-Benzoni, 2002). However, if the incumbent is future-focused, it may increase the likelihood that the incumbent pays the benefit forward (due to a tendency to be attentive to things to come and engaging in long-term planning), resulting in an even greater investment in the potential successor.

**Hypothesis 7:** *Future temporal focus will strengthen the positive relationship between predecessor imprint and incumbent investment in potential successor.*

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH SAMPLE AND METHODS

This chapter consists of three subsections: 1) research sample and data collection procedures, 2) key measures and 3) analysis techniques.

#### **Research Sample and Data Collection Procedures**

As mentioned in the introduction, the context of this study is a sample of professional public university fundraisers. Over the past several years, private donations to public universities have increased, indicating a shift toward a funding model that increasingly relies less on state funding and more on philanthropy. As the demand and capacity for private contributions has grown, so too has the need for university fundraisers. This has resulted in a growing profession with plenty of opportunity for movement in and out of roles (Adams, 2009). Also, because the component most critical to fundraisers' success is knowing how to manage relationships with donors, it is important to understand how knowledge flows across role occupants in a highly fluid profession. According to the Occupational Information Network, or O\*NET, the key tasks of a fundraiser (O\*NET code: 13-1131.00) consist of the individual's ability in building, developing, and maintaining relationships. These relationships are often formed over the course of many years, with information and knowledge about the donors being critical to securing future donations. Grant and Sumanth (2009) also provide a description of the relational components of the professional fundraiser in stating that the primary purpose is to "travel around the country to build relationships and obtain donations" (p. 936). Given the nature of—and growth within—the fundraising profession, understanding succession processes and the mechanisms that link generations of fundraisers within a role may be of utmost importance

to non-profit organizations (particularly public universities) that hope to cultivate and sustain vital donor relationships.

To facilitate access from the fundraising organization at the Research I Public University, I relied on professional contacts I have maintained since my time as a professional fundraiser at the University. I submitted a brief research proposal – based on the concepts outlined in this more extensive research proposal – to the top two leaders in the organization (January 2013). They agreed to the initial ideas proposed (February 2013) and arranged for me to meet with the Director of Human Resources (March 2013) to achieve further clearance prior to administering the survey. After achieving International Review Board (IRB) approval, and formal approval from the dissertation committee, an online survey was sent (in two waves) to all fundraisers (approximately 226) within the fundraising organization of the University. The online surveys were sent to all three campuses of the University: main campus (n=170), urban campus (n=40), and satellite campus (n=16). Sixty-three participants from the main campus fully completed wave 1 and wave 2 surveys (response rate = 37%); 29 participants from the urban campus fully completed wave 1 and wave 2 surveys (response rate = 72%); and 7 participants from the satellite campus fully completed wave 1 and wave 2 surveys (response rate = 43%). Given the length of the survey, I divided the items into two waves to mitigate respondent fatigue (Bradley & Daly, 1994).

Overall, 99 individuals participated fully in the study (response rate = 44%). Of those 99 individuals, 63% were female (see Chapter 5, Table 1 for summary statistics). Four individuals were removed from the study because the missing data among the key variables was too impactful to ignore. For example, one individual failed to provide any

information about his predecessor, while another filled out Survey 1, but only the first two questions in Survey 2. Among the 99 complete surveys, I infrequently encountered missing data. In the cases where data was missing, it was the case of neglecting one item in a multi-item scale; clearly *missing completely at random* (Rubin, 1976). In those cases, I followed the acceptable approach of imputing missing values from the mean of the most highly correlated item in the same scale (Roth, Switzer & Switzer, 1999). I also conducted the same analyses with the median scores for the missing items and found no difference in the results.

### **Key Measures**

*(See Appendix for full survey.)*

#### *Independent Variable*

Predecessor Imprint (Wave 1). Predecessor imprint was examined by asking the participant to identify the extent (1-5 scale) to which they received six different pieces of knowledge from a predecessor (three for tacit knowledge, three for explicit knowledge). These were created in conjunction with the Director of Human Resources in the fundraising organization to ensure that I captured relevant items. An example of a tacit knowledge item is: “My predecessor gave me knowledge of how to effectively fundraise for the alumni and friends population I represent.” An example of an explicit knowledge item is: “My predecessor left valuable written knowledge for my alumni and friends population in his/her FACTS reports.” Coefficient alpha for this scale was .87.

#### *Mediating Variable*

Engagement (Wave 2). The mediating variable was measured using the 18-item scale developed by Rich, Lepine & Crawford (2010). The scale has shown high reliability and

relationship to performance (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Furthermore, it builds on the theoretical framework for engagement provided by Kahn (1990). The scale contains items that build on three different facets proposed by Kahn: emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and physical engagement. An example from this scale is: “I work with intensity on my job,” “I am enthusiastic in my job,” and “At work, my mind is focused on my job.” Coefficient alpha for this scale was .96.

### *Moderating Variables*

Incumbent Temporal Focus (Wave 1, Past Temporal Focus; Time 2, Future Temporal Focus). The moderating variable is a measure of the incumbent’s temporal focus. I utilized the 12-item measure developed and validated by Shipp, Edwards & Lambert (2009). This measure consists of four past focus items (e.g., “I replay memories of the past in my mind”), four present focus items (e.g., “My mind is on the here and now”), and four future items (“I think about times to come”). To contextualize these items to work, I will prime the direct the participants to answer these question as they pertain to their careers. This contextualization is important given that situations interact with aspects of personality to affect outcomes (Murtha, Kanfer & Ackerman, 1996). I suspected the possibility that a person who is past-focused in general life matters may process work matters quite differently. I wanted to ensure that recorded outcomes are rooted in individual organizational experience. Coefficient alpha for past temporal focus was .88, while future temporal focus alpha was .81.

### *Dependent Variables*

Incumbent Performance (Archival). The first dependent variable, incumbent performance, was determined using available archival data in the university fundraising central office.

Performance was measured through a common metric in the academic fundraising domain: close rate. Close rate is simply the number of gifts booked by a fundraiser during any given year divided by the number of asks made by a fundraiser during any given year. Close rates provide a standardized performance coefficient given that fundraisers differ in portfolio size (i.e., the number of potential donors from whom they can solicit donations) due to the college or department in which they work (e.g., the College of Engineering has more donors than the School of Social Work). After personal consultation with several fundraising executives and two different academic fundraising consultants, the industry standard for excellence—independent of the size of unit in which the fundraiser works—is generally recognized as 50%. If the fundraiser in the School of Social Work solicits gifts from 20 individuals during the course of a year, and closes 10 of them, this is recognized as approximately equal to a fundraiser in the College of Engineering who solicits 40 individuals over the course of a year and closes 20 of them. This is not a perfectly clean measure of performance (also recognized by many in the field of fundraising) and alternatives are currently being examined at Universities across the nation, but for the time being, this measure most effectively approximates a fair comparison across fundraisers who work within very different units and Colleges on a University campus.

Incumbent Investment in Potential Successor (Wave 2). The second dependent variable, incumbent investment in potential successor, is necessary to capture evidence of intergenerational reciprocity. First, each incumbent was asked to identify an individual in the organization (making sure to emphasize *internal candidates*) who could be in a position to succeed him or her in the current role. After the potential successor was identified, the incumbent was asked to identify mentoring behaviors that take place with this person

(relying on the Scandura and Ragins' [1993] measure) and frequency of interactions with the person (e.g., "On average, how many hours a week have you had contact with this person?"). The coefficient alpha for this scale was .93.

*Control Variables.* (50% in Wave 1 and 50% in Wave 2)

Several control variables that have been shown to relate to mentoring, socialization, knowledge transfer, and beneficence were also measured to ensure accuracy in the proposed main and moderating effects. These items include: proactive personality (Seibert, Crant & Kraimer, 1999) ( $\alpha=.80$ ), conscientiousness (John, Donahue & Kentle, 1991) ( $\alpha=.79$ ), prosocial motivation (Grant, 2008) ( $\alpha=.90$ ) and various demographic variables (age, gender, title, tenure in-role).

### **Analysis Techniques**

I used conventional ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis to analyze the data. The results of this analysis allowed me to assess the accuracy of the hypothesized main and moderating effects proposed in the model. To analyze the mediation effect of engagement, I followed Baron and Kenny's (1986) four step approach, in which several regression analyses are conducted and the significance of coefficients is examined at each step in order to arrive at conclusions regarding direct and indirect of effects of independent variables on the dependent variable.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

Table 1 provides a summary of the variables included in this study. As shown in the table, the study variables all possess an acceptable degree of internal consistency reliability. Included in this table (in column “Source”) is the time wave in which individuals completed certain scales. Role and Organization tenure are reported in months.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables**

Variable	Source	Mean	SD	$\alpha$
<u>Control Variables</u>				
Gender (2=female)	T1 Self	1.63	.486	--
Age	T1 Self	46.37	10.84	--
Education Level	T1 Self	2.525	.59	--
Role Tenure	T1 Self	42.96	40.75	--
Org Tenure	T1 Self	98.42	69.25	--
Conscientiousness	T1 Self	4.36	.408	.79
Prosocial Motivation	T2 Self	4.57	.476	.90
Proactive Personality	T2 Self	3.80	.455	.80
<u>Independent Variable</u>				
Predecessor Imprint	T1 Self	2.53	.829	.87
<u>Mediator and Moderators</u>				
Engagement	T2 Self	4.356	.502	.96
Future Temporal Focus	T2 Self	4.03	.579	.81
Past Temporal Focus	T1 Self	3.36	.813	.88
<u>Dependent Variables</u>				
Performance	Archival	.3824	.156	--
Successor Investment	T2 Self	2.74	.785	.93

Furthermore, I was able to obtain access to two of the control variables and one of the dependent variables for a subset of the non-participant employees at the Research I Public University. Table 2 reveals the descriptive statistics of the two groups side by side. I conducted T-tests on each of the three variables to determine the similarity of these two independent groups. For Age and Role Tenure the p value was high enough (.41 and .95 respectively) to conclude that there is no statistically significant difference between the means of the two groups. However, while the difference in performance between the groups appears similar, the p value for the T-test conducted on performance was low enough (.00) to conclude that there may be difference between the two groups. Some of this difference may be attributed to aspects of the participant population that I discuss in greater depth in the discussion section.

**Table 2: Summary of Three Study Variables for University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) Participants and Non-participants**

Variable	Mean (part.) n=63	SD (part.) n=63	Mean (non-part.) n=69	SD (non-part.) n=69
<u>Control Variables</u>				
Age	45.11	10.82	46.69	11.02
Role Tenure	41.70	43.41	41.29	34.08
<u>Dependent Variable</u>				
Performance	.4208	.157	.349	.14

Table 3 reports descriptive statistics and correlations among all study variables. Of substantive interest, the correlations reveal that predecessor imprint is associated with incumbent performance. That is, incumbents who were *imprinted upon* by the individuals

**Table 3: Variable Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<b>Control Variables</b>																
1. Age	46.37	10.85	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Gender (2=female)	1.63	.486	-.13	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
3. Education Level	2.525	.59	-.07	-.13	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
4. Role Tenure	42.96	40.75	.36*	.03	-.01	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
5. Org Tenure	98.42	69.25	.34*	-.08	-.04	.38**	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
6. Conscientiousness	4.36	.41	-.06	.08	.15	.01	-.02	(.79)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
7. Prosocial Motivation	4.57	.48	-.06	.15	.12	-.24*	-.17	.35**	(.90)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
8. Proactive Personality	3.80	.46	.03	.01	.09	-.11	-.02	.13	.22*	(.80)	--	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Independent Variable</b>																
9. Predecessor Imprint	2.53	.83	-.04	-.10	-.22*	-.13	-.01	-.12	.02	-.09	(.87)	--	--	--	--	--
<b>Mediator</b>																
10. Engagement	4.36	.17	-.05	-.05	.06	.08	.17	.39**	.32**	.47**	-.16	(.96)	--	--	--	--
<b>Moderators</b>																
11. Future Temporal Focus	4.03	-.11	.03	.03	-.00	-.10	-.17	.08	.18	.36**	-.09	.12	(.81)	--	--	--
12. Past Temporal Focus	3.36	-.17	-.07	-.07	-.06	-.23*	-.12	-.08	.06	-.08	.01	-.18	.26**	(.88)	--	--
<b>Dependent Variables</b>																
13. Performance	.38	-.16	.01	.01	-.13	-.24*	-.09	-.10	.11	.07	.64**	-.08	.17	.15	--	--
14. Successor Investment	2.74	-.15	-.13	-.13	.01	-.09	.13	-.00	.02	.27**	-.12	.33**	-.06	-.22	-.18	(.93)

Note. Diagonal entries are scale reliabilities.  $N = 99$ . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed); All items with the exception of demographic and performance variables were assessed using 5-point Likert scales. As previously noted, all items are self-report with the exception of performance.

performance (one of the main direct effects in the hypothesized model). Also, there is evidence that some of the selected dependent variables are associated with the mediating variable and dependent variables, strengthening my reasoning for including them in the model

*Testing for Overall Fit of Models*

To assess the overall fit of the two models I tested in this dissertation (the first with Incumbent Performance as the dependent variable, the second with Investment in Potential Successor as the dependent variable) confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in IBM SPSS AMOS 20.0. Table 4 presents each model’s fit statistics, including chi-square value, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (RMSEA; Steiger & Lind, 1980), and comparative fit index (CFI; Bentler, 1990).

**Table 4: The Overall Fit Indices**

	RMSEA	CFI	DF	$\chi^2$
Model 1 (DV Performance)	.133	.938	14	38.12
Model 2 (DV Investment)	.054	.978	34	43.78

RMSEA values less than .05 are considered indicative of a good fit, values less than .08 considered reasonable fit, and values exceeding .10 considered mediocre or poor fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). CFI is commonly used in organizational research and is considered one of the best approximations model fit, with values greater than .90 generally indicative of good fit (Mathieu, Gilson, & Ruddy, 2006; Medsker, Williams, & Holahan,

1994). As such, Model 1 displayed mixed fit indices,  $\chi^2 = 38.12, p < .01$ ; CFI = .94; RMSEA = .13. Model 2 indices signaled good fit,  $\chi^2 = 43.78, p < .01$ ; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .05.

### *Direct and Indirect Effects*

Although the zero-order correlations reported in Table 3 suggest possible support for my previous theorizing, I formally tested the hypotheses utilizing OLS regression. Table 5 reports the results of OLS stepwise regression to examine the direct and indirect (through engagement) effects of predecessor imprint on performance, thereby addressing Hypotheses 2 and 3. As mentioned previously, I tested for mediation using the Baron and Kenny (1986) four step approach in which several regression analyses are conducted and the significance of the coefficients is examined at each step. Step 1 is a regression analysis with Predecessor Imprint predicting Performance to test the direct effect.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + e$$

Step 2 is a regression analysis with engagement predicting Performance to test the direct effect between the mediator and the dependent variable.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 M + e$$

Step 3 analyzes Predecessor Imprint and engagement predicting Performance (with both in the model, thereby controlling for one while conducting the analyzing the effect of the other).

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 M + e$$

**Table 5: Results of OLS Stepwise Regression, DV = Performance**

	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 3</i>
Age	-.11	-.10	-.11
Prosocial Motivation	.06	.12	.07
Conscientiousness	-.07	-.12	-.07
Role Tenure	-.12	-.17	-.12
Org Tenure	.07	.04	.07
Gender	.06	-.01	.06
Proactive Personality	.11	.08	.11
Predecessor Imprint	.64***	--	.64***
Engagement	--	-.09	-.00
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.47	.09	.47
$\Delta R^2$	--	-.38	.38
<i>F</i>	10.03***	1.10	8.82***

*Note.* *N* = 99; \*\*\*: *p* < .01; \*\*: *p* < .05; \* *p* < .10; All variables were standardized.

#### *Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3*

As Table 5 reveals, the direct effect between predecessor imprint and performance is quite strong ( $\beta = .64, p < .01$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 2. However, there is no relationship between engagement and performance ( $\beta = -.09, ns$ ), which fails to support the mediating role of engagement, as proposed in Hypothesis 3. In the third step the Predecessor Imprint coefficient remains the same ( $\beta = .64, p < .01$ ), further negating the possibility of a mediating effect. Additionally, the direct effect between Predecessor Imprint and engagement is also insignificant at ( $\beta = -.08, ns$ ), thereby failing to support Hypothesis 1.

#### *Hypotheses 4 and 5*

These same steps were followed to analyze Hypotheses 4 and 5; a positive main effect between Predecessor Imprint and Successor Investment and engagement as the mediator in that relationship, respectively. Table 6 illustrates these results.

**Table 6: Results of OLS Stepwise Regression, DV = Successor Investment**

	<i>Step 1</i>	<i>Step 2</i>	<i>Step 3</i>
Age	-.23**	-.27**	-.27***
Prosocial Motivation	-.00	-.07	-.07
Conscientiousness	-.05	-.14	-.15
Role Tenure	-.45	-.08	-.09
Org Tenure	.22**	.16	.16
Gender	-.14	-.11	-.12
Proactive Personality	.28***	.14	.14
Predecessor Imprint	-.11	--	-.08
Engagement	--	.37***	.36***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.47	.09	.47
$\Delta R^2$	--	-.38	.38
<i>F</i>	10.03***	1.02	8.82***

*N* = 99; \*\*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*\*:  $p < .05$ ; \*:  $p < .10$ ; All variables were standardized.

Results reveal that there is no main effect between Predecessor Imprint and Successor Investment ( $\beta = -.08, ns$ ), thereby failing to support Hypothesis 4. While there is a significant direct effect between engagement and Successor Investment ( $\beta = .36, p < .01$ ), due to the lack of relationship between Predecessor Imprint and engagement, there is no support for the mediating role of engagement, thereby failing to support Hypothesis 5.

#### *Moderating Effects of Temporal Focus*

To test the role of temporal focus as moderating the direct effect of Predecessor Imprint on Performance and Successor Investment, I conducted two separate 4-model OLS regression analyses. The first analysis, in Table 7, examines the moderating effect of a Past Temporal Focus on the relationship between Predecessor Imprint and Performance.

**Table 7: Results of OLS Regression Models, DV = Performance**

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Age	-.10	-.11	-.09	-.09
Prosocial Motivation	.10	.06	.06	.05
Conscientiousness	-.15	-.07	-.06	-.07
Role Tenure	-.18	-.12	-.10	-.07
Org Tenure	.03	.07	.08	.06
Gender	-.01	.06	.07	.04
Proactive Personality	.05	.11	.12	.10
Predecessor Imprint		.64***	.65***	1.40***
Past Temporal Focus			.12	.67***
Predecessor Imprint X Past Temporal Focus				-.96**
$R^2$	.09	.47	.49	.51
$\Delta R^2$	--	.38	.02	.02
$F$	1.02	10.03***	9.23***	9.31***

*N = 99; \*\*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*\*:  $p < .05$ ; \*:  $p < .10$ ; All variables were standardized.*

### *Hypothesis 6*

While there is continued support for Hypothesis 2 ( $\beta = .65, p < .01$ ), a significant positive relationship between Predecessor Imprint and Performance, this relationship is moderated by Past Temporal Focus, such that the relationship is weakened the more an individual is focused on the past ( $\beta = -.96, p < .05$ ). This finding, while significant and interesting, is opposite to what was proposed in Hypothesis 6. I discuss this specific finding in greater depth in the Discussion section. Another curious association is the strengthening of the relationship between Predecessor Imprint and Performance in Model 4 ( $\beta = 1.40, p < .01$ ). One possible explanation for this sudden spike is that another unidentified variable is interacting with the relationship. The relatively small sample size may increase susceptibility to these unexplained influences.

*Hypothesis 7*

Table 8 reveals the results of testing the moderating effect of Future Temporal Focus on the relationship between Predecessor Imprint and Investment in a Potential Successor.

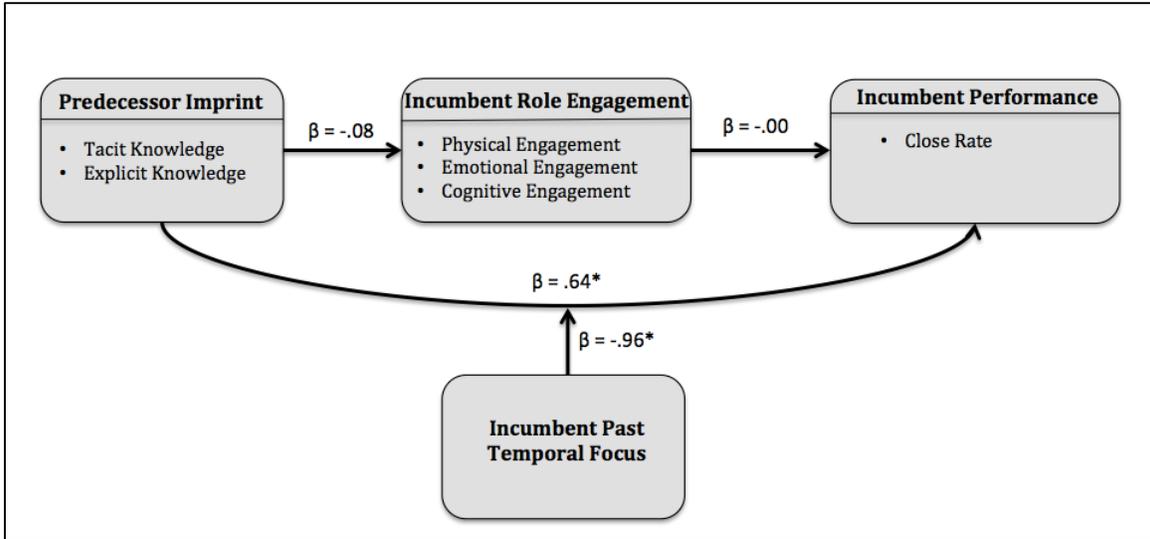
**Table 8: Results of OLS Regression Models, DV = Successor Investment**

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Age	-.23**	-.23**	-.25**	-.25**
Prosocial Motivation	-.00	.00	.02	.02
Conscientiousness	-.04	-.05	-.05	-.05
Role Tenure	-.45	-.06	-.06	-.05
Org Tenure	.22**	.21**	.18*	.19*
Gender	-.14	-.15	-.15	-.15
Proactive Personality	.28***	.27***	.33***	.34***
Predecessor Imprint		-.11	-.12	-.00
Future Temporal Focus			-.19*	-.14
Predecessor Imprint X Future Temporal Focus				-.13
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.16	.17	.20	.20
$\Delta R^2$	--	.01	.03	.00
<i>F</i>	2.45**	2.33**	2.45**	2.21**

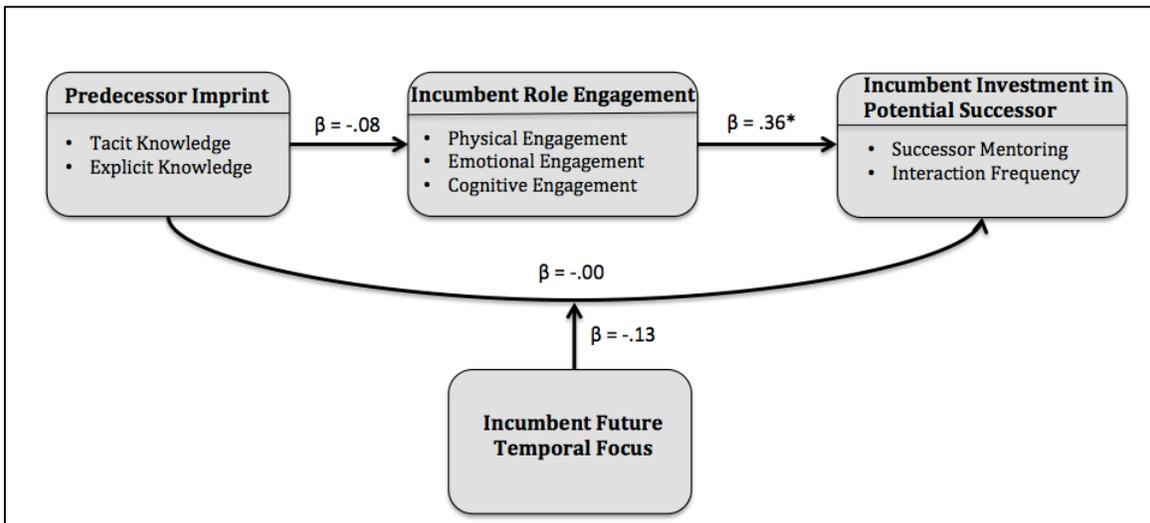
*N = 99; \*\*\*: p < .01; \*\*: p < .05; \*: p < .10; All variables were standardized.*

The results of the full model fail to support Hypothesis 7, with the moderating effect of Future Temporal Focus being insignificant ( $\beta = -.13, ns$ ).

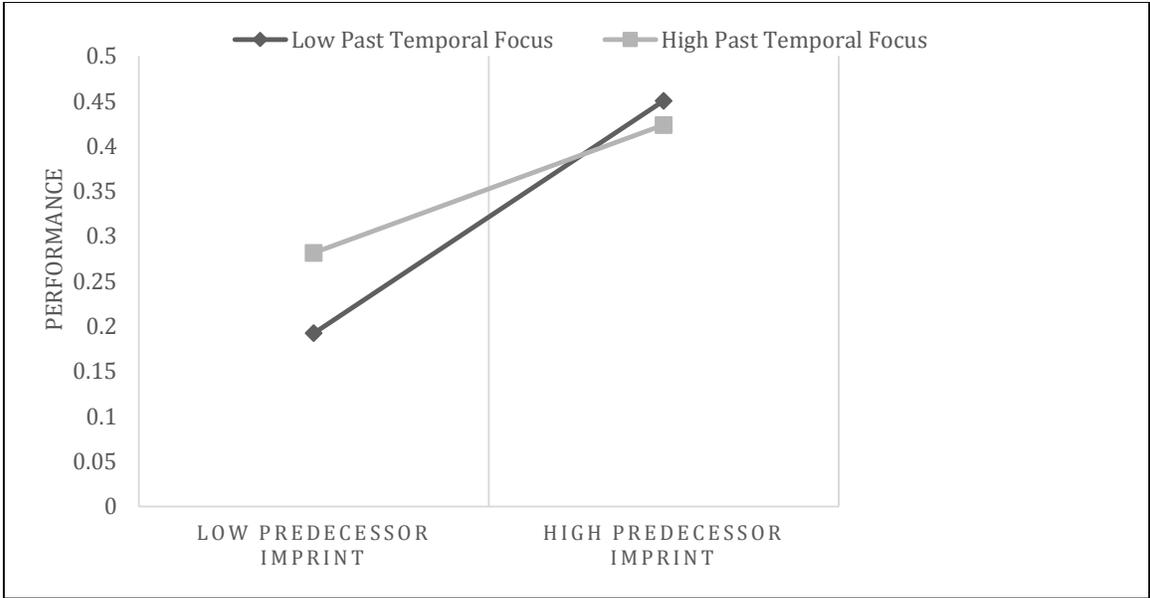
Figures 3 and 4 provide a snapshot of both models, and the significant coefficients in each model. Figure 5 is a plot of the interaction of Predecessor Imprint and Past Temporal Focus on Performance.



**Figure 3: Theoretical Model 1 with Reported Coefficients, Dependent Variable: Performance**



**Figure 4: Theoretical Model 2 with Reported Coefficients, Dependent Variable: Successor Investment**



**Figure 5: Interaction of Predecessor Imprint and Past Temporal Focus**

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

Most organizations constantly face the reality of employee turnover. In organizational environments where knowledge is key, increasing the access each generation of employees has to the knowledge acquired by a preceding generation of employees may be a potential way to combat some of the ills associated with turnover. Drawing from theories of imprinting, engagement, temporal focus, and intergenerational reciprocity, in this dissertation I have proposed and tested a theoretical model of role succession. Specifically, I have sought to uncover mechanisms that help explain performance by an incumbent as a function of both individual experience and intergenerational interaction. While certain hypotheses were unsupported by the empirical models, the conclusions provide some insight into the process of role succession and uncover an area ripe with potential and needing further investigation. In this section I provide an overview of each hypothesis and explanation (both theoretical and practical) for the observed outcomes. I also discuss theoretical contributions, managerial implications, limitations and future related research directions, and close with a conclusion that summarizes the proposals and conclusions of this dissertation.

#### *Overview of Findings and Theoretical Contributions*

The major contribution of this study is support for the direct relationship between predecessor imprint and incumbent performance (Hypothesis 2). While the relationship between imprint and performance has been proposed theoretically (Higgins, 2005) and tested empirically in the abstract (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013), this dissertation represents a first attempt to examine the imprint *within a role* and across individuals who possess the

same role at separate points in time. This is not insignificant given the impact a predecessor has on his/her role and how a successor may benefit from receiving an imprint from that individual (Turner, 1962; Nicholson, 1984). The role-relevant knowledge passed along through the predecessor imprint (Baum & Ingram, 1998; Reagans & McEvily, 2003) to a successor should increase the likelihood that the successor is in a better position to succeed in that role. The results I found provide support for this. Furthermore, I have attempted to substantiate the measure for *imprint within a role* which adds another layer to the contexts and levels of analysis that have been utilized to examine the phenomenon of imprinting up to this point (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013). By seeking to directly measure predecessor imprint (albeit from the perspective of the successor), I move beyond measuring imprint as an assumption of what occurs when two individuals interact with one another (McEvily et al., 2012).

While the findings for the main direct effect are encouraging, surprising is the lack of statistical significance for engagement as a mechanism linking predecessor imprint and incumbent performance. I theorized that predecessor imprint would be related to engagement (Hypothesis 1) and that engagement thereby would mediate the relationship between predecessor imprint and incumbent performance (Hypothesis 3). However, I found no support for these relationships. There is a growing body of literature supporting the link between engagement and performance (Rich et al., 2010; Newman & Harrison, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008), therefore I expected to find conclusions to further support this link. Furthermore, despite the high alpha level for the engagement construct ( $\alpha=.96$ ), I sought to unpack engagement, running the same analyses with each separate sub-construct (i.e., emotional engagement, cognitive engagement and physical engagement) but

found the same insignificant relationship. One explanation may be that there was simply not enough variance in the engagement measure to detect a relationship. The sample mean for the engagement score was 4.36 out of 5 ( $SD=.50$ ); the group which self-selected into the survey may have been among the most highly engaged group of employees. This is consistent with theory which proposes that engaged employees see all aspects of work as part of their role, thereby participating in the survey would be seen as part of one's job among highly engaged employees (Truss, Soane, Alfes, Rees & Gatenby, 2010). With minimal variance on this variable (i.e., a sample only including *highly* engaged individuals), it may be more difficult to ascertain a significant relationship with the dependent variables. Given the significant body of literature on the connection between engagement and performance, I cannot say that the present study provides any pause for a general acceptance of that relationship. However, as has been noted, engagement as a recently validated empirical construct needs continued study and empirical support in order to be firmly included in the canon of valid organizational constructs (Rich et al., 2010).

Given the lack of relationship between imprint and engagement, I failed to find support for hypothesis 5 as well, which proposed that engagement would mediate the relationship between predecessor imprint and investment in a potential successor. In addition, hypothesis 4 (the direct relationship between imprint and investment in a potential successor) was also unsupported by the data. Consistent with the body of work in the area of intergenerational reciprocity (Wade-Benzoni, 2002; Wade-Benzoni, 2008a; Wade-Benzoni, Sondak, and Galinsky, 2010), I expected that incumbents who receive an imprint from their predecessors will be more likely to *pay forward* this benefit to the *next generation* by investing in a potential successor. As distinct generations pass through a role

in a clear sequence, they are in a position to first receive a benefit (from the previous generation) and contribute in the future (to the next generation). I measured this by defining the predecessor imprint as a benefit and investment in a potential successor as the contribution to the next generation. As previously stated in Chapter 3, the support for intergenerational reciprocity has been garnered almost exclusively through a reliance on laboratory experiments. While this body of work has built strong support for its internal validity, the approach does little to shed light on the *why* of intergenerational reciprocity. This dissertation represents a first (to my knowledge) attempt to test this phenomenon in a field setting in order to understand some of the practical manifestations of intergenerational reciprocity (i.e., will those who received a predecessor imprint be more likely to invest in a potential successor). Given the lack of support I found for this relationship, additional field studies may be required to further explore the generalizability of the intergenerational reciprocity phenomenon.

Hypotheses 6 and 7 test the moderating effect of a temporal focus (past and future, respectively) on the main effects between predecessor imprint and performance and predecessor imprint and potential successor investment. Although there was no observable moderating effect of future temporal focus on the relationship between imprint and investment (Hypothesis 7), the moderating effect of past temporal focus on the relationship between imprint and performance was negatively significant (Hypothesis 6). This is the opposite effect that was hypothesized—that is, individuals who received a predecessor imprint were more likely to perform better when they had lower past temporal focus. Originally I theorized that a predecessor imprint would be deemed a positive past event, and that individuals who dwell on the past, would be dwelling on something positive, and

therefore reap the benefits of that positive past occurrence. This is consistent with evidence from the social psychology literature which suggests thinking about the past or the future anchors an individual to memories of the past or expectations for the future that may then impact outcomes depending on individual perceptions of what happened in the past (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999). However, the results in this study suggest that the more negative consequences of the past temporal focus may indeed outweigh any potentially positive outcomes. A past-focused person may be more likely to get “stuck in the past,” leading to increases in emotional distress following traumatic events (Holman & Silver, 1998) and tend to experience more negative effects and neuroticism (Shipp et al., 2009). These findings are consistent with the observed results in the current study.

### *Managerial Implications*

Role succession has significant implications for organizations and this study raises several areas of potential interest for managers and employees. That predecessors can play a part in grooming and preparing their successors is a trend that has gained traction at the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) level in many firms. The most recent regulatory filings reveal that 16 of the Fortune 1000 companies reported links between CEO performance awards and succession planning (Lublin, 2014). Specifically, former Intel CEO Paul Otellini was rewarded \$4 million in stock and cash for helping to groom his successor, Brian Krzanich. The implication here is clear: a lot is at stake in succession and the predecessor can play a unique role in increasing the likelihood that his or her successor is successful. While this *pay for imprint* trend is a current phenomenon at the CEO level, it is quite possible that a trickledown effect may occur wherein employees at lower levels are also incentivized to invest in—and prepare—potential role successors. The main direct effect observed in this

study substantiates the important role of the predecessor imprint in impacting successor performance.

While not a focus of this study, the results do reveal a significant relationship between engagement and investment in a potential successor ( $\beta = .36, p < .05$ ). Related to the points in the previous paragraph, organizations should not only incentivize investment in a potential successor, but might also strive to engage their employees. While employee engagement has a number of benefits to organizations (Rich et al., 2010), proactively investing in a potential successor is another possible outcome revealed by this study.

Finally it should be noted that the sample used in this study was from a very specific occupation—fundraising. As such, some of the effects could be attributed to the importance of donor relationships, and the value in transmitting key elements of these donor relationships to the successor whose success in maintaining those relationships will be critical in his or her success in the role. While not all occupations are structured this way, there are many which are. For example, account managers<sup>1</sup> in advertising agencies often spend many years building relationships with particular clients. They come to know their clients well and often maintain business based on their intimate knowledge of the likes and dislikes of the client. They know how to approach the clients and frame ideas in such a way that make it more likely that the client will accept proposals. As a result, these account managers often are bound by non-compete clauses when they switch agencies. If the relationship were not only dyadic, but rather triadic (i.e., involving a potential successor), the nuanced knowledge that might have otherwise been lost when the account manager

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<sup>1</sup> This example was based on my conversation with a family member who is an account manager at the global advertising agency, McCann-Erickson.

leaves, is now captured by at least one other person, thereby potentially increasing the likelihood that the firm can continue to maintain the relationship with this client. Sales positions represent another specialized occupation wherein intimate knowledge of the customer is critical for success in the role. Recognizing this reality, some pharmaceutical companies<sup>2</sup> utilize recently retired sales employees to serve as *field experts* for successors. Field experts accompany the successor on customer visits, providing key information about the customer in addition to feedback after the visit to ensure that the successor is approaching the customer in the best way possible.

Additional occupations with a client/customer-facing focus could gain considerable benefits from ensuring that proactive predecessor imprinting is occurring on a continual basis. In this study I relied on individuals selecting potential successors on their own. It would be interesting to see if the same effects are found when a potential successor is selected by the organization and then asked to invest in these individuals (this would be consistent with the model employed by the previously mentioned Fortune 1000 firms).

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

Although the findings of this dissertation are compelling, the research design has limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, while the results would presumably generalize to other occupations similar to fundraising (i.e., where long-term client/customer relationships are critical to success), the degree to which they generalize to other employee populations is unknown. For example, firefighters may be one such context. A seasoned firefighter may have occupation-specific knowledge which is useful for new firefighters entering a station, but the role imprint may be less important since the

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<sup>2</sup> This example came from a phone conversation with a sales executive at one of the world's top 4 pharmaceutical companies.

work is more task-oriented. However, firefighters within a station serve different functions and it would be interesting to explore whether success in these roles (which are presumably more task-oriented than relationship-oriented) is still bolstered by a predecessor who has *been there, done that* and can help the firefighter in this new role be successful. Future studies in a variety of contexts (both relationship-based and task-based) could address this concern.

Second, this design, although carried out by administering two separate surveys at two different time intervals, is ultimately a cross-sectional design. Engagement, for example, was originally described by Kahn (1990: 693) as a dynamic phenomenon where individuals make multiple “calibrations of self-in-role” over time. Future research could utilize multilevel modeling within subject designs to test models that capture the variance in individuals’ engagement in roles over time. Although I control for role tenure in the current study, measuring engagement at different points in time may prove to be useful in unpacking the connection between imprint and engagement. For example, it could be that predecessor imprint leads to high engagement in the beginning of the successor’s time in a role (since presumably the successor has more limited resources to draw upon early in role tenure), but its effect wanes as other resources are acquired that play a greater role in determining engagement (e.g., organizational support). This waning effect would be consistent theoretically with Nicholson’s (1984) assertion that imprints are most easily received and most deftly felt during periods of vulnerability for the receiver, such as entry into a new organization or transitioning into a new role. Continued work is needed to adequately assess the *stickiness* of the predecessor imprint which is passed along to the successor.

Third, temporal focus is not without some measurement concerns. This was first brought up to me during personal interactions with the author of the measures (Abbie Shipp) who suggested that some individuals are *hyper temporal*, meaning they tend to simultaneously focus a great deal on the past and the future. There is modest preliminary evidence of this in the current study given the significant correlation (.26) between the two constructs. Future studies utilizing this measure should take *hyper temporality* into consideration and model accordingly.

Fourth and finally, while there is a standard process for collecting performance measures among the employees who participated in this study, it is a new process and may not provide a precise measure for actual employee performance. In some cases I had to piece together information from three different sources to obtain a performance measure for one employee. The host University is working to automate this process utilizing performance management systems which interact with donor tracking software, but the performance data I acquired (FY 2014) predated this automation. As these systems become commonplace in the fundraising operation, the attention to performance drivers will become a focus of individuals in the talent management group<sup>3</sup>.

### *Conclusion*

A survey conducted by the Council for Aid to Education found that charitable contributions to colleges and universities across the country—even amidst the lingering effects of an economic downturn—increased 8.2 percent in 2011, reaching a total of \$30.3 billion in donations (Applegate, 2012). Fundraising is big business, and the fundraisers who build relationships with donors and make philanthropic solicitations are key to its

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<sup>3</sup> This is a key aspect of my new role as Executive Director of Talent Management in the Fundraising operation at the University which provided data access for this dissertation.

success. Fundraisers, like employees in every other organization come and go, but the roles remain. This dissertation is an attempt to examine the mechanisms at play in routine role succession, and show the intergenerational aspects of succession of relevance for employees and organizations across time. The dissertation represents an important first step in empirically addressing the recent theories on generations in organizations and how individuals who are separated within a role by chronological order, are linked to one another through the imprints and investments. Results of this dissertation suggest that predecessors do matter, and that success in a role can be enhanced by the imprint passed along by a predecessor to a successor. Relative to other studies that look at the advantages of mentoring or socialization, this study examines the importance of the *role* as the context for the transmission of critically important, role-specific knowledge across generations of incumbents.

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APPENDIX  
FULL SURVEY

Time 1 Survey

Demographic Items

1. What is your current age?
2. Gender
3. Tenure in current role
4. Tenure at the University (as a full-time employee)

*\* Participants were asked to respond to all questions on a 1-5 scale (1-disagree strongly, 5-agree strongly)*

*Answer the following questions about yourself:*

Conscientiousness Items

*I see myself as someone who...*

5. Does a thorough job.
6. Can be somewhat careless (r)
7. Is a reliable worker
8. Tends to be disorganized (r)
9. Tends to be lazy (r)
10. Perseveres until the task is finished
11. Does things efficiently
12. Makes plans and follows through with them
13. Is easily distracted (r)

Past Temporal Focus Items

*The following questions address things that have happened in the past, things that are happening now, and things you anticipate might happen in the future. While there are contexts in which you might think about the past, present, and future (for example: family, friends, Church), **I ask that you answer the following questions as they relate to your career.***

14. I replay memories of the past in my mind
15. I reflect on what has happened in my life
16. I think about things from my past
17. I think back to my earlier days

## Proactive Personality Items

18. I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life.
19. Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change.
20. Nothing is more exciting than seeing my ideas turn into reality.
21. If I see something I don't like, I fix it.
22. No matter what the odds, if I believe in something I will make it happen.
23. I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition.
24. I excel at identifying opportunities.
25. I am always looking for better ways to do things.
26. If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen.
27. I can spot a good opportunity long before others can.

## Conscientiousness Items

*I see myself as someone who...*

28. Does a thorough job.
29. Can be somewhat careless (r)
30. Is a reliable worker
31. Tends to be disorganized (r)
32. Tends to be lazy (r)
33. Perseveres until the task is finished
34. Does things efficiently
35. Makes plans and follows through with them
36. Is easily distracted (r)

## Predecessor Imprint

*Answer the following questions about your predecessor*

37. My predecessor took a personal interest in my career.
38. My predecessor helped me coordinate professional goals
39. My predecessor devoted special time and consideration to my career.
40. I shared personal problems with my predecessor.
41. I exchanged confidences with my predecessor.
42. I consider my predecessor to be a friend.
43. I try to model my behavior after my predecessor.
44. I admire my predecessor's ability to motivate others.
45. I respect my predecessor's ability to teach others.
  
46. My predecessor helped me learn how he or she effectively fundraised for the alumni and friend population that I now represent
47. My predecessor helped me understand how they made people aware of the work they did in order to be recognized and visible by the right people in the organization

48. My predecessor helped me understand the norms and expectations critical to his or her success in the role
49. My predecessor left me written knowledge about technological tools (like FACTS)
50. My predecessor left me a manual describing the 'how to' aspects of my current role
51. "My predecessor left valuable written knowledge for my alumni and friends population in his/her FACTS reports."

## Time 2 Survey

### Prosocial Motivation Items

*Why are you motivated to do your work?*

1. Because I care about benefitting others through my work.
2. Because I want to help others through my work.
3. Because I want to have positive impact on others.
4. Because it is important to me to do good for others through my work.

### Temporal Orientation Items

*The following questions address things that have happened in the past, things that are happening now, and things you anticipate might happen in the future. While there are contexts in which you might think about the past, present, and future (for example: family, friends, Church), **I ask that you answer the following questions as they relate to your career.***

5. I think about what my future has in store
6. I think about times to come
7. I focus on my future
8. I imagine what tomorrow will bring for me

### Role Engagement Items

9. I work with intensity on my job
10. I exert my full effort to my job
11. I devote a lot of energy to my job
12. I try my hardest to perform well on my job
13. I strive as hard as I can to complete my job
14. I exert a lot of energy on my job
15. I am enthusiastic in my job
16. I feel energetic at my job
17. I am interested in my job
18. I am proud of my job
19. I feel positive about my job
20. I am excited about my job

21. At work, my mind is focused on my job
22. At work, I pay a lot of attention to my job
23. At work, I focus a great deal of attention on my job
24. At work, I am absorbed by my job
25. At work, I concentrate on my job
26. At work, I devote a lot of attention to my job

#### Investment in Potential Successor Items

*Who is someone in this organization you feel would fill your current role well when you decide to leave? \_\_\_\_\_*

*On average, how many hours a week do you spend interacting with this individual?*

- Less than 1 hour each week (1)
- 1-3 hours each week (2)
- 4-5 hours each week (3)
- 6-8 hours each week (4)
- More than 8 hours a week (5)

*Answer the following questions based on your relationship with the individual you identified as someone who would fill your role well when you leave*

27. I take a personal interest in his/her career
28. I help him/her coordinate professional goals
29. I devote special time and consideration to his/her career.
30. He/she shares personal problems with me.
31. He/she exchanges confidences with me.
32. I consider him/her to be a friend.