

HELPING THE GRANT MACEWAN COLLEGE BOARD OF GOVERNORS
ACQUIRE AND TRANSFER KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH

By

THERESA MARGUERITE BAPTISTA

BAdmn (With Great Distinction), Athabasca University, 2006

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
The requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In

LEADERSHIP

We accept this thesis as conforming
To the required standard

.....
Richard Cook, MBA, Project Sponsor

.....
Niels Agger-Gupta PhD, Faculty Supervisor

.....
Stan Amaladas, PhD, Committee Chair

ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY
May, 2009

©Margo Baptista, 2009

ABSTRACT

The frequency of turnover within public post-secondary boards of governors presents particular challenges to the individual and collective ability of members to acquire and manage intellectual capital and practical knowledge on board roles and responsibilities. My study examined how, through the application of knowledge management theory, a board can learn and share knowledge on a vital board responsibility—presidential search. Normally, boards learn about presidential search while engaged in a recruitment process or through presentations at governance conferences. Seeking knowledge about this topic through a proactive and targeted approach is not common practice. Through a facilitated, qualitative action research exercise, participants engaged in a progressive learning experience to create a body of knowledge about presidential search experiences and develop strategies for transferring it when membership changes. This shared organizational learning experience is also expected to contribute to a comprehensive board succession plan for Grant MacEwan College.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been on a fifteen-year learning journey, the last two in this graduate program. Along the way, I have been privileged to live, work, and learn with many incredible people. I owe a debt of gratitude to all of you. To family and friends, for understanding all the times I played my broken record, “Sorry I can’t, I’m studying”. To my children, Melanie and Steven, who have watched me study for these many years. Thank you for your patience. I am so grateful to be your mother. To my husband, Arthur, for your unconditional love, confidence, and friendship. I look forward to a lifetime of dancing together.

To Paul Byrne, President & CEO of MacEwan, thank you for your unparalleled support of my educational and professional pursuits. To Trish Howatt, for keeping things running at the office—especially on the days when I was studying, researching, or writing. To Andrea Graham, who joined our dance team in May 2008, thank you for embracing the craziness. To the MacEwan Board of Governors, for your enthusiastic support of, and insightful contributions to, my research. It is a privilege to work with you.

To my remarkable sponsor, Richard Cook, for meandering this path with me, for sharing your insights and encouraging words. To my faculty supervisor extraordinaire, Niels Agger-Gupta, for the enthusiasm you showed from our first conversation, for navigating me through this experience, and encouraging me to speak with passion. To the other faculty members, who guided me from start to finish, a sincere thank you. To Karen Graham, the wizard of APA and editing for your meticulous attention to detail, teaching me new skills, and helping me create this piece of writing. To the 2007-3 cohort, for the amazing learning community we created and sustained together.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my father, who was literally and figuratively my first dance partner. Always encouraging me to find my own path, your love was unconditional and unwavering. I miss you, Dad. I wish you were here to share this milestone with me. As I dance across the graduation stage, I'll hold you in my heart.

To my friend Laura, who left us in October 2007 just a few months after writing a letter of reference for my application to graduate school. I miss our phone calls and dinners where you shared your wisdom, listened with friendship, and laughed at my antics. You were a blessing in my life.

To my friend Liz, who passed away in May 2007 while in the first year of the 2006-3 MA LEAD program. You unknowingly connected the 2006-3 and 2007-3 cohorts, and through the bench on campus dedicated in your honour, you will continue to bring learners together. We shared a passion for dancing and for learning. I felt your spirit and hugs of encouragement throughout my learning journey. This degree is for both of us. Dance in peace, my dear friend.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abstract | ii |
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Dedication | iv |
| List of Tables | ix |
| List of Figures | x |
| Chapter One: Focus and Framing | 1 |
| Research Question | 3 |
| The Opportunity and Its Significance | 4 |
| Systems Analysis of the Opportunity | 9 |
| Acquisition and Transfer of Knowledge | 9 |
| Internal and External Factors | 10 |
| Organizational Context | 15 |
| Chapter Two: Literature Review | 19 |
| Knowledge Management Theory | 19 |
| Defining Data, Information, and Knowledge | 20 |
| Three Generations of Knowledge Management's Evolution | 21 |
| Building on the SECI Model | 22 |
| Community as a Component of Knowledge Management Theory | 23 |
| Organizational Learning as an Element of Knowledge Management | 24 |
| Relating Knowledge Management Concepts to a Board of Governors | 24 |
| Knowledge Transfer | 26 |
| The Role of Trust in Knowledge Transfer | 26 |
| Social Networks as a Technique for Transferring Tacit Knowledge | 30 |
| Factors Motivating and Influencing Knowledge Transfer | 32 |
| Board Succession Planning | 34 |
| The Importance of Board Succession Planning | 35 |
| Education, Training, and Development of Board Members | 37 |
| Chapter Three: Research Approach and Methodology | 39 |
| Research Approach | 39 |
| Project Participants | 41 |
| Research Methods and Tools | 43 |
| Conducting the Study | 44 |
| Online Survey | 45 |
| Mini-Focus Groups | 49 |
| One-on-One Interviews | 52 |
| Modified World Café | 54 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Data Analysis | 61 |
| Ethical Guidelines | 63 |
| Respect for Human Dignity | 70 |
| Respect for Free and Informed Consent | 70 |
| Respect for Vulnerable Persons | 71 |
| Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality | 72 |
| Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness | 73 |
| Balancing Harm and Benefits | 73 |
| Minimizing Harms | 74 |
| Maximizing Benefits | 75 |
| Chapter Four: Action Research Project Results and Conclusions | 76 |
| Introduction | 76 |
| Study Findings | 77 |
| Knowledge Management Within a Board of Governors | 83 |
| Orientation | 83 |
| Education and Development | 88 |
| Best Practices for Knowledge Management | 90 |
| Knowledge Transfer within a Board of Governors | 90 |
| Interpersonal Trust | 91 |
| Motivation for Participating in Study | 93 |
| Board Succession Planning | 95 |
| Best Practices for Board Succession Planning | 98 |
| Presidential Search | 99 |
| Search Process | 100 |
| Search Timeline | 101 |
| Search Committee Models | 102 |
| Membership | 103 |
| Committee Chair | 104 |
| Policy, Practice, Plan, or Guidelines | 106 |
| Role of The Board and Committee Terms of Reference | 107 |
| Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement | 110 |
| Board Visioning Exercise | 112 |
| Position Profile | 113 |
| Recruitment Specialist | 115 |
| Role of Human Resources Department | 117 |
| Interim President | 118 |
| Transition Plan | 119 |
| Communication Strategy | 120 |
| Confidentiality | 121 |
| Potential Sensitivities and Ethical Issues Needing Consideration | 123 |
| Organizational Culture | 125 |
| Best Practices for Presidential Search | 127 |
| Learning about Presidential Search | 129 |
| The Learning Experience | 131 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Level of Knowledge about Presidential Search | 132 |
| Level of Knowledge about Board Succession Planning | 134 |
| Feedback on Experience with the Study | 137 |
| Study Conclusions | 138 |
| Managing Knowledge | 140 |
| Transferring Knowledge | 140 |
| Planning for Board Succession | 143 |
| Learning about Presidential Search | 144 |
| Scope and Limitations of the Research | 146 |
| Applicability to Public Post-Secondary Sector | 146 |
| Presidential Search Topics | 147 |
| Research Methods | 147 |
| Researcher Skill, Professional Background, and Bias | 148 |
| Available Literature | 149 |
| Summary | 150 |
| Chapter Five: Research Implications | 151 |
| Introduction | 151 |
| Study Recommendations | 152 |
| Recommendation #1: Explore and Activate Unique Opportunities to Facilitate Individual and Group Learning | 152 |
| Recommendation #2: Value and Support Knowledge Management as an Integral Component of Good Governance | 154 |
| Recommendation #3: Develop and Utilize Strategies that Contribute to Creating a Culture of Trust | 157 |
| Recommendation #4: Design a Presidential Search Process to Fit with Organizational Context and Culture | 159 |
| Organizational Implications | 160 |
| Knowledge Management Strategy | 160 |
| Individual and Group Learning | 164 |
| Trust | 165 |
| Presidential Search | 168 |
| Implications for Future Research | 171 |
| Board Succession Planning | 171 |
| President and CEO Succession Planning | 172 |
| Best Practices for Board Succession Plans and Presidential Search Processes | 173 |
| The Role of Professional Board Staff | 173 |
| Action Research as a Tool for Board Learning | 175 |
| Chapter Six: Lessons Learned | 177 |
| My Academic Dance | 177 |
| My Self-Awareness Dance | 180 |
| My Leadership Dance | 182 |
| Conclusion | 185 |
| References | 186 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Appendix A: Copyright Permissions | 192 |
| Appendix B: Telephone Contact Form | 194 |
| Appendix C: Letter of Invitation for Survey and Mini-Focus Group | 196 |
| Appendix D Informed Consent for Survey and Mini Focus Group Session | 198 |
| Appendix E: Survey Questions | 200 |
| Appendix F: Focus Group Email | 203 |
| Appendix G: Mini-Focus Group Questions | 205 |
| Appendix H: Interview Questions | 207 |
| Appendix I: Letter of Invitation for Interview and Modified World Café | 211 |
| Appendix J: Informed Consent for Interview and Modified World Café | 213 |
| Appendix K: Confidentiality Agreement Regarding Transcription | 215 |
| Appendix L: Modified World Cafe Questions | 216 |
| Appendix M: Invitation to World Café | 218 |
| Appendix N: Initial Themes Noted In the Data | 219 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 1. World Café Topics and Rotation Schedule..... | 57 |
| Table 2. Data-Collection Method and Number of Participants | 77 |
| Table 3. Search Committee Composition | 102 |
| Table 4. Role of the Board and Role of the Committee..... | 109 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Figure 1.</i> Acquiring and sharing knowledge | 10 |
| <i>Figure 2.</i> Systems analysis of the research opportunity | 11 |
| <i>Figure 3.</i> Modes of knowledge conversion | 22 |
| <i>Figure 4.</i> Logic model for major project inquiry process:..... | 40 |

CHAPTER ONE: FOCUS AND FRAMING

“Effective boards place a high value on their learning.... the outcome of trustee education is that trustees have the skills and knowledge to better contribute to their boards” (Smith, 2000, p. 193).

Within the Alberta public post-secondary system, boards of governors function as the ultimate authority of the institution and are in a fiduciary relationship with the province. Authorities, roles and responsibilities are outlined in the Post-Secondary Learning Act (2003) and include setting policy, strategic planning (e.g., academic, financial, and capital), and providing oversight and audit. A variety of activities and techniques are used at institutions to facilitate board members’ (members) learning about these functions, including orientation programs, meeting agendas, retreats, conferences, committee assignments, organization documents, institutional events and activities, as well as governance books and articles. Within these institutions, boards are supported by a professional resource staff person who manages many of these strategies. In addition, members can participate in formal board development programs through government departments, member organizations, and educational institutions. Grant MacEwan College’s (MacEwan) Board of Governors employs all of these learning strategies.

Another key responsibility, as noted in Section 81 of the Post-Secondary Learning Act (2003), is the appointment of a president. With the terms of office for board members ranging from one year to a maximum of six years and the tenure of presidents averaging ten years, the prospects for practical learning about this important area of responsibility during a board member’s term are generally limited. Board members at post-secondary institutions come from a broad range of backgrounds ranging from internal appointees

(e.g., students, staff, and faculty) to community volunteers (e.g., lawyers, accountants, doctors, artists, and other professions). Some may have experience with CEO recruitment from their professional organizations or other volunteer roles; others may have limited experience. Some may experience a presidential search during their term of office; others may not. Some members may, individually or collectively, discuss the topic of presidential search during retreats or at conferences. Other members may seek information on best practices from external recruitment specialists in the corporate sector.

Block McLaughlin (1993) commented, “No other event in the life of an institution affords the same opportunity for institutional learning as does the search for a president” (p. 113). It has been almost eleven years since MacEwan engaged in a search process for this single most-influential leadership position. Each of the processes used to recruit MacEwan’s past presidents differed based on the context and needs of MacEwan at a particular point in time. Although the MacEwan board is not actively engaged in planning the next presidential search, there is some likelihood that at some point in the next three years the current president may make a decision about his retirement. Over the same time-frame and based on current terms of appointment for MacEwan board members, the potential exists for a 100% change in members (Grant MacEwan College, n.d.c).

Chait, Holland, and Taylor (1993) defined education as one of six competencies of effective boards and posited: strong boards consciously create opportunities for trustee education about the institution as well as board roles and responsibilities. Recruiting and selecting a president is a critical responsibility of a board of governors, which should be approached as a thoughtful learning experience. Normally, boards of governors learn about presidential search while they are engaged in a recruitment process or through

presentations provided at governance conferences. Seeking knowledge about this topic through a proactive and targeted approach is not standard practice. My study provided a timely and unique opportunity through an action research exercise using knowledge management as a framework for board members at MacEwan and elsewhere to gain insights from, and share findings with, one another about a topic that is a fundamental board responsibility—choosing the institution’s top leader.

Participants in this project included current and retiring board members from four board-governed public Canadian post-secondary institutions who have completed a search process in the past five years. As well, a senior partner from each of two recruitment firms, who specialize in public post-secondary searches, and nine members of MacEwan’s Board of Governors participated in the study.

Research Question

My goal was to explore the question: How can the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors acquire and transfer knowledge about presidential searches? My sub-questions were:

1. What techniques do boards of post-secondary institutions use to gather information about presidential searches?
2. How do boards consider best practices when developing search processes?
3. What role do external recruitment specialists play in board member education about best practices in presidential search?
4. How is this information transferred when board members change?
5. How can the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors translate this knowledge into a plan for its next presidential search?

The Opportunity and Its Significance

For the past twenty years, I have been the Senior Manager of Board Operations and the President's Office with Grant MacEwan College. Over that time, I have worked with more than eighty board members, including four board chairs and two presidents. Many of the strategies and techniques noted in the preceding section are used to orient and educate members about their roles on the MacEwan Board. When the last presidential search was conducted in 1996, my responsibilities included facilitating communication between the Board and MacEwan internal community, sourcing reading material regarding presidential searches, developing and coordinating the interview process, and recording all elements of the process. Details of MacEwan's 1996 search process were fully documented by me and captured in a publication entitled "Finding the Right CEO" that summarized the experience (Grant MacEwan College, 1997).

Following Dr. Paul Byrne's appointment as president in 1997, I worked with the Board and my colleagues at MacEwan to develop and implement a marketing strategy to clearly establish him as the senior leader of the organization, in contrast to having the college community view him as simply returning to MacEwan. Eight years prior, Dr. Byrne had been the Dean of Business at MacEwan. Subsequently, I co-presented with the board chair, vice chair, and new president at a national conference, wherein we outlined our experience to board members of other public post-secondary institutions in the Canadian system. Over the past eleven years, I have been called upon frequently to share the document and information about our experience with other post-secondary boards and board staff colleagues as they engaged in their recruitment processes. On each occasion, I

have cautioned that MacEwan's approach was based on a particular context and may not work well within other environments.

My experience with, and contribution to, MacEwan's 1996 search process were not typical among my board staff colleagues across Canada. My colleagues' experiences ranged from having no involvement in the process, to arranging logistics but not being otherwise involved in a search, to being directly involved and coordinating the entire search process. As I observed other post-secondary boards across Canada engage in search processes over the years, I had often wondered how boards acquire knowledge about best practices in presidential search, choose the components for their institution's search, and transfer this information when the membership on the board changes.

While I was conversant with MacEwan's 1996 recruitment experience and had heard anecdotally about the experience of other boards in Canada's post-secondary system, I had no substantive current information or resources to assist our board in preparation for MacEwan's next presidential search. I realized my research project could serve as the impetus for acquiring and transferring knowledge among board members on this important board responsibility. Wheatley (2006) observed, "Knowledge grows inside relationships from ongoing circles of exchange where information is not just accumulated by individuals but is willingly shared. Information-rich, ambiguous environments are the source of surprising new births" (p. 104). Weisbord (2004) similarly stated, "Each new generation must learn all over again for itself" (p i).

Stating that "a presidential search is the most important task a governing board undertakes", Neff and Leondar (1992, p. xv) observed that each recruitment exercise is unique. They strongly advised that the board view the leadership search as a critical

change imperative related to the institution's development and that boards work diligently to match the leader's "skills, interests, and background [with] the needs of an institution in a particular phase of its development" (p. xv). Wolford (2008) similarly observed, "At the most basic level, [CEO] succession planning is a sound risk management practice" (p. 3). Reflecting on MacEwan's history, I could see that each of the three presidents led distinct phases of its evolution. From a storefront community college offering general interest courses (Haar from 1971 to 1981), MacEwan's second phase involved offering career and university transfer programs (Kelly from 1981 to 1996). Its current mandate is as a comprehensive undergraduate degree-granting college with a continuum of credentialed programs (Byrne 1997 to current).

"Leadership is an affair of the heart, not of the head" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 271). Upon the appointment of Dr. Paul Byrne as the third President and CEO of Grant MacEwan College in 1997, staff and faculty frequently remarked to me that he did not have to learn or be sold on MacEwan's culture because it already existed within his heart from his prior tenure as Dean of Business. His actions and sentiments demonstrated passion for the people, the students, the organization, and the community it serves. Twelve years later in 2009, current Board Chair Eric Young often states, "Paul bleeds MacEwan blue," as a reference to MacEwan's primary marketing color, its culture, and relationship with the president. This highlights the importance that MacEwan placed and still places on the fit between its culture and a leader who is "in love with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with their customers" (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 239).

MacEwan's internal and external environments have changed dramatically since the 1996 search process. Dusting off the previous search process would not suffice in finding an appropriate leader for MacEwan's future. MacEwan's position relative to other post-secondary institutions in Canada is significant in size and scope, making it a highly attractive leadership opportunity. Internal and external environmental factors, future changes in membership on the Board of Governors, current and future issues, and opportunities required a fresh approach be developed to recruit the next President/CEO.

With the exception of Dr. Byrne and me, there was no one within MacEwan's current board governance structure who participated in or knows the history of the 1996 search. Further, none of the current board members had recent experience with presidential search processes within a post-secondary setting, and several members will complete their terms before the next search commences. As Dr. Byrne contemplates his eventual retirement, the Board of Governors plans to engage in a dialogue about the college's future, the attributes of MacEwan's next leader, and the myriad elements of a presidential search process.

Within the Alberta and British Columbia public post-secondary systems, boards of governors are comprised of members who are either publicly appointed according to provincial legislation or internally elected by constituency: student, staff, and faculty. These individuals serve between one- and six-year terms. As a result of these ongoing membership changes, boards need to have strategies and techniques for transferring knowledge between members. This is particularly important when membership changes take place at a time when the board and the organization are engaged in a presidential search process. Over the next two to three years and based on current terms of

appointment for MacEwan board members, the potential exists for a 100% change in membership (Grant MacEwan College, n.d.c).

My study provided MacEwan's board members with a chance to learn from recent search experiences of other organizations and draw on industry expertise. This could potentially create a valuable knowledge base of best practices. Ultimately, this knowledge could serve as intellectual capital for the MacEwan Board to develop the College's next presidential search process. Participants also had the opportunity to discuss strategies for knowledge acquisition and transfer that could contribute to an overall board succession plan. Finally, this experience could also benefit participants in their roles as board members with other organizations.

Acquiring and transferring knowledge about MacEwan and best practices in presidential search was an essential exercise for MacEwan's board to undertake at this time. My contribution to the 1996 presidential search process was value-added. However, I acknowledged a need to work with the MacEwan board to develop a body of credible knowledge on the challenges and opportunities of this critical responsibility: successful recruitment of MacEwan's fourth leader. My research project provided the opportunity to pro-actively learn about presidential searches through a unique experience: an action research exercise. As Coghlan and Brannick (2007) observed, "Doing action research in your own organization is opportunistic... [It is] occurring anyway, irrespective of whether or not your inquiry takes place" (pp. 47-48).

A second component of this research proposal was to identify ways to transfer knowledge. Citing team learning as a cornerstone of a learning organization, Senge (1990) contended that "a learning team continually fosters other learning teams through

inculcating the practices and skills [and knowledge] of team learning more broadly” (p. 237). The participants in this project are temporary members of the senior-most decision-making level of their organizations. During their tenure, they acquire significant knowledge about their institutions and the trends and issues associated with the field of public post-secondary education. Failure to transfer knowledge to successors could be detrimental to the work of their boards and the future success of their post-secondary institutions. Stringer (2007) cited one of the benefits for participants in an action research project is that they can “build a supportive network of collaborative relationships that provides them with an ongoing resource” (p. 21).

Systems Analysis of the Opportunity

By sharing the experiences of MacEwan’s 1996 search process (Grant MacEwan College, 1997), valuable knowledge was gained by board members across Canada. The approach taken through my research exercise had the potential to have a similar impact for MacEwan’s board and other post-secondary institution boards in acquiring knowledge about presidential search processes. My project, however, offered the added component of having these participants focus on the challenges associated with knowledge management and develop skills and processes to manage their intellectual capital.

Acquisition and Transfer of Knowledge

Drawing on Berger and Luckmann (1966), Huysman and de Wit (2003) discussed how organizational and external knowledge is retrieved, created, and exchanged by individuals and subsequently translated into shared organizational learning (pp. 29–32). Using this as a framework, I depicted the systems impact of this process for individual

board members who participated in this research project, a board of governors as a group, and the overall organization (see Figure 1).

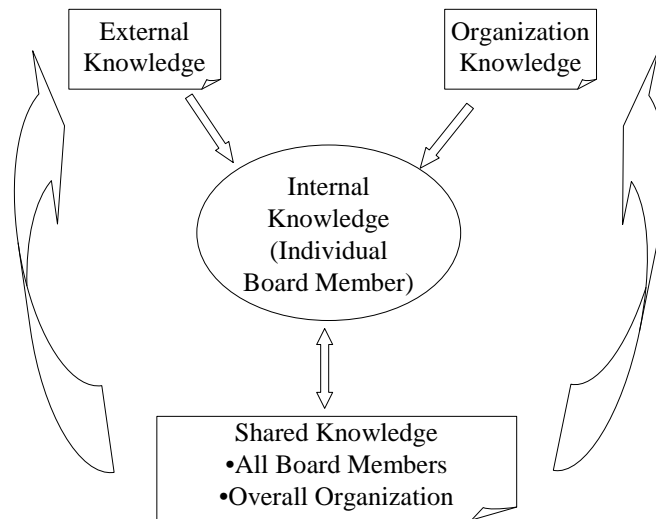


Figure 1. Acquiring and sharing knowledge

Considering the complexities of MacEwan’s current and evolving context as outlined in this section, relying on the success of the 1996 search experience would not necessarily translate into future success. Having an opportunity to learn about best practices through dialogue with board colleagues and from experts in the field was a valuable experience for participants. Taking an action research approach to this subject would, as Morton-Cooper (2000) described, accomplish the goals of “improving practice as well as producing additional knowledge” (p. 9) on a critical board responsibility.

Internal and External Factors

In addition to a dramatic change in size and scope since the 1996 presidential search occurred, there were several factors that could influence my research project and

the search process for MacEwan's next president. Depicted in Figure 2 and outlined in this section, each of these factors presented potential issues as well as opportunities.

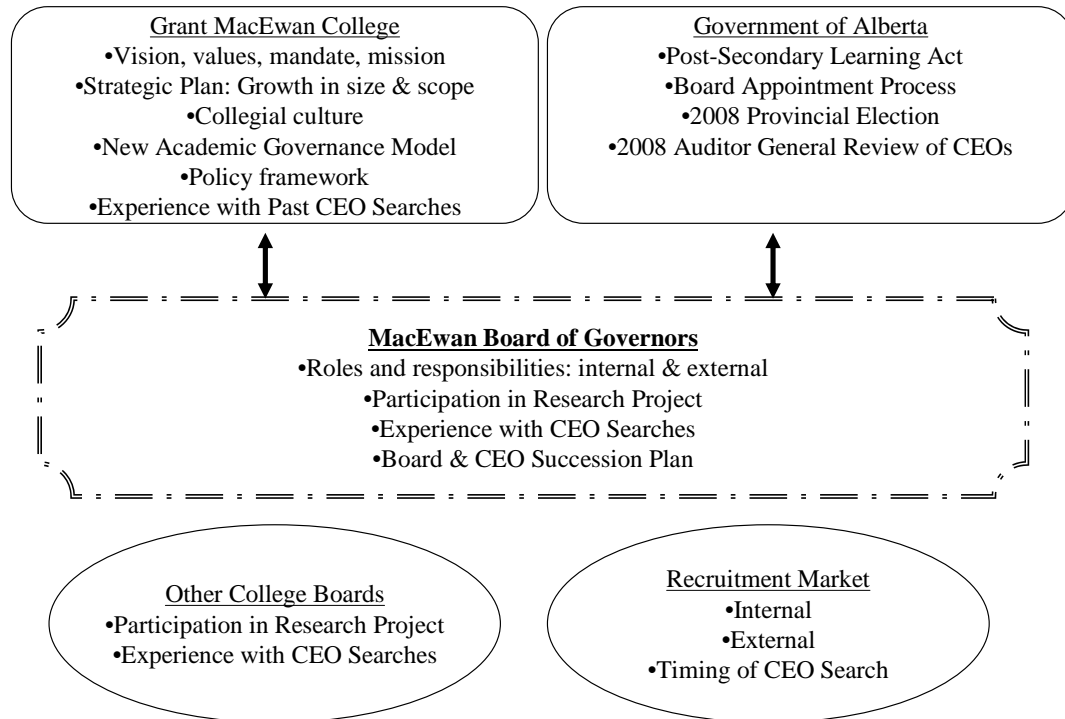


Figure 2. Systems analysis of the research opportunity

At this point, it is important to note that, during the process of developing my research proposal I became aware of an initiative underway by the Office of Auditor General of Alberta (OAG) that could have had a direct bearing on my research project. In February 2008, the OAG forwarded a letter to board chairs at Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions regarding “a comprehensive overview of the systems used by government organizations to select, evaluate and compensate Chief Executive Officers” (E. Young, personal communication, February 13, 2008). Neither MacEwan’s Board Chair, President, members of the board, administration, nor I were aware of this initiative up to this time.

Twenty-two public post-secondary institutions, including MacEwan, were included in the 250 Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions (ABCs) being asked to participate in this review. The review was conducted during the spring and summer months of 2008 to prepare a report to the Alberta Legislature in fall 2008. Among the objectives of this review was to obtain a description of the processes used by ABCs to recruit CEOs and identify and make recommendations on any deficiencies. Several of the questions posed in this questionnaire (E. Young, personal communication, February 13, 2008) bore similarity to those that may have formed part of my inquiry exercise: role of external bodies, position description, individual qualities and characteristics, assessment of past recruitment experience, succession-planning strategy, organizational CEO recruitment policy or plan, and so forth.

The opportunity existed to enhance my project as the organizations responding to this review extended beyond the few Alberta public colleges, technical institutes, and universities that could form part of my participant sample. In addition, the OAG's initiative did not encompass institutions outside of Alberta, some of whom could be participants in my study. Further, my study sought to explore the process of knowledge acquisition and transfer within and among boards. This appeared to be beyond the parameters of the OAG's review. The findings from the OAG's review were published in October 2008 (Dunn, 2008). The importance of a board's role in selecting a president was cited in the report, "A board's ability to effectively implement its mandate and move the organization forward depends—significantly—on finding and keeping a competent CEO" (p. 23).

The report went on to suggest boards need to prepare and adopt “integrated CEO recruitment and succession policies and plans” (p. 25). However, the audit found, with the exception of post-secondary institutions, most agencies “do not normally establish recruitment policies or plans” (p. 36). Plans utilized by post-secondary institutions were noted as being “typically comprehensive, inclusive of various stakeholders and formalized” (p. 36). Beyond suggesting boards establish and follow a recruitment policy “to objectively identify and evaluate candidates” and ensure the process is consistent with an overall CEO succession plan (p. 35), the report offered no guidelines for developing a presidential search policy or process. The audit did not speak to the focus of my study: how boards learn about presidential search.

Throughout its history, MacEwan’s competitive edge has been its ability to respond quickly to market demand, in many cases being a trendsetter in emerging fields of study. In 2004, the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology expanded MacEwan’s mandate to include baccalaureate degrees (Grant MacEwan College, 2008a). This shift makes MacEwan a comprehensive institution offering a continuum of credentialed programs from certificate to diploma, post diploma, applied degrees, and now, undergraduate degrees. There are some similarities with an evolving university-college model in British Columbia such as Malaspina University College. However, MacEwan’s combination of program mandates (i.e., certificates, diplomas, applied degrees, and undergraduate degrees) is unusual and unique within the Canadian public post-secondary system of colleges and universities. Creating a different type of educational organization in the Canadian post-secondary system has brought, and will

likely continue to bring, opportunities and challenges to MacEwan and its CEO, current and future.

MacEwan's board membership has changed several times since the 1996 search, and more changes will take place by the time the next search begins. In Alberta, public board members including chairs can serve a maximum of two terms totalling six years. The current chair's second term of office concludes in 2010, with the remaining board members' terms expiring or requiring renewal within the next three years. In addition to being oriented to board priorities, the new members will need to learn about presidential search processes, develop an appropriate strategy for the next search, and ensure that there is knowledge transfer between current and future board members.

In a collegial environment, faculty, staff, and students have expectations based on an espoused set of organizational values regarding participation in major decisions and activities. Understanding, valuing, and integrating these values into the presidential search process in 1996 contributed to its ultimate success (Grant MacEwan College, 1997). It is reasonable to presume incorporating cultural value into the next search process will be equally as critical to its success. The specifics as to how this will be done may differ based on current and future organizational contexts.

Another factor affecting the organizational context related to the new academic governance model (Grant MacEwan College, n.d.a) adopted by MacEwan in January 2009. For the previous two years, through a process reflective of its collegial culture, the Board of Governors, faculty, staff, students, and administrators were engaged in an exercise to develop a new academic governance model. This change shifted academic decision-making from the Board of Governors to a governance council comprised of a

majority of faculty. Responsibility for visionary and fiduciary decisions remained with the Board (Grant MacEwan College, n.d.a). The new model was implemented in January 2009, and there are many unknown facets that could have an impact on MacEwan's internal environment, such as managing a culture of differing expectations and needs affiliated with diploma and undergraduate degree programs.

Several other factors had the potential to impact the upcoming presidential search. The MacEwan community had recently concluded a review of the mission statement. This could influence the traits and competencies required of MacEwan's next leader. The reality of the marketplace from which to recruit a new president is another contextual factor requiring consideration. An analysis of internal, provincial, national, and international markets is needed to determine a pool of candidates. Lastly, an overall transition strategy is required to facilitate retirement of the current president, appointment of an interim or acting president if necessary, and contracting and orientation of a new president.

Organizational Context

Established in 1971 in Edmonton, Alberta, MacEwan is the largest public college in the province and one of the largest in the Canadian public college system. At the time of the previous presidential search process in 1996, MacEwan had three campuses in Edmonton, participated in two educational consortia in Northern Alberta, operated with a budget of \$55 million, and employed 893 faculty and staff. Forty-five certificate, diploma, and university transfer programs were offered to a student population of 32,500 of which 20%, or 6,650, were full-time (Ruhl, 1995, p. 192). Today, MacEwan has four campuses located within the municipality, a budget of \$184 million, and 72 programs.

Almost 3,500 faculty and staff serve a learner population of 39,861 of which more than 30%, or 10,338, are full-time students (Grant MacEwan College, 2008b). MacEwan also offers programming through two consortia relationships to rural communities in Northern Alberta and internationally in Ukraine and Russia (Grant MacEwan College, n.d.b).

By provincial legislation and governance structure, a Board of Governors is the most senior decision-making body of a public college in Alberta. A college board is comprised of twelve individuals: eight external community members and four internal institution members, appointed through an Order-In-Council issued by the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2009). The internal members include the President and representatives elected by each of the faculty, staff, and student associations. From among the eight external members, the Lieutenant Governor appoints a chair. Through its bylaws, MacEwan's board of governors annually assigns the role of vice chair and identifies members to serve as chairs of its standing committees: Campus Planning, Audit/Finance, and Human Resources.

Among the responsibilities of a board, as outlined in legislation, is the appointment of the board's only employee, the president. Administration of the institution flows from legislative requirements and board-defined policy through the president to the remainder of the organization. MacEwan's board human resources committee has responsibility for facilitating the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of the president. Within MacEwan's organizational framework, my position has a dual reporting relationship to the Board of Governors and the President to manage, direct, and organize their governance and administrative activities (Grant MacEwan College, n.d.c).

The official sponsor for my research project was the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors under the authority of Mr. Eric Young, Q.C., Chair. During a conversation, he expressed support for the topic and approach to my research exercise, as it appealed to his wishes that MacEwan's board explore best practices in CEO succession planning (E. Young, personal conversation, February 19, 2008). To support an arms-length relationship, mitigate conflict of interest, and facilitate his potential participation in my research project, Mr. Young delegated sponsor responsibility to Mr. Richard Cook, Dean of MacEwan's Centre for the Arts Development. While Mr. Cook was familiar with the operations of the MacEwan Board of Governors, he did not have a direct working relationship with the board.

Among the reasons Mr. Cook cited for being the sponsor of my major project are a sense of fascination and perplexity about the areas of leadership and governance. Serving as the sponsor provided Mr. Cook with an opportunity to step outside of his normal administrative role. He had a clear understanding of the responsibilities associated with being the sponsor of my project, which included identifying, articulating, and providing commitment to the research opportunity on behalf of the overall organization, reviewing and commenting on the project proposal, providing guidance on complying with ethical requirements, facilitating the selection of participants through a third-party process, conducting timely reviews of all elements of the research project, and contributing to the assessment plan. Mr. Cook was familiar with the concepts and theory of action research. He viewed this as the appropriate approach for my research project and the topics of knowledge management and presidential search (R. Cook, personal conversations, January 22, 2008 and February 13, 2008).

Along with Mr. Cook, my other research advisors were Dr. Steven Joyce and Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta. Dr. Joyce is the Acting Senior Manager, Evaluation & Analysis at Grant MacEwan College, where he also teaches in the Department of Sociology. Dr. Joyce served as an internal academic advisor and qualitative analysis expert on my research project. Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta is a core faculty member with the School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University (Royal Roads). Dr. Agger-Gupta served in the capacity of faculty supervisor for my research project.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Hart (2003) suggested a major benefit of engaging in a literature review is “that it ensures the researchability of your topic before ‘proper’ research commences” (p. 13). Reading, assessing, and reflecting upon previous research and writing provides the researcher with a frame of reference within which to conduct a study. It is an opportunity to discover, critique, and relate key concepts to the focus of the current inquiry and potentially contribute to a field of study. In this chapter, I examine literature on various concepts underpinning the three areas of focus in this study: knowledge management, knowledge transfer, and board succession planning.

Knowledge Management Theory

The frequency of turnover within public post-secondary institution boards presents particular challenges to the individual and collective ability of members to acquire and manage intellectual capital. My study examined how, through the application of knowledge management theory, board members can learn and share knowledge on a vital governance responsibility: presidential search. Ultimately, this knowledge could serve as the intellectual capital used by the board to make decisions.

The first objective of my literature review was to gain an understanding of the theory behind knowledge management in terms of how knowledge is defined, generated, acquired, transferred, and sustained. Building upon this learning, I researched knowledge management within the context of a board of governors who, on an individual and collective basis, acquire and transfer knowledge on a variety of governance topics. During the action research component of my project, I focused on acquisition and transfer of knowledge about presidential search: an important governance responsibility. Through

the second and third literature reviews and the action research process, I explored the relationship between a board's succession plan and knowledge transfer between outgoing and incoming board members.

Defining Data, Information, and Knowledge

A starting point for my discussion of knowledge management was a definition of knowledge in comparison with information and data. Acknowledging the three concepts are interconnected, Davenport and Prusak (2000) clearly distinguished between each. Quantitative in nature, data are viewed as "a set of discrete, objective facts about events ... essential raw material for the creation of information" (pp. 2–3). Information is defined by Davenport and Prusak as a message involving a sender and a receiver, who give it meaning, relevance and purpose within a context. The pivotal element that creates knowledge out of information is human involvement. Davenport and Prusak provided a working definition of knowledge as

a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, and expert insight that provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the minds of the knowers. In organizations, it often becomes embedded not only in documents or repositories but also in organizational routines, processes, practices and norms (p. 5)

Using the notion of articulation, Williams (2006) commented on the implicit nature of data, information, and knowledge. He noted each level builds upon the previous and, therefore, implicitly contains parameters from that domain (p. 83). Data are found in information, which in turn articulates to knowledge; conversely, knowledge contains elements of information and data with the added ingredient of context.

Three Generations of Knowledge Management's Evolution

Early perspectives on knowledge management concentrated on developing technical ways to store knowledge, in essence a stock approach for codifying content. More recently, knowledge management is viewed as a dynamic process that focuses on social, intellectual and human capital—a contextually-based human interface. Snowden (2002) summarized the three generations through which the concept of knowledge management has evolved. Prior to 1995, the first generation of knowledge management concentrated on managing knowledge to provide timely information in support of decisions and business process re-engineering initiatives. By the mid to late 1990s, organizations began to realize these re-engineering efforts had “achieved efficiencies at the cost of effectiveness” (pp. 100–101). Failure to consider the value and complexity of human systems resulted in the loss of vital experience and knowledge.

The second generation of knowledge management started to outline specific knowledge management models, such as Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model in 1995 (as cited in Nonaka, 2002) which was based on two dimensions of a knowledge continuum: explicit and tacit (p. 442). Explicit or codified knowledge located at one end of the continuum is objective and linear, often taking the form of documents, such as policies, procedures, standards, reports, or manuals, and is communicated or transmitted through formal systematic language. At the opposite end of the continuum is tacit knowledge, a more subjective way of knowing. Viewed as being personally possessed by the individual, tacit knowledge is contextual, ambiguous, and nonlinear. It is constructed from experience and education, which is often communicated informally. DiBella and Nevis (1998) considered tacit and explicit knowledge as essential components of their

framework for increasing an organization's learning capabilities. Positing tacit and explicit as the two components of common knowledge in organizations, Dixon (2000) argued they combine or fall at some more intermediate position on the continuum, rather than being on extreme ends (p. 27).

Building on the SECI Model

Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model (as cited in Nonaka, 2002) outlined four modes for converting tacit knowledge from individuals into shared, explicit knowledge: socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization.

| | | Tacit knowledge | To | Explicit knowledge |
|--|--|-----------------|----|--------------------|
| Tacit knowledge <i>From</i> Explicit knowledge | | Socialization | | Externalization |
| | | Internalization | | Combination |

*Figure 3. Modes of knowledge conversion*¹

The central theme to the socialization process is the interaction between individuals (Nonaka, 2002, pp. 442–443). Through shared experiences like apprenticeship, on-the-job training, or mentorships, individual tacit knowledge converts into shared tacit knowledge. Imagination, intuitive learning, and the use of metaphors feature in the externalization process, where tacit knowledge moves to explicit. In the combination process, social processes such as meetings and telephone conversations

¹ From "A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation," by I. Nonaka, 2002. In C. W. Choo and N. Bontis (Eds.), *The Strategic Management of Intellectual Capital and Organizational Knowledge* (p. 442), New York: Oxford University Press. Copyright © 2002 by Oxford University Press. Reprinted with permission (See Appendix A).

combine and reconfigure different bodies of existing explicit knowledge into new explicit knowledge. Through the fourth mode, internalization, explicit knowledge transfers into tacit knowledge. Nonaka noted internalization “bears some similarity to the traditional notion of ‘learning’ ... and ‘action’ is deeply related to the internalization process” (p. 442).

Within the SECI model, knowledge is viewed as moving through cycles of continuous learning that eventually resemble a spiral when deeper and deeper levels of understanding are reached (Nonaka, 2002, pp. 442–444). Where knowledge was previously regarded as an organizational asset separate from the individual, Nonaka and Takeuchi (as cited in Nonaka, 2002) sought to create a more holistic theory that integrated individual and collective relationships with knowledge management.

Community as a Component of Knowledge Management Theory

Snowden (2002) argued the SECI model continued to treat “knowledge as a thing to be managed” (p. 108), and, instead, posited a four-dimensional model where knowledge is seen as having a paradoxical nature, both as a thing and a flow within a community. Coining the word Cynefin to identify his “sense-making” model (p. 104), Snowden acknowledged everyone in the knowledge community brings a history of both positive and negative baggage to creating the new knowledge system. This notion of community ties to Wenger’s (2004) cornerstone principle of knowledge management—communities of practice. These are social structures defined by knowledge domains, problems, or situations in which practitioners, the people with a shared passion for and experience with a particular knowledge, “interact regularly in order to learn” (p. 2).

Wenger's (2004) "doughnut" (p. 1) model of knowledge management contains three elements: domain, community, and practice. Domain is defined as the area of common knowledge upon which the community of practitioners can focus. Community is the group of people who have the relevant domain knowledge and the quality of relationships within which collective learning can effectively take place. Practice is the experience needed to produce "the body of knowledge, methods, tools, stories, cases, and documents which members share and develop together" (p. 3).

Organizational Learning as an Element of Knowledge Management

Adding another dimension to the perspectives of knowledge management as a thing and a flow, Huysman and de Wit (2003) identified organizational learning as "the process through which an organization (re) constructs knowledge" (p. 29). Drawing on the 1966 work of Berger and Luckmann, Huysman and de Wit developed a framework depicting how organizational and external knowledge is retrieved, created, and exchanged by individuals and subsequently translated into shared organizational learning. Underlying Huysman and de Wit's framework is the premise that organizations employ technical and non-technical tools, techniques, and processes to facilitate collective, as well as individual, learning. Acknowledging that individual learning is less complicated and easier to manage, Huysman and de Wit maintained collective learning must be a priority if organizations are to experience success in their knowledge management initiatives.

Relating Knowledge Management Concepts to a Board of Governors

Acquiring and sharing explicit and tacit knowledge is critically important to a board's ability to conduct its business. Explicit knowledge is captured in documents, data

reports, meeting minutes, routines, policies, and procedures created through the governance decision-making process. Tacit knowledge includes the beliefs, viewpoints, insights, and experiences that individual board members bring to group discussions. Nicholson and Kiel (2004) utilized the concept of intellectual capital to present a four-quadrant framework for governance. Their model outlined the various roles, responsibilities, and functions of a board. It also highlighted the importance of ongoing board member development by “keeping governance an evergreen topic for the board [so that it] will have the human and social capital needed into the future” (p. 14).

From initial orientation through to completion of tenure, board members purposefully interface as individuals and a collective, while continuously progressing through cycles of learning. Through this interactive and iterative learning process, members reach deeper levels of understanding about one another, the collective team, and the organization. Within their particular context as board members, they jointly and dynamically create the knowledge needed for decision-making. Some of the learning methodologies include: (a) socialization; and (b) shared learning through experiences such as presentations, board development curricula, team-building events, networking with board colleagues, and exercises.

As a collective, a board constitutes a community of practice or social network. Boards are comprised of practitioners who share social and professional interests within a particular domain and context. The functional work of boards is often managed by a professional resource staff member. Therefore, knowledge management within a board of governors is a social activity that is influenced by and embraces the context of the individual members involved in the process of creating and sharing knowledge. My

research project examined these knowledge management principles in terms of how boards of governors manage knowledge around a strategic board topic: presidential search.

Knowledge Transfer

According to the provincial government websites for Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2009) and British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, 2009), in 2008 there were 75 and 131 orders-in-council issued, respectively, for changes in board membership of public post-secondary institutions. “One litmus test for determining whether organizational learning has occurred is analyzing whether organizational learning persists in the face of individual turnover” (Argote, 2005, p. 44). With membership on a board of governors constantly changing, I believed there was a need to have strategies and techniques for transferring knowledge between board members. I also thought this could be particularly important should membership changes take place at a time when the board is engaged in a presidential search process, which Neff and Leondar (1992) observed “is the most important task a governing board undertakes” (p. xv).

In this section, I define and examine concepts underpinning knowledge transfer from the organic, social, and relational perspectives, instead of the more usual technological perspective. I also explore and discuss evidence about the effectiveness of techniques and strategies used by individuals and groups to share knowledge on important organizational priorities such as presidential search.

The Role of Trust in Knowledge Transfer

Argote (1999) identified interpersonal knowledge transfer as a key building block of organizational learning. Further, Argote suggested organizations need to facilitate

group learning through four processes: (a) acquiring knowledge by importing or sharing knowledge already existing within or outside the group, (b) generating new knowledge through collaboration and interaction, (c) evaluating knowledge that has been shared or generated, and (d) combining knowledge into a collective product. Within the context of leadership and group processes, Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2006) commented on the significance of building interpersonal trust in organizational relationships. They acknowledged trust as “an essential element of organizational effectiveness” (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, p. 146) and described it as “the social glue that binds human relationships (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, p. 71). As my study brought together individuals from different organizations to discuss a sensitive board responsibility, I was curious as to whether or not trust would play a role in their participation and in the knowledge being transferred.

Abrams, Cross, Lesser, and Levin (2003) assessed the effectiveness of two forms of interpersonal trust for creating and sharing knowledge in social networks: one based on trust in a person’s competence and a second based on trust in a person’s benevolence or goodwill. They went on to say, “Research shows that trust leads to increased overall knowledge exchange, makes knowledge exchanges less costly, and increases the likelihood that knowledge acquired from a colleague is sufficiently understood and absorbed that a person can put it to use” (p. 65). The authors described organizational, relational, and individual factors that serve as builders of benevolence—and competence-based trust.

Organizationally, interpersonal trust can be promoted by (a) establishing and ensuring shared vision and language and (b) holding people accountable for trust. In terms of relational factors, trust can be facilitated by creating personal connections and

giving away something of value. Finally, Abrams et al. noted an individual's personal judgment of his or her abilities matters in developing trust as well as the individual's ability to disclose expertise and limitations. Correlating these characteristics and factors, Abrams et al. presented a series of behaviours and practices that managers can use as a guide for promoting interpersonal trust to enable effective knowledge sharing:

- Act with discretion
- Be consistent between what is said and what is done
- Ensure frequent and meaningful communication and interaction at both personal and professional levels
- Engage in collaborative, inquisitive, unambiguous communication
- Ensure that decisions are fair and transparent
- Establish and ensure shared vision and language
- Hold people accountable for trust
- Create personal connections and learn about things in common with one another from both a personal and professional perspective
- Give away something of value including sharing tacit or experiential knowledge and personal networks
- Disclose your expertise and areas of strength as well as your limitations. (p. 67)

The influence of trust and shared vision on knowledge transfer between intra- and inter-organizational relationships was examined by Li (2005). Both relationships were found to be "important and sufficient conduits for knowledge transfer" (p. 91) that require ongoing cultivation. However, in inter-organizational relationships, trust was found to be a more influential factor, while shared vision was found to be more influential in intra-organizational relationships. Li also highlighted the importance placed by the recipient on having confidence in the exchange partner's reliability and integrity. Li's study suggested further research is needed to assess trust as an inter-personal phenomenon between organizations and the effects of individual-individual trust on individual-organization trust and organization-organization trust.

Levin and Cross (2004) explored trust as a mediating role in effective knowledge transfer in relation to the strength of ties, weak or strong, between participants. They concluded the exchange of tacit and explicit knowledge is enhanced through benevolence-based trust while tacit knowledge exchange relies on competence-based trust. Further, they established a positive relationship between “trusted weak ties” (p. 1486) and useful knowledge transfer thus leading them to suggest that individuals and organizations work on developing both strong and trusted weak ties. In essence, Levin and Cross surmised, “Trusting relationships lead to greater knowledge exchange” (p. 1478).

Levin, Whitener, and Cross (2006) speculated relationship length serves as a moderating factor “between perceived trustworthiness and the basis on which people decide to trust each other” (p. 1163). They assessed the impact of relationship length on three bases of trust: perceived demographic similarity between participants, social interaction and behaviour, and shared perspective. Levin et al. concluded, “Trust does not necessarily increase over the course of a relationship [rather] as the relationship matures and people learn more about each other, the basis on which someone decides to trust another will likely shift” (p. 1163). Kouzes and Posner (2007) similarly recognized the dilemma and challenge associated with trustworthiness as “being in the eye of the beholder” (p. 244). I agree with Kouzes and Posner’s advice that leaders need to create “opportunities for people to interact with one another and in the process form more trusting, more collaborative relationships” (p. 246).

Social Networks as a Technique for Transferring Tacit Knowledge

In this time of electronic evolution, I think there is a frequently misplaced over-reliance on technology for communication. While I agree email and other electronic tools have their benefits for communicating explicit information, I do not believe they adequately express emotion or context: two factors that are integral to developing human relationships. Curran and Casey (2006) examined challenges associated with expressing emotion in electronic mail and noted the need for people to use more than written words to effectively communicate with one another. Davenport and Prusak (2000) also advocated for a shift from technical concepts for knowledge transfer toward a culture of sharing by focusing on “more human aspects—from access to attention, from velocity to viscosity, from documents to discussions” (p. 106).

Argote (2005) described this as the organic, rather than computational, paradigm of knowledge management, as it encompasses “the people, group dynamics, social network, and cultural aspects of knowledge management” (p. 45) as well as tacit and explicit knowledge. Abrams et al. (2003) similarly observed, “While technological advances can help in the search for useful knowledge, numerous studies confirm that people prefer to get useful information and advice from other people” (p. 73).

Communities of practice, networks, mentoring, and other active learning techniques were widely discussed in the literature as ways for individuals and groups to transfer tacit knowledge (Bollinger & Smith, 2001; Davenport & Prusak, 2000; DiBella & Nevis, 1998; Hinds & Pfeffer, 2003; Huysman & de Wit, 2003; Snowden, 2005; Wenger, 2004). The social nature of knowledge management through the use of social networks was investigated in greater depth by Marouf (2007) and Snowden.

Marouf observed, “Conceptualizing organizations as social communities in which knowledge is structured, coordinated, and shared is central to understanding knowledge sharing in organizations” (p. 118). Chait, Ryan, and Taylor (2005) suggested, “Boards act as communities of practice creating multiple opportunities for the entire board or particular committees to pool usable knowledge and thereby learn together” (p. 144). The concepts of communities of practice as well as personal and organizational networks were discussed by Christensen (2007) as tools to resolve problems inherent in the process of transferring knowledge. Networks create opportunities for accessing knowledge and having a common identity between the individuals sharing knowledge creates a similar absorptive capacity, thereby positively affecting knowledge transfer. Further, Christensen noted knowledge transfer problems can be resolved by developing the relationship between receiver and sender, demonstrating a willingness to share knowledge and possessing the necessary knowledge to be shared.

Snowden’s (2005) use of a social network analysis tool held similar results that “knowledge creation and exchange, together with learning mechanisms, require forms of community interaction” (p. 561). Abrams et al. (2003) commented on the value of social network analysis for pinpointing organizational problems and suggested focusing on building trust within social networks is the key to ultimately achieving organizational effectiveness. They outlined a set of ten behaviours and practices to promote interpersonal trust and observed, “Combining these trust builders with a social-network perspective can yield very targeted and successful interventions [for the organization]” (p. 74).

Factors Motivating and Influencing Knowledge Transfer

Borgatti and Cross (2003) examined relational factors informing and influencing an individual's decision to seek information within social networks: knowing, valuing, access, and cost. They found that information is sought based on the extent to which the knowledge seeker is aware of the other person's expertise and perceives it to be of value in resolving a particular problem or opportunity. Further, the knowledge seeker must perceive he or she can access information from the knowledge owner. Finally, the knowledge seeker must believe that seeking information is not too costly in terms of either interpersonal risks or reciprocal obligations incurred.

Borgatti and Cross's (2003) dynamic interaction model (p. 442) demonstrated the relationship between type of interaction, presence of any barriers, and the probability of future interaction. Each interaction causes the knowledge seeker to recalibrate the probability of future interactions with the knowledge source. For example, "discovering that a person is not helpful reduces the probability of interacting with them, which means that knowledge of their expertise and how best to access them begins to fade" (p. 442). The reverse also holds, in that positive interactions reduce barriers and increase the possibility of future interactions, thereby increasing the transfer of knowledge from that particular source.

Lucas and Ogilvie (2006) similarly observed the importance of the sender and receiver's perceptions in relation to the information sharing process. Successful knowledge transfer is based on whether or not they see one another as partners, know one another well, and "view knowledge as something to be shared with their colleagues" (p. 18).

An individual's ability, motivation, and opportunity were identified by Argote, McEvily, and Reagans (2003) as mechanisms affecting successful knowledge management. Individuals have innate abilities as well as abilities acquired through training and experience. Social and monetary rewards, as well as incentives driven by strong relational ties and reciprocity, influence the degree to which individuals are motivated individuals to acquire and transfer knowledge. A third knowledge management mechanism, opportunity, is impacted by the organization's ability and capacity to bring people closer together, either physically or psychologically. This can be facilitated by providing people with opportunities to create informal internal and external networks, learn from trial and error experiences, as well as through observation within close proximity to one another.

Darr and Kurtzberg (2000) examined conditions under which partner similarity—strategic, customer, or geographic—influenced knowledge transfer within franchise-based organizations. Extending this to the individual level of organizations, they asserted individuals are attracted to and select partners on the basis of these similarity dimensions. Darr and Kurtzberg concluded strategic similarity, and the context created through having a similar business strategy, is useful for successful knowledge transfer while geographic and customer similarity have less of an impact. “Managers are cognizant of different strategies and, given a choice, tend to align themselves with potential knowledge transfer partners displaying a similar strategy to their own” (p. 41). Further, Darr and Kurtzberg argued for a different definition of knowledge transfer that looked beyond sharing of knowledge and included a signal indicating the knowledge has been used by the adopter.

Board Succession Planning

Rothwell (2005) defined succession planning and management as “any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department, or work group by making provision for the development, replacement, and strategic application of key people over time” (p. 10). Within the Alberta and British Columbia public post-secondary systems, boards of governors are comprised of members who are either recruited through a public application process or internally-elected by constituency: student, staff, and faculty. These individuals serve between one- and six-year terms. Regardless of whether members are internally-elected or publicly-recruited, they are ultimately appointed by the government ministry responsible for post-secondary education.

As mentioned in the preceding section on knowledge transfer, there were 75 and 131 orders-in-council issued in 2008 for new board appointees to public post-secondary institutions Alberta (Government of Alberta, 2009) and British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, 2009), respectively. This level of turnover reinforces the importance of having a succession strategy for recruiting, orienting, and developing board members within the public post-secondary sector, as well as a knowledge management strategy for transferring intellectual capital.

In a (2008) study of Crown Corporations, The Conference Board of Canada noted only 11 per cent of responding organizations have a formal succession plan however 86 per cent have identified criteria for potential members. By monitoring term limits and retirement dates for board members, Crown Corporations “are taking an active role in ensuring continuity for their boards” (p. 6).

The Importance of Board Succession Planning

“An effective board is becoming a strategic necessity, not only a legal requirement. The most effective boards ... evolve over time through careful planning” (Lakey, 2007, p. vii). Smith (2000) encouraged boards to develop an ongoing, well-informed strategy for cultivating potential board leaders throughout the community. Nicholson and Kiel’s (2004) model of board effectiveness highlighted strategic board recruitment as “a major component of ensuring ongoing corporate renewal” (p. 17).

In a workbook developed for non-profit boards in Alberta, The Muttart Foundation and Alberta Culture and Community Spirit (2008) observed,

Recruiting, developing, and retaining appropriate individuals to serve in board roles is a difficult and time-consuming job. Healthy organizations are willing to make a major investment of time and effort in these activities to build a strong organization (p. 3).

Another point noted in the workbook is that board member recruitment, orientation, training, and development are ongoing activities and part of “a planned building process that continues throughout the year” (p. 45) toward the goal of creating an effective board.

The Government of British Columbia, Board Resources and Development Office (2005), in its guidelines for governance of public sector organizations, acknowledged the importance of having a strategy for determining criteria of board members, recruiting appropriate members, and recommending them for appointment. Further, the British Columbia Board Resources and Development Office asserted the need for a comprehensive orientation program as well as ongoing professional development. In a study of the Workers’ Compensation Board of British Columbia, O’Callaghan and

Korbin (1995) recommended boards conduct an annual assessment of their composition and establish criteria linked to the organization's current and future needs (p. 15).

Bugg and Dallhoff's (2006) *National Study of Board Governance Practices in the Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector in Canada* identified board succession planning as well as recruitment, orientation, and training as critical governance practices. They observed several trends in board governance, including: increased awareness of and focus on governance, increased demand for and reduced supply of qualified members, rising expectations and requirements for directors, increased demand for efficiency and effectiveness of board operations, more emphasis on both process and culture as well as balancing the two factors, increased demand for transparency and accountability, increased emphasis on board performance measurement, and increased attention to risk management (pp. vii–ix).

Of those organizations with succession plans in place, Bugg and Dallhoff (2006) concluded the plans tended to be more informal than formal for both board chairs and members. They noted one board's succession planning efforts included developing two matrixes to establish criteria for selecting members. One matrix was based on current skill sets on the board, while the second identified future needs based on the organization's strategy. The matrixes were used to identify gaps where skills were needed. Upon appointment of new members, Bugg and Dallhoff recommended a well-organized orientation program that includes written materials, presentations from organization staff, facility tours, mentors, and a meeting with the board chair and CEO "to outline plans, the purpose of the organization, and expectations" (pp. xiv–xv). As well, they recommended finding resources to continuously educate, train, and develop

board members in governance work. Chait et al. (2005) also advocated for a new approach to board recruitment: “one that stresses quality of mind, a tolerance for ambiguity, an appetite for organizational puzzles, a fondness for robust discourse, and a commitment to team play” (p. 178).

Education, Training, and Development of Board Members

The educational dimension of boards was explored by Chait et al. (1993), who posited, “Effective boards take the necessary steps to ensure that [members] are well-informed about the institution and about the board’s roles, responsibilities, and performance” (p. 26). They encouraged boards to take a conscious and ongoing approach to orientation and development of members through a variety of informal and formal strategies. Smith (2000) cited a defining characteristic of effective boards is that “they are learning boards for their learning colleges” (p. 198). By making learning a priority for themselves and their colleges, boards ultimately make a better contribution to their colleges. This philosophy was supported by Nicholson and Kiel (2004), who suggested a commitment to board member development “is a commitment to the continuing improvement of an organization [and] is a process that adds value to the company” (p. 17). A 2008 survey of Crown Corporations conducted by The Conference Board of Canada indicated 92 per cent of respondents actively promote ongoing direction education (p. 2).

Commenting on the intellectual capital of boards, Chait et al. (2005) observed, “Intellectual capital is not the sum of trustees’ knowledge [rather] effective boards and successful companies require shared knowledge” (p. 143), so that governance as leadership can flourish. On the topic of board development programs, Davis (1997) cited

Vaughn and Weisman's 1995 study of U.S. community college trustees, which indicated "only 14 per cent of boards require new trustees to participate in a structured orientation" (p. 21), with 70 per cent of the orientation programs being voluntary. Further, Davis noted "nearly one in four colleges does not provide any local professional development programs for trustees" (p. 21).

When designing board development programs, Davis suggested consideration be given to the unique characteristics of the institution, the board, and the individual member. This point was also supported by Smith (2000), who posited the "different desires, goals, learning styles, and time constraints" (p. 194) of members requires an individualized, comprehensive education program. Robinson (2001) correlated a board's capacity for strategic thinking and decision making to its commitment to continuous learning.

Through this literature review, I introduced three primary theoretical constructs underpinning this study: knowledge management, knowledge transfer, and board succession planning. These theories provided a context and framework for study of how a board of governors acquires and transfers knowledge on governance roles and responsibilities. In particular, the literature concepts were used to guide an action learning experience, within which participants acquired and transferred knowledge on the governance role related to presidential search. In the next chapter, I outline the action research inquiry, the research approach, and the data-gathering methodology. I also introduce the participants, describe the data analysis approach, and present ethical issues pertinent to the study.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

In this chapter, I describe the process undertaken to provide the MacEwan board with an iterative learning experience. The research approach is presented, the study participants are introduced, the data gathering tools are outlined, and the data analysis methods employed in this study are explained. Ethical principles that guided the project are also explored.

The primary methodology used in this study was action research, using an appreciative inquiry process and focused on qualitative data gathering and analysis combined with some quantitative data gathering and analysis. The research question explored was: How can the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors acquire and transfer knowledge about presidential searches?

Action research is a social process of joint inquiry. According to Stringer (2007), action research is used to “gain insights into the ways people interpret events from their own perspective, providing culturally and contextually appropriate information assisting them to more effectively manage problems they confront” (p. 237). As a post-secondary institution offering undergraduate degrees, MacEwan’s policy on research and scholarly activity embraces the theories and constructs of action research (S. Brown, personal communication, February 19, 2008). In contrast to traditional quantitative research, a qualitative approach embraces the lived experiences of participants: context, background, and values. It necessitates that they collaboratively educate themselves on real-life matters.

Acquiring and Transferring Knowledge at MacEwan 40






| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|----------------------|---|
| Sept 2008 Board Retreat | Who: (10 participants) MacEwan Board Purpose: Overview of Major Project and Process How: Presentation and Document Outcome: Key stakeholders brought on board for project | Look Think Act |  |
| Sept-Oct 2008 | Who: (23 participants) MacEwan Board, other post secondary institutions, public organizations, AGB What: Q's about recent search experience, org characteristics, board succession planning, knowledge management strategies Purpose: Find volunteer participants How: Survey (third-party administered) Outcome: 12 participants volunteered for focus groups | Look Think Act |  |
| Oct-Nov 2008 | Who: (12 participants) MacEwan Board and other post secondary institutions and public organizations What: Acquire knowledge about searches and knowledge management strategies Purpose: Share experiences How: Mini-focus groups; reading resource material Outcome: knowledge acquired | Look Think Act |  |
| Nov-Dec 2008 | Who: (9 participants) MacEwan Board What: Current experience with and knowledge of searches; themes/topics to pursue in mini-focus group and modified World Café Purpose: Identify current knowledge and areas of learning How: Semi-structured interviews Outcome: confirmation of knowledge acquired in focus groups, identification of gaps, and identification of areas to explore in World Café | Look Think Act |  |
| Jan 2009 Board Mini Retreat | Who: (9 participants) MacEwan Board What: Transfer knowledge gained about searches Purpose: Share new knowledge and experiences How: Modified World Café Outcome: knowledge transferred among all members on board succession planning, presidential search, knowledge management | Look Think Act |  |
| Sept 2009 Board Retreat | Who: (12 participants) MacEwan Board What: Overview of Research Findings Purpose: Start planning How: Modified AI Summit | | |

Figure 4. Logic model for major project inquiry process.

Through my research project, board members from MacEwan and other post-secondary institutions had a unique opportunity to go beyond casual conversation to have an in-depth dialogue about and analyze presidential search processes. My action research project reflected the tenets of, and provided an authentic experience with, the process of knowledge management, allowing board members to draw upon their experiences and place their perspectives “alongside academic and bureaucratic literature... [and share the outcomes], so that more appropriate and effective programs and services can be formulated” (Stringer, 2007, p. 171). They had the opportunity to learn from their and others’ lived experiences to meet the first goal of this exercise: acquire knowledge about best practices in presidential search.

This study was designed to provide the MacEwan board members with the opportunity to be involved at all stages of the research process. The participatory philosophy of action research was pertinent to this study, as each board member had something to contribute to the dialogue and the solution. Equally as important was the reflective nature of action research, whereby board members would have the opportunity to contemplate their and others’ experiences.

Project Participants

The profile of participants in my study included board members, internally-elected and publicly-appointed from public post-secondary institutions in Alberta and British Columbia. Also, there were recruitment specialists who provide executive search services to public post-secondary institutions in both provinces. I reviewed the websites of public post-secondary institutions and several private board-governed corporations in Alberta and British Columbia to prepare a spreadsheet of contact information of my

colleagues at those institutions and their board chairs. I was also able to initially identify several institutions that had conducted a presidential search process within the past five years. Through an initial phone call (see Appendix B), I contacted my colleagues at these 49 organizations in Alberta and British Columbia to outline the topic and process of my study. I sought their assistance in distributing an online survey link to their board members, in particular the chair of their board. I also contacted the senior partners of four recruitment firms to explain my research project and invite their participation.

I subsequently distributed a letter of invitation, informed consent, and link to an online survey through my colleagues (see Appendices C, D, and E). Based on responses to the survey, I identified and approached participants for the mini-focus group sessions. No response to the survey was received from the private board-governed institutions that I had contacted by telephone. Two survey respondents expressed a desire to participate further in the study, however, their institutions had not conducted a presidential search in the past five years.

Board chairs of four public post-secondary institutions that had completed a presidential search process in the past five years and two recruitment specialists comprised the six external non-MacEwan study participants. These individuals were paired with six volunteers from the MacEwan board who had also completed the survey and indicated their desire to participate in further stages of the research. I subsequently interviewed a total of nine MacEwan board volunteers. Six of the interviewees had participated in the mini-focus group sessions, while the remaining three had not. All nine MacEwan volunteers later participated in a group activity based on the concept of a World Café.

Research Methods and Tools

The goal of this study was to create a progressively deeper learning experience for the MacEwan board volunteers. Glesne (2006) advocated for depth and repeated interaction with a small group of participants rather than greater breadth and single observation. Glesne posited, “The use of multiple data-collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data [and this practice] is commonly called triangulation” (p. 36). Berg (2004) described triangulation as using “multiple lines of sight” (p. 5) and suggested researchers strive for more than two sighting lines to obtain a deeper verification and validation of the matter being investigated.

Four data-gathering techniques were used in my study: an online survey, mini-focus groups, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, and a modified World Café. Each technique was sequenced to build upon the preceding one and cover the three topics of the study: knowledge management within a board of governors, board succession planning, and presidential search. Input was sought from my research advisors on the questions and process of each technique. With the premise of the study based on the concepts of social conversation and experiential learning, questions were arranged by topic and grouped by theme.

The online survey provided basic information and a starting point for two-way dialogue in the mini-focus group session. The one-on-one interviews allowed for reflection on learning acquired through the mini-focus group session, in-depth exploration of topics and themes, and identification of gaps in knowledge. The modified World Café brought all nine MacEwan board volunteers together in one setting to share

individual knowledge and perspectives and develop a common understanding of topics and associated themes.

Conducting the Study

In early September 2008, I submitted ethics applications to the research ethics boards at Royal Roads and Grant MacEwan College. At the September 2008 annual retreat of the MacEwan board, I provided an overview of my research proposal. I outlined the components of Royal Roads' Master of Arts in Leadership program, noting the research requirement and my progress. I compared and contrasted the principles underpinning traditional research and action research. I identified my research advisors, the research questions and sub-questions, and literature review components. I explained the theories being explored and the research methods to be used. I indicated the status of my ethics applications with both institutions.

To set the context for the proposal, I reviewed the roles and responsibilities of a board of governors and the techniques traditionally used to learn about them. I highlighted the board's responsibility for presidential recruitment, selection, and evaluation. I also presented a visual depicting the tenure of MacEwan board members between 2008/2009 and 2011/2012 and commented on the relationship between board succession planning, presidential search, and knowledge management: the three areas of focus for my study. I received approval on September 29, 2008, from the research ethics boards of both MacEwan (2006) and Royal Roads (2007) to proceed with my study. In essence, my presentation to the MacEwan Board at its annual retreat served as the launching point of my study as it brought key stakeholders on board. As I reflected on the

experience, I realized the retreat could be considered as an initial round of the action research cycle: look, think, and act.

Online Survey

In mid-September 2008, to prepare for the first data-gathering step, I reviewed the websites of board-governed public post-secondary institutions and several private corporations in Alberta and British Columbia to gather contact information about my colleagues and the board chairs at those institutions. I also noted which institutions indicated they had conducted a presidential search process within the past five years. I contacted colleagues at two institutions, one in Alberta and one in British Columbia, to inquire whether or not they required an ethics application associated with my study. I chose these colleagues because I had not previously met them and thought this would provide arms length and objectivity. As well, these institutions are comparative in size and complexity to MacEwan, with well-established research policies and practices.

Between October 6 and 7, I telephoned (see Appendix B) my colleagues at forty-nine organizations in Alberta and British Columbia to introduce myself and outline the topic and process of my study. I sought their assistance in outlining my research proposal to their board chairs and distributing the online survey link. I also contacted the senior partners of four recruitment firms to explain my research project and invite their participation. I had the opportunity to meet face-to-face with three of these individuals.

Over the course of my career, I have reviewed and prepared a broad spectrum of printed resources on the topics of board succession planning and presidential search. I have also attended and presented at several conferences on these and other governance topics. Through the experience of developing my research proposal, I read more books,

articles, and other written resources on these two topics as well as on the topics of knowledge management and knowledge transfer. I drew upon this knowledge to draft a series of potential questions for each research method and included these in my concept proposal.

As I proceeded to prepare the questions for the online survey, it became evident that I could combine many of the draft questions into the survey. This allowed me to create an initial point of reference to build upon in the next three research methods, where I could delve deeper into the topics and themes. I designed the survey (see Appendix E) to include both closed and open-ended questions to elicit quantitative responses, as well as provide participants with the opportunity to more broadly and qualitatively express their points and share their context.

I designed and administered my survey using SurveyMonkey[®] (2008), an American-based survey product. Within my letter of invitation and informed consent (see Appendices C and D) for the online survey, I advised potential participants this software is subject to the U.S. Patriot Act (2001) and could be seized by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and disclosed to governments, courts, or law enforcement and regulatory agencies. I purchased a renewable professional subscription to allow me to utilize all of the software features and maximize access to my data. Prior to launching the survey, I conducted several tests of the software with the assistance of one of my research advisors. This was a critical exercise to undertake, as I experienced some technical issues and had to trouble shoot to ensure the integrity of the survey. I pilot-tested the survey with two long-time board staff colleagues who had recently retired. Their extensive governance experience and perspective and keen eye for detail were valuable contributors

to this step in the process. I also sought and incorporated input from my three research advisors.

The survey questions (see Appendix E) were quantitative and qualitative in nature. Demographic data, such as length of term on the board, nature of appointment (i.e., public, student, staff, faculty), institution mandate, size of institution, and timeframe of last presidential search exercise, were gathered for comparison of organizational context. The qualitative data were sought to provide guidance in identifying themes for further exploration. Data from the survey were intended to assist with identifying participants to approach and invite to participate in the remaining data-gathering stages of my study.

To mitigate any perception of bias or influence associated with my knowledge of or relationship with potential participants at MacEwan or elsewhere, I used a third-party with expertise in conducting surveys to extend the letters of invitation to potential participants, confidentially receive and review the responses, and select participants based on pre-established criteria. Glesne (2006) described this selection strategy as “homogeneous sampling” (p. 35).

On October 9, 2008, Dr. Joyce distributed my letter of invitation, informed consent, and online survey link (see Appendices C, D, and E) to my colleagues at the 49 organizations across Alberta and British Columbia, as well as the recruitment specialists. At this time I was advised by one of my colleagues at an Alberta post-secondary institution that they required an ethics application before they could distribute my survey to their board members. I submitted the application as requested and received approval three weeks later.

Between October 9 and 31, I received 37 responses to the survey. Of these, 20 contained responses to the informed consent question, but no responses to the remaining survey questions. While I was unable to confirm the reasons behind this, I wondered if potential participants had accepted the informed consent so they could do a preliminary review of the survey. Reminders were sent by email on October 22 and 30, resulting in an additional six responses by November 14. Kirby and McKenna (1989) noted the need for making one or two follow-up contacts when conducting surveys so as to increase return results. Eleven respondents indicated a willingness and desire to participate in mini-focus group sessions. I needed one more non-MacEwan participant so I could conduct a total of six sessions, with two participants each. I was aware of at least one other potential respondent, as the individual had verbally indicated a desire to participate in my research. I contacted the individual, and on November 26, the individual completed the survey and indicated an interest in participating in the next step.

As I waited for the survey responses, I reviewed the ones received to identify potential themes to explore in the mini-focus group sessions. I used a large whiteboard in my home office and multi-coloured markers to group the topics and themes generated through the survey data. It was at this time that I chose to re-sequence my research methods by delaying the one-on-one interviews until the survey and focus group sessions were completed. I thought this would allow the MacEwan board volunteers an opportunity to reflect on their experiences with the survey and mini-focus group session, assess their level of knowledge on the research topics, and identify areas needing further exploration.

Mini-Focus Groups

While waiting for the survey stage to be completed, I started preparing for the mini-focus group sessions. I contacted an audiovisual technician through MacEwan's technology help desk and inquired about options for recording the sessions, which were being conducted through a teleconference bridge. On November 6, with the assistance of one of my classmates in the 2007-3 cohort and my administrative assistant, the technician and I tested the audio recording software Audacity® (Mazzoni, 2007) and tools. The set up included two microphones placed to the left and right of my office speaker phone, a soundboard for adjusting pitch and volume, and a laptop containing the audio recording software. As a back-up to the audio recording arrangement, I used a digital voice recorder that I had purchased while in second residence. Both approaches worked well and were alternately necessary when technical problems occurred.

I reviewed the survey responses, identified themes to pursue in the focus group sessions, and drafted a series of questions, which were tested through my research advisors. I prepared a set of guidelines for the session. While focus groups normally involve between four to six participants, my study paired MacEwan participants with participants from other organizations to engage in a mini-focus group facilitated by me. Six individual MacEwan board volunteers were paired with one of four board colleagues from another public post-secondary institution or one of two recruitment specialists.

I researched and prepared biographical background on each participant so I could introduce them to one another. I contacted each participant to coordinate a date and time for the session. Once the arrangements were finalized, I followed up with an email (see Appendix F) to confirm the logistics (i.e., date, time, teleconference number, length of

session), provide brief biographical information on each participant, in addition to a copy of the survey, the letter of invitation, informed consent, an overview of my study, and the questions responded to online. I also attached an overview of focus groups, guidelines for the session, and a list of topics and themes to be explored (see Appendix F). Six focus groups were conducted between November 25 and December 8, and the questions (see Appendix G) used for these sessions were qualitative in nature. The goal of the mini-focus group session was to share and compare experiences and develop and generate ideas for presidential search processes, board succession planning, and knowledge management.

Building on the social interaction of interviews, focus group sessions create a group dynamic and offer an opportunity for the researcher to “observe session participants interacting and sharing specific attitudes and experiences, [and exploring] issues” (Berg, 2004, p. 127). Some of the other advantages of focus groups, as identified by Berg, related to my study: flexibility, the speed with which results can be produced, and allowing the researcher to “assess substantive content of verbally expressed views, opinions, experiences, and attitudes” (pp. 126–127). Unlike interviews, focus groups generally produce substantially less data and do not offer a private setting in which participants can express themselves.

With my focus groups being conducted with two participants on a teleconference, both participants were able to remain in a private location convenient to them and engage in deep dialogue. I was also located in a private office. I applied the principles of a round robin format where I posed a question first to one individual then the other. Although I was not able to visually observe each participant, I was able to listen for verbal cues. For

example, I could hear enthusiasm in the voices of participants as well as any hesitation. I listened for acknowledgement between participants of points they were presenting to one another through use of interjections such as “uh huh” and “umm hmm”. I also listened for interjections indicating any points of disagreement. I paid attention to breaks in conversation signifying the topic had concluded and it was time for me to posit another question. If I sensed confusion or lack of clarity, I provided guidance and clarification. I noted these various cues within my verbatim transcripts as they assisted in providing me with valuable insights into the context and richness that existed behind participants’ spoken words.

During this time, I also assessed options for transcribing the data that would be gathered in the focus group sessions, interviews, and World Café. I purchased and installed a transcription software program. I chose to use transcription equipment as I wanted to transcribe verbatim, rather than make notes about key points being presented by participants. I wanted full content and context of their words, as opposed to my interpretation or summation. Also, by using transcription equipment, which included a foot pedal to stop and start each audio file, I was able to multi-task and keep my hands free for typing content. I have highly-developed typing skills, and this approach to transcribing data allowed me to capitalize on this strength.

I created templates for each research method to be transcribed with columns for recording the name of each participant, content of the discussion, and a blank column to assist with analysis. The focus group sessions were transcribed and reviewed immediately so that themes could be identified and analyzed to assist in preparing questions for the

one-on-one interviews. I compiled information from the focus group templates into a spreadsheet to assist in analyzing themes from across the sessions.

One-on-One Interviews

As each focus group session concluded, I contacted the MacEwan board volunteer to arrange a date, time, and location for a one-on-one interview. The goal of the interview was to gain an understanding of how board members understand the elements involved in the topics of presidential search, board succession planning, and knowledge management practices. In particular, the interview was intended to (a) understand the board member's level of knowledge, (b) better identify approaches board members found effective for learning about these topics, (c) receive suggestions to improve or enhance these activities, and (d) identify areas of growth to be explored in a modified World Café with all MacEwan board participants.

In addition to the social interaction that an interview brings to the research, a semi-structured interview allows for more flexibility than a structured interview. While questions and topics are predetermined, there is freedom to reorder, as well as add or delete, to probe more deeply (Berg, 2004). Palys and Atchison (2008) identified several strengths of interviews that related to my study: higher rates of participation in immediate and future interview activities, a reduced level of volunteer bias, and enhanced quality of data gathered. They suggested the most significant challenges are cost and time associated with conducting the interview and subsequently analyzing the data.

A total of nine interviews were conducted between December 4 and 18 at times and in private locations convenient for the participants. Six of the interviewees had participated in the mini-focus group sessions, while the remaining three had not. I

followed up with an email to all interviewees expressing my appreciation for their continued participation, confirming logistics for the interview and providing a set of questions (see Appendix H), together with the letter of invitation (see Appendix I) and informed consent (see Appendix J). As the participants in the interviews and the modified World Café were the same, the informed consent was adjusted to cover both research activities. I reviewed the elements of the informed consent verbally with participants, and each participant signed the informed consent at the start of the interview.

I formulated the interview questions (see Appendix H) by analyzing responses to the survey and mini-focus group sessions and identifying themes for deeper exploration. Questions were reviewed by my research advisors. The questions were qualitative in nature and were adjusted to each participant depending on whether or not the individual had participated in a mini-focus group session. The interviews were semi-structured, averaged one-hour in length, and were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder. The data were immediately transcribed. I hired an individual to assist with transcribing the focus group sessions as well as the interviews. I discussed the requirement of confidentiality associated with my study and had the transcriptionist sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix K).

In total, it took 59 hours to transcribe these activities, of which I personally transcribed thirty hours. I reviewed each transcript for themes, including any gaps in knowledge to be explored in the World Café activity. I prepared a spreadsheet on each of the research themes: presidential search, board succession planning, and knowledge management. Within the spreadsheet, I listed themes, points, and quotes I had noted in

each of the three data-gathering activities conducted to date: survey, focus groups, and interviews.

Modified World Café

The last method I implemented was a whole-system group intervention for nine MacEwan board volunteers based on the concept of a World Café. A World Café is a group dialogue process where people gather at café tables, each with a theme. With a host remaining at the table, participants move between café tables and have conversations about the assigned theme. This results in a cross-pollination of perspectives, observations, and ideas, as well as new insights. “The World Café is designed primarily to generate collective knowledge-sharing, webs of personal relationships, and new possibilities for action” (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 27).

The seven principles of a World Café, as outlined by Brown and Isaacs, were presented: set the context; create hospitable space; explore questions that matter; encourage everyone’s contribution; cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives; listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions; and harvest and share collective discoveries. While this technique is normally used with larger groups, it was modified to involve the nine MacEwan participants and, therefore, did not provide an authentic World Café experience. Additional insight is provided in this section as well as within the research limitations section of Chapter 4 on how the principles of the World Café were modified and their impact upon this research experience.

With the assistance of one of my team members, we spent a full day reviewing data and themes from the survey, focus group sessions, and one-on-one interviews and grouping them according to the research topic areas. These were assessed and prioritized

to identify six potential themes for the World Café activity. We used a meeting room containing a large table, where we could group printed copies of the data and transcripts associated with the three data-gathering exercises. The room was also equipped with a whiteboard, where we listed the three research topic areas and placed themes noted in the research. I also used a laptop to capture this information in the documents I had previously prepared for each topic.

We discussed logistics for the café and decided to have three tables involving three board volunteers and a table host. Each table discussion would be audio recorded and have flipchart paper for noting of ideas. The first round of discussions would be twenty minutes in length, and participants would be rotated between each of the tables rather than travel from table to table as a group. The second round of discussion would be fifteen minutes. In total, participants would discuss six topics. Several days later, I prepared flipchart papers to outline the six topics and associated themes. These were subsequently used by my sponsor and I to fine-tune the café table topics; we decided to change two of the topics. We drafted a series of questions for each table discussion (see Appendix L). I then prepared a spreadsheet depicting each table topic, table host, and a preliminary rotation schedule for the participants. I captured each table topic, the draft questions, and points noted in the research into a single document for use by each facilitator as background and, if necessary, to prompt discussion at the table.

The date of January 15, 2009, for the World Café was established in early November so as to accommodate the participants' schedules and fit with my data-gathering timeline. At that time, I contacted the event coordinator at the location I planned to use and booked the venue. The date was placed in the MacEwan board of

governors' planning calendar, and reminders were included with the emails sent during the mini-focus group and interview stages. I prepared an invitation that explained the concept of a World Café and outlined logistics (date, time, and location) and topics to be explored: presidential search, board succession planning, and knowledge management (see Appendix M). The goals for the activity were described as: reflect on and share individual perspectives and learning gathered through the first three research steps, create a shared understanding of the three topics, and identify next steps. Once again, I expressed my appreciation for their participation in my study.

I sent the invitation on January 7, and I indicated I would contact each participant to re-confirm availability for the evening and answer any questions. All nine participants confirmed their plans to participate in the World Café. I met with the event coordinator at the venue to finalize arrangements for room set up and catering. I reviewed my planning spreadsheet for the event and finalized the table rotation schedule. I prepared a portfolio for each participant containing their table rotation schedule, questions for discussion at each table (see Appendix L), and guidelines about the World Café concept. I also prepared a package of information for each facilitator containing their participant list, the table topics, questions (see Appendix L), and initial themes I had identified from the three data-gathering activities (see Appendix N) for reference during the table discussions.

The World Café activity was conducted at an off-campus location close to downtown in the early evening immediately at the end of the work day. To create a café atmosphere, the room chosen for the event had large windows overlooking a scenic golf course. A table with four chairs was placed in each of three corners of the room to accommodate three MacEwan board participants and a table host. Two of the tables were

coffee tables with lounge chairs, while the third was a smaller card table with dining room style chairs. Tea lights were placed on the windowsills and tables. Plastic table cloths depicting leaves, flipchart paper, and markers were placed on each table. A buffet table was set up in the centre of the room in the shape of the letter 'S' and an assortment of hot and cold hors d'oeuvres were provided along with refreshments.

Table 1. *World Café Topics and Rotation Schedule*

| Table | Topic | Table Host |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------|
| First Rotation: 20 minutes per topic | | |
| 1 | Board succession planning | Cook |
| 2 | Role of board and role of committee | Baptista |
| 3 | Board orientation, education and development | Joyce |
| Second Rotation: 15 minutes per topic | | |
| 1 | Presidential search and selection process and timeline | Cook |
| 2 | Trust and confidentiality during a presidential search | Baptista |
| 3 | Stakeholder consultation and engagement | Joyce |

As each participant arrived, I introduced them to Richard Cook and Steven Joyce, two of my research advisors who were hosting two of the café table discussions. I hosted the third table. We each facilitated discussion at our respective tables, with Dr. Joyce having the added responsibility of monitoring the time allotted for each round. I provided each participant with a personalized portfolio containing the participant list, topics, and questions (see Appendix L) for each round. After everyone was settled at their first table, I outlined the process and timeline for the evening to the whole group. Six topics were presented for discussion: (a) board succession planning; (b) role of board and role of search committee; (c) board orientation, education, and development; (d) presidential

search and selection process and timeline; (e) trust and confidentiality during a presidential search; and (f) stakeholder consultation and engagement. Topics one through three were explored in the first table rotation, which lasted twenty minutes. Participants then moved to their second assigned table to discuss the next topic for twenty minutes. They then moved to their third assigned table and topic. Following a short break, the participants started the second rotation, where they spent fifteen minutes on the next three topics.

Since there were nine participants rotating between six topics, on a couple of occasions, two participants were assigned to the same table. Overall, the amount of duplication was kept to a minimum because I had pre-assigned the rotation schedule. With only having three hours to conduct the group activity, there was insufficient time for the table hosts to recap conversations from the rounds of discussion, compare notes, and facilitate report outs to the whole group. Given that I had established the questions for the World Café based on points brought forward from the survey, focus groups, and interviews, the rounds did not provide an opportunity to build upon points being presented. Participants did not collectively connect perspectives, identify patterns, nor harvest new discoveries. They did, however, cross-pollinate perspectives with one another on each of the World Café topics, based upon information they had individually acquired through the online survey, focus groups, and interviews. They also developed consensus on each of the World Café topics.

On several occasions while transcribing data from the World Café table discussions, I noted participants indicating they had arrived at the event with one perspective and this had changed as a result of having a facilitated opportunity for

dialogue. For example, one participant indicated, “When we started this discussion [about stakeholder engagement] I had a different interpretation of open forums and felt quite hesitant about them. I now have a clearer understanding of why they are important and how to do them” (WC834).

As a result of being unable to apply key World Café principles, this group activity was more reflective of three parallel focus groups. Focus groups offer an opportunity to build relationships through interaction, learning, and by creating common ground among participants. The sense of intimacy created through the café setting and small number of participants at each table allowed participants to speak freely on each of the topics and listen closely to points presented by others at the table. These points are also noted in the research limitations section of Chapter 4.

At the end of the evening, I recapped the topics discussed and highlighted similarities identified by participants between the processes used for board succession planning and presidential search. I invited participants to identify future activities and topics of discussion they might wish to participate in during retreats, in-camera board sessions, or committee meetings. I encouraged them to consider the roles they could individually and collectively play in MacEwan’s board succession plan as well as any future presidential search. I outlined the next steps in my research project in terms of compiling and analyzing data and preparing the report.

The energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by participants throughout the evening’s discussions was captured in the overwhelmingly positive feedback they provided me on their experience with the World Café as well as the other elements of my study. Their specific comments are contained in the section on feedback in Chapter 4. To

avoid confusion with the mini-focus group sessions, the term World Café is used throughout this report to refer to the last data-collection activity in my study.

The table conversations were recorded using laptops containing the audio recording software Audacity®. (Mazzoni, 2007). As I prepared to transcribe the data, I experienced technical issues with converting the Audacity® files into a format for transcription. I realized all of the audio tracks on each laptop had combined to become part of a single audio file resulting in an overlap of the table conversations making it impossible to transcribe them. Through a process of troubleshooting, I eventually developed a solution. I soloed and muted each track in sequence, deleted the remaining tracks on the file, and saved the single track as a waveform (.wav) file. I then closed the Audacity® file without saving any changes. I re-opened the original Audacity® file and repeated the process until I had saved each track individually. I was then able to use transcription software to transcribe each track. I shared this solution with MacEwan's audio technician who had assisted me with recording the focus group sessions.

As I started the transcription process, I also became aware that I did not have audio files for one table. I checked the flipchart papers for that table and compiled a list of items noted by participants and the table host. I sent this to the table host, who provided additional context and information on the two topics. Unfortunately, this meant that I was unable to capture direct data and quotes within my research findings from the participants at that table. Over the course of the following week, I personally transcribed the remaining twelve table discussions. I reviewed these transcripts along with the notes from the table where the audio records were lost. Based upon this, I compiled a

spreadsheet of raw data to capture points presented on each question as part of my data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you've learned. Working with the data, you described, create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link your story to other stories. To do so you must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data you have collected. (Glesne, 2006, p. 147)

Each step of the inquiry process required data analysis before proceeding to the next activity. The use of multiple iterative data-gathering methods triangulated the perspectives of participants on the topics of presidential search and board succession planning within the framework of knowledge management.

Survey data were assessed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify potential participants for the mini-focus group sessions. As I had used the SurveyMonkey[®] (2008) software to prepare the online survey, I used the program's analysis features to review each individual response as well as summarize all of the responses into a raw data spreadsheet. I prepared a second spreadsheet of raw data, where I assigned each participant an identity code and assessed responses to two questions: (a) when their organization had last conducted a presidential search and (b) whether or not they would be willing to participate in a focus group session. From the individual responses and overall response summary, I identified key themes in each of three areas: knowledge transfer, board succession planning, and presidential search.

As a highly visual learner, I used a whiteboard with multi-coloured markers as well as a colour-coded spreadsheet to conduct the necessary sorting and to graphically depict and relate themes in the form of a mind-map. These themes were used as the basis

for formulating questions for the second inquiry activity, mini focus group sessions. Data from the survey were also used to identify participants to approach and invite to participate in the remaining data-gathering stages of my study: focus group, interview, and World Café. I used a third-party, Dr. Steven Joyce, one of my research advisors with expertise in conducting surveys to extend the letters of invitation, confidentially receive and review the responses, and select participants based on pre-established criteria. Glesne (2006) described this selection strategy as “homogeneous sampling” (p. 35).

The focus group sessions, interviews, and World Café group activity were all audio-recorded and immediately transcribed verbatim. I created templates for transcribing each activity and used columns, where I coded and recorded each participant and the content of the discussion. To assist with analysis, I included a blank column in each document where I made notations about key words or points expressed on the question. I grouped similar concepts and searched for common themes and any gaps in knowledge. Feedback was sought and assessed from participants through the interview questions (see Appendix H) and World Café summation about their experiences with each data-collection activity. This information was used to improve my skills as a researcher and make any necessary adjustments within the forthcoming data-collection activity.

By doing much of the transcription myself and choosing to transcribe verbatim, I was able to experience what Patton (2002) described as “an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights” (p. 441). Through the experience of transcribing data, the deep connection I had felt with each participant translated into a profound sense of obligation to honour every aspect of the insights they were sharing with me. Had I chosen to transcribe thematically, I might have inadvertently

missed critical perspectives being offered by participants. Glesne (2006) suggested such an experience can help researchers gain valuable insights into themselves:

You may take pride in the way that you carefully listen and ask probing questions, but you may also realize that you are not as observant as you had hoped. You may need to develop better strategies to record and remember unspecified interactions. (p. 218)

Data from the three interactive and iterative research methods were analyzed thematically to understand the data within the participants' context and the setting, as well as identify themes and questions to be explored in the next activity. The process of thematic analysis, the most widely used data analysis method, "involves coding and then segregating the data by codes into data clumps for further analysis and description" (Glesne, 2006, p. 147). Each data-collection method and the three primary topics explored: knowledge management, board succession planning, feedback, and presidential search are presented in Chapter 4. A fourth topic, feedback, is also presented in Chapter 4. The four tables depict how themes were carried forward from one activity to the next for deeper exploration as well as new areas studied.

Ethical Guidelines

The sensitive nature of my research topic required reflection on any ethical factors that are directly or indirectly associated with my proposal. To facilitate this, I met one-on-one with the Chair of the Board of Governors, the Chair of the Board Human Resources Committee, MacEwan's President, and the potential sponsor. We individually and confidentially identified opportunities and issues with the research project focus and the action research strategy. As well, they were provided with the freedom to indicate whether or not they wished me to proceed with the project. We discussed the parameters

of the ethical principles defined by each of Royal Roads (2007) and MacEwan (2006) with regard to free and informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, minimizing harm, and maximizing benefit.

As a specific example of potential political and ethical issues, we talked about Mr. Cook's role as sponsor being familiar with the Board and yet external to it. It was essential that all parties have confidence in and comfort with Mr. Cook serving in this role, particularly with respect to the ethical expectations around privacy and confidentiality. Coghlan and Brannick (2007) also advised paying attention to the power relationships between the researcher, sponsor, peers, subordinates, clients, other organizational members, departments, executives, and those in higher positions.

Referencing Adler and Adler, Coghlan and Brannick (2007) discussed the complexities of a "complete member [undertaking] action research in and on their own organizations" (p. 47). In this context, and as the action researcher, I am a full member of the organization, who wishes to continue my career when the research project is completed. The action researcher as a complete member has two roles: a long-term member of the organization and a short-term consultant conducting action research. Applying this to my situation, in the first role, I have knowledge of the organization and the issues based on my long career with MacEwan. My second role as an action researcher was to facilitate a collaborative inquiry process with participants, to solve problems and generate new knowledge. As Coghlan and Brannick cautioned, this "role duality" (p. 61) has advantages and disadvantages, as well as ethical issues that I, my potential sponsor, and potential participants needed to consider carefully as we approached and proceeded through this research exercise (pp. 61–69).

For example, a key aspect of my initial conversations with the potential sponsor, the Chair of the Board of Governors, the Chair of the Board Human Resources Committee, and the President was to distinguish between and clarify expectations regarding these dual roles. Although my background includes prior experience with a presidential search process at MacEwan, we agreed there was no expectation that this will form part of the dialogue. My research project was intended to be a joint-learning experience within the current context for all participants. Further, we confirmed there was no expectation that MacEwan's board or any other board would use the findings that I had to prepare to meet the requirements for a graduate credential.

Another factor considered was the involvement of external recruitment firms as a source of information about best practices in presidential search. The firms had to clearly understand there had to be no expectation that MacEwan or any other board would use their services. As well, board participants had to be made aware of this component of the research plan. I met privately with each recruitment specialist to explain my project and the ethical issues associated with their potential participation. They all expressed support for the parameters and approach of my study on the basis of the focus on key governance roles within the post-secondary sector.

I also spoke privately with the MacEwan focus group participants who would be matched with a recruitment specialist to ensure they were comfortable with the situation. All participants understood they had the option to decline to participate. As the project proceeded, I remained alert to the need for ongoing dialogue about the ethical complexities of meeting participants' expectations regarding privacy and confidentiality

during the research process and through the publication of a manuscript (Glesne, 2006, pp. 138–146).

Glesne (2006) presented a particular point on the benefits and ethical dilemmas associated with the nature and influence of relationships between the researcher and research participants. Whether the relationships were close at the start of the research process or they developed as a result of it, “the closer the relationship between the researcher and research participants, the more special obligations and expectations emerge” (p. 144). I kept this advice in mind through the initial proposal phase of the project, during the data-collection period, and when preparing this report. I have close relationships with current members of the MacEwan Board of Governors, as well as with other board members and many of my colleagues within the Alberta and British Columbia public post-secondary systems. All of these relationships are integral to my professional life, and it was important that I honoured them.

By virtue of my position within the offices of the Board and President, I have had a direct or indirect role in formulating many, but not all, of MacEwan’s public and confidential organizational documents and records that I accessed for this project. While I may have authored several of these documents, I have done so with the clear understanding that they are MacEwan’s intellectual property (see Appendix A). Through my professional networks in Alberta and across Canada, I accessed to documents and records produced by external organizations including other post-secondary institutions, the Government of Alberta, and so forth. I appropriately informed, gained permission for, and negotiated “access with authorities and participants” (Coghlan & Brannick, 2007, p. 78). The issue of intellectual property in relation to this action research project and the

fact that I conducted it while a full-time employee required clarification and agreement between my sponsor and me before the research was undertaken.

On another note, I was cognizant of the bias that could be perceived around the idea that I could be helping to develop a process to choose my immediate supervisor and the potential influence this could have on my action research project. However, I viewed my prime responsibility in this research project and the eventual search process as helping to find the right individual to lead MacEwan into the future. Whether or not I would continue to be part of that future was not a consideration. It is not unusual for the individual in my position at a post-secondary institution to move on once the new president has transitioned into the organization. As I considered the potential risk this might present to my continued career with MacEwan, I acknowledged a need for ongoing discussion of these issues with my sponsor.

Reflecting on Coghlan and Brannick's (2007) advice, a common thread throughout each of the preceding sections is the importance of managing power relationships between my sponsor and me, between stakeholders, within the MacEwan board, within the post-secondary institution community, from external influences, and so forth (pp. 72–76). Plummer (as cited in Glesne, 2006) suggested action researchers take a combined approach to addressing ethical issues in the action research process: “the ethical absolutist and the situational relativist” (p. 145).

As an ethical absolutist, I was guided by the professional codes of ethics of both Royal Roads (2007) and MacEwan (2006). When approaching other boards of governors to participate in this research exercise, I inquired regarding their institutions' ethics guidelines. While these codes help to mitigate ethical dilemmas, they cannot address all

of them. The situational relativist approach facilitates responding to ethical dilemmas that arise as the research exercise unfolds and requires “continual communication and interaction with research participants throughout the study” (Glesne, 2006, p. 146).

To safeguard the rights and interests of humans participating in research activities and provide guidance to researchers, organizations such as Royal Roads (2007) have developed ethical principles and associated regulations. In Canada, the practice has been to develop these principles and regulations within the context of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, [Tri-Council], 1998). At Royal Roads, this translates into eight ethical principles: respect for human dignity, respect for free and informed consent, respect for vulnerable persons, respect for privacy and confidentiality, respect for justice and inclusiveness, balancing harm and benefits, minimizing harm, and maximizing benefits (Section D, ¶ 2-9). Treating people with respect is a core personal value, and I strongly subscribe to the duty-of-care tenet upon which these principles are based. In this section, I describe my understanding of Royal Roads’ ethical principles and discuss how each applies to my research project.

Palys and Atchison (2008) acknowledged each research exercise is unique in terms of participants, topic, researcher perspectives and interests, norms and standards of the discipline, social and legal context, and level of researcher experience. My research involved individuals at the governance level of several post-secondary institutions engaging in a discussion about their most vital responsibility: presidential recruitment. Myriad factors within each environment had the potential to impact and influence my

project, making it impossible to predict what ethical issues might arise during the research process. As a novice researcher, I heeded the caution that ethics issues are complex. There are “rarely any clear-cut right or wrong ethical answers” with the result that ethical dilemmas cannot be “easily resolved [or] dismissed by applying simplistic ethical formulas” (p. 85).

To ensure participants are protected and the project is successful, Palys and Atchison’s (2008) advice to less-experienced researchers was to carefully consider every aspect of the process and “seek the advice and counsel of trusted colleagues with experience in that area before [making] decisions” (p. 85). Maintaining a journal throughout my research was a valuable tool for reflection and response to each situation I encountered.

One of the mitigating strategies I incorporated into my concept proposal was including three academics who have research experience as research advisors. One individual had a master’s degree in business administration, while another had a doctorate in Library and Information Science and specializes in qualitative research. For my faculty supervisor, I chose someone with experience in the fields of knowledge management, organizational behaviour, leadership, and qualitative research within the context of post-secondary education. In addition to learning about Royal Roads’ (2007) ethical principles and research project requirements, I familiarized myself with those of MacEwan (2006)—my primary research site. This included attending an afternoon workshop on research ethics conducted through MacEwan’s Research Office, as well as reviewing policies and guidelines for conducting research as a member of the college’s staff.

Respect for Human Dignity

Every human being is unique. Each person's life experience has given them a unique perspective and contributed to creating a sense of self. By virtue of asking people to participate in my research, I believed that I had created an obligation to respect their individuality. These competent, autonomous people would voluntarily contribute to help me achieve a personal and professional goal. From my first point of contact to completion of the project, I remained vigilant in demonstrating that each person's dignity was of paramount importance to me. I did not cast judgment on their contributions. All participants were fully informed, verbally and in writing, of the intended purpose of my research, the approach and methodology, and how their contribution would be captured and reflected. I was also cognizant of the role that privacy and confidentiality plays in maintaining a person's dignity. I protected each participant's dignity by having the highest standards in place for recording, transcribing, transporting, and storing their personal information.

Respect for Free and Informed Consent

Stringer (2007) observed that the participatory nature of action research contains "a particular imperative to ensure that all participants know what is going on, that the processes are inherently transparent to all" (p. 55). Beginning with the survey and throughout each subsequent data-gathering exercise, I provided participants with an overview of my project, including the particular methods being utilized. I outlined the benefits and risks associated with their involvement. I also explained the parameters of free and informed consent and offered them the opportunity to withdraw. After they agreed to take part, I provided them with a letter of invitation (see Appendices C, H, and

L) and informed consent (see Appendices D and I) that outlined the purpose and processes of the research and the parameters of their participation.

Each participant had the freedom to choose to participate and to withdraw at any time. They were under no obligation to participate in any way that was outside of their comfort zone. Evidence of this is reflected in the fact that not all MacEwan board members participated in my study, and there were a couple of members who chose not to participate in the focus groups on the basis of not being comfortable with such activities. Information was not collected without participants' knowledge nor were the participants publicly identified or revealed to anyone else without their consent. Their data were kept in confidence and available for their personal review and edit at any time. Pseudonyms or identification codes were used for any direct quotes included in the final document. Had they chosen to withdraw, their information would have been returned to them. None of the participants chose to withdraw from my study.

Respect for Vulnerable Persons

My research did not focus on or involve children, institutionalized persons, nor others whose circumstances required special protection. While I anticipated each participant in my research would be competent, able to protect their own interests, and have the capacity to make decisions, I did not assume the issue of vulnerability was put to rest. The topic of my research project, acquiring and transferring knowledge about presidential search, is highly sensitive and politically charged in any setting, public or private. Asking board members from different educational institutions to share their lessons learned, both positive and negative, could have caused discomfort and made them feel vulnerable.

I was particularly aware of the challenge this presents to student, staff, and faculty board members representing their internal constituencies. A student member who usually serves a one-year term could find it difficult to comment on the successes and failures of his or her institution's CEO search process. Staff and faculty members could feel conflicted between their roles as board members and their professional roles within their institution. I further acknowledged that my position could be perceived as having power and influence. This had the potential for creating a sense of obligation with participants.

The situation was further complicated by my proposal to include external recruitment specialists in my research. I gauged board members' level of comfort with this approach prior to proceeding with the mini-focus group sessions, and I followed up after the session. In subsequent interviews with the two MacEwan focus group participants who were paired with external recruitment specialists, both indicated they found the sessions valuable and were comfortable with the questions posed and format utilized.

Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality

Palys and Atchison (2008) stressed the importance of researchers clearly establishing and maintaining participants' expectations about privacy and confidentiality. The relationship between privacy and a person's dignity is fragile and was protected. Each participant was asked, "How important the provision of confidentiality [is] to their participation" (p. 80). There were no cultural, legal, professional, or personal matters requiring special consideration to ensure privacy and confidentiality. I used pseudonyms, identification codes, password-protected digital files, anonymous records, shredded all transient documents, and stored all documents in a locked cabinet located away from the

research site. The informed consent written agreements outlined how privacy and confidentiality would be maintained (see Appendices D and I). I also had a confidentiality agreement signed by my transcriptionist (Appendix K).

Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness

Inclusion is a keystone principle underpinning action research. It requires that all relevant stakeholders participate in the process of investigating and resolving the nature and context of problems that concern them (Stringer, 2007, pp. 33–36). My research involved internal and public board members from several public post-secondary institutions and external recruitment specialists. I encouraged and continue to value the diversity of perspectives and experiences they brought to my project.

I was aware that some educational institutions view the positions of student, faculty, and staff board members as being of less value than public members—MacEwan is not one of these. As I identified the institutions and individuals to approach as potential participants, I gauged the degree of inclusiveness that existed within their current context. I designed fair research tools and strategies to ensure that all voices were heard and authentically reflected through my research.

Balancing Harm and Benefits

My research was contingent upon the participation of board members from several post-secondary institutions. As board members, they are responsible for recruiting and selecting their institution's most senior leader. I could not have proceeded without their involvement. I acknowledged the sensitive nature of my research topic could cause discomfort for participants in sharing positive and negative experiences. I believed this

was offset by the valuable base of knowledge they would assist in bringing forth through my research.

Operating at the uppermost level of an organization, board members can be placed in a position of isolation when making decisions that affect the overall organization. I anticipated the interpersonal connections made among board members during my research could “build a supportive network of collaborative relationships that provides them with an ongoing resource” (Stringer, 2007, p. 21).

Palys and Atchison (2008) observed the unpredictable nature of research results in researchers making “best guesses [about] costs and benefits” (p. 86). If at any time during the process an individual or group had expressed concern about the value of their participation, I would have reminded them of their option to withdraw. None of the participants indicated such a concern or requested to withdraw. Based on the foreseeable harms and anticipated benefits outlined, I believed there was a favourable harms-benefits balance for my research.

Minimizing Harms

Applying the principle of a reasonable person, I believed the participants in my research would be representative average, rational, and intelligent community members. As individuals responsible for making governance decisions, I expected they would be capable of understanding how my project related to their role as a board member and that it presented minimal risk to them. I followed Palys and Atchison’s (2008) general guideline of viewing participants as an immediate relative or close friend when assessing risk. No situations arose that subjected participants to unnecessary risks of harm or threatened their safety.

Maximizing Benefits

The frequency of turnover among board members challenges their individual and collective ability to acquire and manage knowledge that is essential to exercise their governance responsibilities. Orientation programs, retreats, and annual conferences are common strategies used to facilitate learning about post-secondary trends and issues and governance topics. In my twenty-five years of experience at the post-secondary governance level, I was unaware of any action research projects involving board members and related to the topics of knowledge management and board succession planning within the context of presidential search processes. I believed my research offered a unique opportunity for board members from several educational institutions to actively research the most vital aspect of their governance responsibilities: presidential search. They had the potential to create a valuable body of knowledge on this topic and develop strategies for transferring this knowledge to their successors and with colleagues at other institutions.

CHAPTER FOUR: ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

I used four data-collection methods to create a progressive learning experience for the participants in my study and to answer the question: How can the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors acquire and transfer knowledge about presidential searches? Each data-collection method and associated questions were designed to gather input related to three literature topics: knowledge management, knowledge transfer, and board succession planning. The use of multiple and sequential data-collection methods involving the same participants contributed to the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research.

In this chapter, I describe the research findings and conclusions drawn from data gathered through an online survey, focus group sessions, one-on-one interviews, and a World Café. I also present knowledge acquired and transferred by participants on the topic of presidential search. As well, I outline the scope of the research project and limitations of the research. Quotes from study participants are coded according to the activity in which they participated: survey (S), focus group (FG), interview (I), or World Café (WC).

Twenty-three responses were received to the online survey, and twelve respondents, of which six were MacEwan volunteers, participated in six mini-focus group sessions. One MacEwan volunteer was paired with one external volunteer for each session. Three additional MacEwan participants volunteered to participate in the interview stage. I conducted a total of nine interviews with MacEwan participants, and all nine subsequently took part in the World Café group activity. Each data-collection

method, the number of individuals who participated, and differentiation between MacEwan and non-MacEwan participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Data-Collection Method and Number of Participants*

| Data-Collection Method | Total Number of Participants | External Non-MacEwan Participants | MacEwan Participants |
|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Survey (S) | 23 | 14 | 9 |
| Focus Groups (FG) | 12 | 6 | 6 |
| Interviews (I) | 9 | 0 | 9 |
| World Café (WC) | 9 | 0 | 9 |

Study Findings

In this section, I outline the findings associated with (a) learning about governance roles and managing that knowledge within a board of governors, (b) knowledge transfer within a board of governors, (c) board succession planning, (d) specific knowledge acquired and transferred by participants on the topic of presidential search, and (e) MacEwan participants' overall learning experience with this study. Each data-collection method and the three primary topics explored: knowledge management, board succession planning, feedback, and presidential search are presented in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 respectively. The tables depict how themes were carried forward from one activity to the next for deeper exploration as well as new areas studied.

Basic information on the three primary topics was gathered through the online survey. This provided a starting point for two-way dialogue in the six mini-focus group sessions involving MacEwan and non-MacEwan participants. The one-on-one interviews

allowed for reflection by MacEwan participants on learning acquired through the mini-focus group session, in-depth exploration of topics and themes, and identification of gaps in knowledge. Nine MacEwan participants attended the modified World Café to share individual knowledge and perspectives and develop a common understanding of topics and associated themes.

Table 3. *Themes Explored in each Data-Collection Method on the Topic of Knowledge Management*

| Survey | Focus Groups | Interviews | World Café |
|--|---|--|--|
| Orientation process and/or manual | Orientation process | Orientation process | Current orientation process |
| Education & development activities, e.g., mentor or buddy system, written resources, retreats and meetings, colleague networks, conversations with friends and associates, advice from experts | Education & development activities | Education & development activities | Current education & development activities |
| | Role of interpersonal trust in knowledge transfer | Role of interpersonal trust in knowledge transfer (KT) | Recommendations for MacEwan's KM strategy |
| | Feedback for improvement | Lessons learned from focus group | Personal contribution to MacEwan's KM strategy |
| | | Recommendations for MacEwan's knowledge management (KM) strategy | |
| Best practices | | Personal contribution to MacEwan's KM strategy | |
| | | Level of knowledge prior to and as a result of study participation | |

Table 4. *Themes Explored in each Data-Collection Method on the Topic of Board Succession Planning*

| Survey | Focus Groups | Interviews | World Café |
|---|---|---|---|
| Framework: formal or informal; policy or not | Framework and Process: identify, recruit, appoint | Framework and Process: identify, recruit, appoint | Current Framework and Process |
| Needs analysis: ad hoc or annual; strategic or ad hoc | Best practices | Lessons learned from focus group | Similarity with presidential search framework and process |
| Internal process | Lessons learned | Recommendations for MacEwan's Board Succession Plan (BSP) | Synchronization of board succession plan with presidential search |
| External process | Feedback for improvement | Personal contribution to MacEwan's BSP | Personal contribution to MacEwan's BSP |
| Nominating process | | | |
| Terms of appointment | | | |
| Best practices | | | |

Table 5. *Themes Explored in each Data-Collection Method on the Topic of Feedback*

| Survey | Focus Groups | Interviews | World Café |
|--------|--|--|--|
| | Participants' goal for the session | Factors that motivated participation | Feedback on participating in action research project |
| | Factors that motivated participation | Feedback on survey and focus group session | |
| | Feedback on survey and focus group session | | |

Table 6. *Themes Explored in each Data-Collection Method on the Topic of Presidential Search*

| Survey | Focus Groups | Interviews | World Café |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Institution profile | Institution profile | Institution profile | Key elements of a search process |
| Candidate profile | Candidate profile | Candidate profile | Factors to be considered when developing the process |
| Role of board | Role of board | Role of board | Benefits and drawbacks of using a search firm |
| Role of committee | Role and structure of committee | Role and structure of committee | Role of board |
| Terms of reference | Terms of reference | Terms of reference | Role and structure of search committee |
| Search firm | Search firm | Search firm | Lessons learned from focus group about search committee |
| Stakeholder input & engagement | Stakeholder input & engagement | Stakeholder input & engagement | Potential search models |
| Role of human resources department | Role of human resources department | Transition plan | Maintaining trust and confidentiality during a search |
| Transition plan | Transition plan | Policy, procedure, guidelines | Sensitivities and ethical considerations |
| Policy, procedure, guidelines | Policy, procedure, guidelines | Confidentiality | Supporting incumbent during search process |
| Website | Website | Search process: models used | Stakeholder consultation & engagement |
| Board visioning exercise | Board visioning exercise | Timeline | Personal contribution to next |
| | Confidentiality | Written resources used to learn about presidential search | |
| | Search process: models used | Level of knowledge prior to and as a result of study participation | |
| | Handling differing viewpoints | Lessons learned from focus group | |
| | Debrief on recent process | | |

| Survey | Focus Groups | Interviews | World Café |
|--------|-----------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| | Communication | Recommendations for MacEwan's next search | presidential search process |
| | Lessons learned | Personal contribution to MacEwan's next search | Timeline: expectations and advice |
| | Timeline | Additional knowledge required | |
| | | Four ideas, points or themes for Jan 15 group activity or another venue | |
| | | Best approaches to learn about the topic | |

Knowledge Management Within a Board of Governors

My study enquired about strategies used to acquire and transfer explicit and tacit knowledge during board orientation and as part of a board member's ongoing education and development during their term of appointment. Within the survey, focus groups, and interviews, I probed participants about their experience with learning about their governance roles through books, articles, written resources, policies, procedures, guidelines, manuals, and organizational documents. I also queried participants about past personal experience, conference participation, presentations, colleague networks, meetings, conversations, advice provided by experts, and other experiential learning activities, including the earlier elements of this study.

As well, I invited participants to share their observations with one another and with me on these various topics. During the interviews, I asked MacEwan participants to assess their level of knowledge prior to, and as a result of, being part of my study. Suggestions for improving or enhancing governance learning strategies—board orientation, education, and development—were sought as well as an indication of how MacEwan participants could personally contribute toward such improvements.

Orientation

The topic of board orientation was discussed throughout the four data-collection methods, survey (S), focus group (FG), interview (I), and World Café (WC). Eighty per cent of survey respondents indicated they have an orientation program as well as an orientation manual. While most conduct individual orientation sessions, one respondent mentioned, “We conduct a group orientation in the fall” (S17). According to focus group,

interview, and World Café participants, providing new members with a comprehensive orientation manual as well as a governance book related to the post-secondary sector is of use.

Two focus group participants and one interview participant indicated a board manual provided by government was generic and not helpful. In particular, participants found it worthwhile to meet with the board chair and president for an overview of institutional priorities, as well as board operations and governance. A common concern expressed by participants related to the volume of information provided to new members in a short period of time, creating a sense of information overload. “The binder and the meeting with the chair and the president sound like a good idea but the truth is I only absorbed about 5% of that. So I’ve been learning by osmosis” (WC937). “How fast we absorb or how much we want to work at it is up to the individual. Also we don’t want to stifle individual creative thought with too much orientation that could channel people” (WC235).

Although several survey and focus group participants mentioned they use a mentor or buddy system to assign an experienced board member with a new member, it is done on an informal rather than formal basis. One institution recently hired a governance coach and utilizes an online governance tutorial as part of its orientation program (FG142). While many institutions rely on professional board staff to facilitate the orientation process, one institution has assigned overall responsibility to its board vice chair (FG613). Another institution coordinates the orientation process through its Human Resources Committee (FG134).

Two focus group participants and two World Café participants mentioned tours of campuses as a helpful orientation activity. Rotating board meetings among different sites was cited by two focus group and one World Café participant, with the suggestion of introducing board members to people and programs on each campus rather than “just going to a different place in a different room for a meeting” (WC834). Another orientation strategy mentioned by five focus group participants and two World Café participants was having new members meet with senior organizational leaders who have responsibility in the areas of finance, student services, and academics. Two focus group participants with experience in the corporate sector noted an increasing trend among boards taking more ownership of their orientation processes.

Attending an annual board planning retreat or a conference early in the member’s term were identified as effective orientation activities by interview and World Café participants. “Attending that [U.S.] conference early in my term on the board was the best orientation I ever had and it’s why I feel so comfortable as a rookie member with asking questions at board and committee meetings” (WC937). In addition to formal orientation strategies, participants suggested there is value in informal activities, such as dinners after board meetings, special occasions like annual convocation ceremonies and staff recognition events, and social events featuring institution programs: for instance, theatrical and musical productions or culinary exhibitions. “The social elements are more effective. I don’t want to sit in a corner studying a book on [the institution]” (WC235).

Two focus group participants (FG643, FG613) differentiated between board knowledge and institutional knowledge. They defined board knowledge as knowledge related to the roles and responsibilities of governance and the operation of the board.

They associated institutional knowledge with the organization's operations, mission, vision, mandate, and strategic plan, as well as "aspects that create passion, excitement and pride about the institution" (FG613). During their respective focus group sessions, two non-MacEwan participants indicated their orientation programs required significant improvement.

Follow-up was done with these participants, wherein they were provided with an overview of MacEwan's orientation program and manual as a point of reference for adjusting their strategies. For the two MacEwan participants involved in these focus group sessions, this affirmed the merits of MacEwan's current orientation program. At the same time, they acknowledged a need to enhance elements of the program. Specific feedback on areas of improvement presented by MacEwan participants during the interview and World Café phases of this study are noted below.

Several focus group, interview, and World Café participants promoted tailoring the orientation program to the needs of individual board members who bring varied experience and expertise to their new responsibilities as governors. Two MacEwan focus group participants suggested: "Make the process slower, more repetitive, and consistent" (FG337), and "Make the orientation more cozy and personal" (FG134). While one MacEwan participant observed, "The current approach has very strong parts that fit well with upcoming change" (WC741), other MacEwan interview and World Café participants presented ideas for enhancing MacEwan's board orientation program including:

Initiate a mentor or buddy system with a series of learning modules or topics to be covered. (I237, I819, WC937)

Designate two or three members to make contact with new member. (WC834)

Have a meeting between the retiring board member and the new board member. This includes internally elected members as well as publicly appointed members. (WC619)

Have the chair, president, or board staff person meet and check-in with the new member after three meetings. (I428)

Provide campus tours and introduce new member to staff and programs at each campus. (I736, I534, W536)

At the first meeting of sub-committees for the academic year, provide an overview of the committee's roles, responsibilities, and upcoming priorities. (I141)

Continually update the orientation manual to ensure it provides current information. (I143)

Conduct the orientation over a one year time-frame using a variety of techniques and sources. (I237)

Provide opportunities for informal interaction. (WC235)

Find ways to facilitate board member's visibility in the institution based on time availability and areas of interest. (WC536)

Have the new member attend a board planning retreat and a conference early in their term. (I237)

Review and assess the orientation program on an ongoing basis. (I534)

Offer a "Governance 101 session" (WC741) on not-for-profit governance as well as government processes.

MacEwan interview and World Café participants were also asked to consider how they could personally contribute to MacEwan's board orientation program. The majority of participants in both data-collection activities proposed spending more time with the new member, taking on the role of mentor or buddy, and participating in conference presentations on governance topics. One offered to "help to orient the member to the sub-committees on which I participate" (I237), while another observed, "I could reach out to

people making them feel comfortable and get them in the groove as quickly as possible” (FG134). Several participants suggested that, as they near the end of their terms, they could meet with their replacement, invite the new member to the retiring member’s last board meeting, and introduce them to the board. Another participant proposed, “Before they leave, have a session where they leave reflections for the future” (WC741).

Education and Development

Seventy per cent of survey respondents have an education and development program for members. Focus group, interview, and World Café participants specified the following elements of their program: educational presentations at board meetings and retreats by and about institution departments, priorities, and environmental factors, including “neat things happening around the [institution]” (FG613). Presentations to sub-committees on topics such as audit and financial oversight were also noted. Attending conferences affiliated with provincial, national, and North American post-secondary institutions or governance organizations was highlighted as a valuable learning strategy. These experiences also included the opportunity to network with board colleagues from other institutions, learn about trends and issues in post-secondary education and governance, conduct presentations, and build team cohesion among board members as they travelled together.

Tailoring education and development programs to the needs of individual board members was suggested by several participants. “As a board member with governance experience, I value the opportunity to self-select areas of interest for my ongoing education and development” (FG436). While a couple of non-MacEwan focus group

participants indicated they regularly participate in workshops or programs conducted by Canadian and North American corporate governance organizations, they acknowledged these are of limited value to [post-secondary] boards because they focus on corporate governance rather than not-for-profit governance.

MacEwan participants in the interviews and World Café were asked for recommendations to enhance MacEwan's board education and development program over the next two years.

Spend time learning more about MacEwan as well as other institutions. (I94)

Respect people's time as board volunteers recognizing they do a lot of behind-the-scenes work as well as attend meetings and events. (I534)

Improve the quality of presentations in public meetings so they are focus on students. (I343)

Review and assess the education and development plan on an ongoing basis. (I534)

Identify learning opportunities such as conferences and workshops and encourage members to participate. (I141)

Provide learning opportunities including courses related to governance responsibilities. (WC536, WC741)

Allow members to take the time they need to keep themselves educated: self-direct and self-select rather than mandate. (I343)

Tailor the education and development plan to the individual member's needs. (WC741)

When asked how they could personally contribute to MacEwan's board education and development program, participants responded they could increase their awareness of and thinking about forthcoming changes in membership and the need for knowledge transfer. Attending formal and informal activities and events, as well as participating in governance conferences and external meetings, were also proposed. In addition,

participants suggested they could identify topics for discussion and presentation at meetings and create more opportunities for “blue-sky thinking at retreats and in-camera sessions” (I343). Finally, a suggestion was made to “keep reminding board members of their broader duties and responsibilities as governors” (I635).

Best Practices for Knowledge Management

Among best practices for managing knowledge within a board, survey respondents suggested having an orientation program conducted by members and the president with multiple opportunities for interaction, pairing new appointees with a senior board member through a mentor or buddy program, staggering board appointments so as to have a blend of experienced and new members, and using a coach to guide the governance knowledge process. Being actively involved with committees, attending board retreats, and having dedicated and “blue-sky discussions” (FG643) at board meetings and retreats were also recommended.

Participants identified the importance of creating and maintaining a culture of respect and trust within the board, where members can have “open, frank discussion formally and informally. There are no stupid questions” (S44). As well, participants mentioned making written documents available to all members, having well-organized written reports, and establishing clear policies, procedures, and mandates.

Knowledge Transfer within a Board of Governors

The second theme explored in my study related to techniques and strategies used by boards to share knowledge. With the membership on a board constantly changing, I was particularly interested in learning about factors that influence the transfer of

knowledge within and between boards. I identified and defined the term knowledge transfer at the start of each focus group session and how it related to board succession planning, orientation, education, and development. Through the focus groups, interviews, and World Café, I sought participants' observations about the role of interpersonal trust, the use of social networks, and factors that motivate and influence knowledge transfer.

Interpersonal Trust

During the focus group sessions, I enquired as to the importance of interpersonal trust for transferring knowledge between governors within the same institution and to colleagues at other institutions. I specifically identified two types of interpersonal trust: benevolence/goodwill and competence. As a second assessment of the role of interpersonal trust, I asked MacEwan interview participants to comment on their focus group experience. During the World Café group activity, a third opportunity was provided to discuss the topic within the context of establishing and maintaining trust and confidentiality during a presidential search process.

“Trusting relationships among governors is important particularly when there are appointed and elected members. Trust is also important in the relationship between the president and the board” (FG35). All participants in the focus group sessions confirmed the importance of building trusting relationships in general and specifically within a board. They suggested trust is automatic at the start of relationships and only diminishes if people demonstrate otherwise. “We have to trust that other people have good intentions and are competent. I assume people are trustworthy; over time you find out if this is the

case or not” (FG613). The relationship between creating a trusting environment and board performance was also highlighted and is captured in this participant’s statement:

Boards need a phenomenal degree of trust and respect for each other to be able to face challenges. They need to be able to talk openly and frankly about all subjects, all the time and operate with a no surprises policy. Trust reflects credibility. Boards can accomplish a lot and get through difficult things in a professional manner if trust is there. (FG240)

Regarding the two types of interpersonal trust, benevolence and competence, MacEwan interview participants indicated they felt the external focus group participants displayed goodwill, were competent, and offered a “deep well of knowledge” (I141). With two of the focus group sessions involving professional recruiters, I clarified with them in advance their participation would not result in a commitment between MacEwan and their search firms. I informed the two MacEwan participants in these particular sessions of this. I also indicated these external participants were being asked to bring their perspectives as professional recruiters in the post-secondary sector as well as their experience as members of governance boards.

From the start of the study and as I prepared for the focus group sessions, I had wondered if the topic of presidential search would cause participants some discomfort and result in a reluctance to share experiences and advice. As facilitator of the focus group sessions and an interested observer, I observed the exact opposite and was impressed with the degree of comfort demonstrated by all participants. MacEwan participants commented on the positive level of comfort displayed by external focus group participants, that their confidences would be respected, and their information would be guarded appropriately.

The topics of trust and confidentiality during presidential search were presented for discussion at the World Café. Participants expressed trust and confidence within the current board and identified a need to sustain this throughout upcoming changes in membership. They also highlighted the need to develop trust between the board, the search committee, and the institution's community during the search exercise. One participant observed, "Time is required to build trust" (WC937).

The seriousness of a breach of trust and confidentiality in the search process was captured by one participant who stated, "You run tremendous risks of damaging somebody's career or perhaps losing a very good recruit" (WC536). Among the strategies suggested were: signing a confidentiality agreement, outlining consequences for non-compliance, having the board participate directly on the search committee, clarifying what can be communicated publicly, returning documents after a meeting, having a transparent process with opportunity for stakeholder input and engagement, and "having everyone on the same song sheet" (WC235). The role of the search committee chair in establishing a climate of trust was also emphasized.

Motivation for Participating in Study

When I started this study, I had hypothesized participants might be uncomfortable discussing the topic of presidential search. I had based this on the critical importance of a board's responsibility for recruiting and selecting its chief executive officer and organizational sensitivities that may arise when a search is taking place. At the time of my study, the MacEwan board was not engaged in a search process. The topic of presidential search was identified as one which they wished to learn more about as part of

their governance role. Context around the choice of topic had to be clearly communicated to MacEwan board participants and external participants to mitigate any potential rumours and issues.

During my introductory telephone conversations with several organizations regarding the project and survey, they advised they were unable to participate in the study. Reasons given included (a) the board was currently experiencing a lot of turnover in its members as their terms were concluding, (b) the topic of presidential search was viewed as private to the institution, (c) the institution was in the middle of a search or in the process of immediately concluding a search, or (d) other organizational activities were absorbing available time. Some institutions did not indicate reasons for being unable to participate.

The reasons for non-participation were not explored beyond these initial responses. Those who did participate demonstrated no reluctance to share their experiences including what worked and did not work. External focus group participants were candid in their responses, and this degree of openness was appreciated by MacEwan focus group participants, as indicated by the following comments:

I was so impressed with [the participant's] frankness and willingness to share their whole experience. Knowing what another institution has gone through was fabulous. (I534)

In the focus group I could ask pointed questions in a way that you can't when there are more people in a room. There was such a strong element of candour. It was so good. (I141)

Focus group participants (four non-MacEwan and six MacEwan) also indicated they were motivated to be part of the study by virtue of being governors in the post-secondary sector, or in the case of two participants, they provide executive recruitment

services to the post-secondary sector and have experience with serving on boards. As well, the level of comfort and motivation was evident in the reasons expressed by participants for being part of the study: (a) supporting the post-secondary system, (b) having a belief in governance and a desire and sense of obligation to learn more about board roles and responsibilities, and (c) feeling passionate about the approach they used for their institution's search and valuing the opportunity to share their experience with other governors.

Governors would be remiss not to help and share with one another. (FG142)

Presidential search is an important part of my work, and I value the opportunity to share with and learn from others about it. (FG519)

This is a very important study given the situation throughout North America where there is an aging group of CEOs who will be replaced in significant numbers over the next five year window. The topic is relevant to what many public boards will face in the college and university sector. (I428)

In addition to MacEwan focus group and interview participants, three of six non-MacEwan focus group participants specifically identified supporting me in my graduate studies as a factor that motivated them to participate. I was surprised as well as honoured by these responses.

Board Succession Planning

To continue my examination of knowledge transfer, I enquired as to how boards develop and manage their succession plan. Twelve responding institutions from the survey indicated they have a policy, practice, plan, or set of guidelines in place regarding board succession planning; nine reported they do not. Fifty per cent of survey respondents stated their board succession plan is informal, while forty per cent have a formal succession plan. These findings are consistent with those of Bugg and Dallhoff's

(2006) *National Study of Board Governance Practices in the Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector in Canada* and the (2008) study of Crown Corporations by The Conference Board of Canada.

In general, within the Alberta and British Columbia public post-secondary systems, internal board appointees are elected by their respective association: staff, faculty, or student. Presidents are ex-officio members by virtue of the position. A nominating or governance committee was used by 50% of survey respondents for recruiting public board members. Identification of potential candidates for public appointments was conducted by 60% of survey respondents on an ongoing basis and aligned with the organization's strategic interest, while 40% identified potential members on an ad hoc, as required basis. Eighty per cent of survey respondents indicated they stagger or strategically time their members' terms of appointment.

One institution had a practice of requiring members to find their replacement (FG35). Of the boards that conducted an analysis of board competencies and needs to inform their succession plan, 40% of survey respondents do so annually and 40% on an ad hoc basis. Five of six non-MacEwan focus group participants reported their boards develop a matrix of current and upcoming skills and attributes. MacEwan focus group participants also referenced the use of a matrix. Among the skills and attributes sought in new board members, focus group participants cited: past board experience, commitment to the institution, good decision making, compatibility, integrity, and specific areas of expertise such as finance, legal, and areas that align with institutional priorities.

A matrix was constructed using these attributes and then overlaid onto a timeline of current members' terms of appointments. Once needs were identified for a particular

vacancy, board members provided input to the board chair on names of potential members. The vacancy and needs were discussed by the board chair with the minister responsible for post-secondary boards and the input was incorporated into a public advertisement. The board chair met with potential candidate(s) to gauge their interest and availability and then discussed options with the post-secondary minister. “By maintaining a list of potential names, we are able to fill any unexpected vacancies that result from someone having to leave unexpectedly” (FG613).

All focus group participants indicated they valued the opportunity to provide input to the minister on the recruitment process for public board members. However, three participants described challenges:

We have a one-in-three chance of having our nominee chosen by the minister. (FG35)

50% of our recommendations are accepted by government. (FG913)

In the past, we were led to believe government did this, and we had no influence. This has changed recently, and now we have more open discussion within the board. (FG142)

All participants reported the final decision on all appointments—internal and public—rests with the minister. The use of a matrix was noted by Bugg and Dallhoff (2006) as a successful governance practice for non-profit and voluntary boards. Two non-MacEwan focus group participants and one MacEwan interviewee experienced with corporate board recruitment reported they have seen an increase in the use of governance committees and a matrix approach.

It is better to take a strategic, longer-term (e.g., three year) look rather than just looking ahead for three to six months. We need to be clear about the qualities and characteristics that are needed. We need to examine strengths and identify weaknesses, then we can start identifying people and encouraging them to come

forward. In the end, it is the fit that matters for both board succession planning and presidential search. (I428)

Commenting on the process for recruiting and electing internal members, two interview participants suggested staff and faculty associations, and perhaps student associations, may wish to consider adopting a process similar to the one used for recruiting public members: identify a pool of candidates; “have conversations with them about being on the board” (I94); and “plant the seed so they can consider it and take the time to divest themselves of other things they are doing to prepare for the opportunity” (I819). They cautioned the strategy should not interfere with the autonomy of associations to recruit and elect their board representatives (I94, I819).

Best Practices for Board Succession Planning

Through the four data-collection activities, I invited participants to identify best practices for board succession planning. Participants’ responses revolved around three themes: (a) ongoing discussion within the board about board succession planning; (b) use of a framework to assess needs and develop strategies for recruitment and transition; and (c) thoughtful identification of specific qualities, skills, and characteristics of potential board members that align with institutional priorities.

It is important to have dedicated discussion on governance and succession planning, whether it be through a board retreat or a governance committee mechanism that then leads to discussion at the board level. It is important that ALL board members participate. To the extent possible, a systematic approach would be preferable as opposed to an ad hoc approach. (S41)

The value of having a framework so boards can anticipate upcoming issues and make a shift in emphasis was noted. One participant observed, “Do a good job with your matrix analysis, then approach the minister and outline your skill set needs without giving

names. That way you can get agreement on what is needed” (FG240). Early planning to give people a chance to consider the opportunity and the time they require to make adjustments in their lives to take on the new role was also mentioned. Comments were noted regarding the small size of post-secondary boards and the “need to cover a broad variety of skills” (WC937) and recruit “people who are passionate towards education and specific goals of the [institution]” (I94).

Presidential Search

Choosing the chief executive officer of a public post-secondary institution is a critical responsibility of a board. Board members may learn about the topic of presidential search through presentations at governance conferences or by reading governance books. Most often, however, boards learn about the topic at the time their institution is engaged in the recruitment process for their next president. This study provided the MacEwan Board with an opportunity to learn about presidential search by participating in a progressive learning experience at a time when MacEwan was not conducting a search.

Through the four data-collection methods, various components of a presidential search process were identified and discussed. While not all of these components were used in all search processes discussed in this study, they indicate a range of ideas that boards could consider. Each of the following components is expanded upon in this section: search process, search timeline, search committee models, role of the board and committee terms of reference, stakeholder consultation and engagement, policy, practice, plan, or guidelines, board visioning exercise, position profile, recruitment specialist, role

of human resources department, interim president, transition plan, communication strategy, and confidentiality.

Search Process

In general, the search processes discussed in this study involved the board receiving informal notice, then formal notice, and engaging in a visioning exercise to create an institution and candidate profile. The board establishes a search committee and may hire a recruitment specialist. An internal consultation or stakeholder input process may be facilitated to gather input on the candidate profile. An advertisement is placed, and the search committee reviews resumés from a long list of potential candidates for an initial round of interviews. If a recruitment specialist is involved, they bring forward the long list of potential candidates.

A shortlist of between one and three candidates is identified for a second round of interviews that may involve the board as well as visits to, and open forums at, campuses. Reference checks are conducted, and the board reaches a decision. Following this, a contract and compensation package is negotiated with the preferred candidate, and a transition plan may be developed. One survey respondent observed, “A public, transparent process is necessary to ensure the entire community and staff complement will buy into the eventual hire” (S33).

Nine survey respondents indicated their last experience with a presidential search was a satisfying, productive, and happy one. Factors cited as contributing to the success of the search included: recruiting an excellent candidate, unanimous support of the

management team, ability of a large group to work well together, and an inclusive process involving all major stakeholders, with the Board making the final decision. One respondent commented, “The process was very uplifting” (S42) and included a detailed description of the institution’s search process, where a small search committee prepared the position description, set timelines and objectives, interviewed candidates, and assessed candidates to reach a decision.

Another respondent expressed a sense of feeling “somewhat removed from the process, and this would be my stand out memory [because] I was not directly involved in the search process, but as a board member I was asked to approve the selection committee’s recommendation” (S37). Several participants advised institutions develop their processes to align with organizational culture. All external focus group participants expressed satisfaction with their search process and suggested the process be tailored to meet the organization’s needs.

Search Timeline

“Presidential search is always harder and takes longer than you think” (S36). External focus group participants reported their searches averaged between 9 and 18 months, with the shortest taking four months (FG544) and the longest requiring 24 months (FG613). A minimum of five months was spent in a pre-planning phase, where the board received formal notice from the incumbent, engaged a search firm, made a public announcement about the search, developed a process, and gathered input on the candidate profile. “Spending time in the pre-planning phase is value-added for understanding what you want and it sets the stage for success” (WC536). The pre-

planning phase could also be defined as taking one year and starting at the point the board received informal notice from the incumbent (I428).

An average of four months was dedicated to actively searching for candidates, and in some cases, this included bringing finalists on campus for open forums and other activities. A further four to six months reflected the time between concluding the search and when the new president started. Participants reported their new presidents most frequently started either January 1 or July 1, representing the mid-point or starting point of a new academic year. Caution was expressed regarding searches that take a long time: “It is important to maintain momentum as you could lose candidates if it takes too long” (FG544); and “If you start too early, you could interfere with or handicap the current president” (WC235). An external focus group participant highlighted the practice in post-secondary institutions related to consulting with internal constituencies and noted it can add 6 to 12 weeks to the search time-line. By comparison, a search in the private sector can be completed between 12 and 16 weeks.

Search Committee Models

Ten survey respondents, who had conducted searches in the past five years, indicated they used a board search committee. The size of the committees ranged from four to twenty-one. “As external board members when we heard that we would have a 21-person search committee, we all rolled our eyes and thought this must be nuts. However, we would all now say that it was fabulous” (FG613). During the focus group sessions, external participants identified six different models for search committees:

Table 3. *Search Committee Composition*

| Model | Committee Composition |
|-------|---|
| A. | The board served as the search committee. (FG544) |
| B. | A single search committee comprised of four members: board chair (served as committee chair), board vice chair, public member, and director of human resources. (FG142) |
| C. | A single search committee comprised of twelve members: board vice chair (served as committee chair), public board members from the board human resources committee, all executives/direct reports, a recruitment specialist, and representatives from each of the faculty, union, and student constituencies. (FG35) |
| D. | A single search committee comprised of appointed, not elected members including the board chair, vice chair, key board members many of whom chair board sub-committees, internal constituency members, and external advisory members. (FG544) |
| E. | A two committee model as defined by institutional policy was used: search committee and human resources committee. Nineteen members comprised the search committee, which was chaired by the board chair. Two members were elected from the board (including the human resource committee chair), one additional board member, and representative appointed or elected from all institutional constituencies. The human resources committee involved only members of the board. (FG240) |
| F. | A two committee model was chosen by the board: board presidential search committee (BPSC) and presidential search advisory committee (PSAC). Membership on the BPSC included only board members and a public board member served as chair. The PSAC, chaired by a public board member, was comprised of twenty-one members including board, faculty, staff, administration, and students. The incumbent president selected student members to participate on the committee. (FG613) |

Membership

Five of the six models were populated by individuals representing a cross-section of the institution, including but not limited to, public board members, internally-elected board members, constituency representatives (e.g., student, faculty, staff, administration, executives, alumni, external community), a resource person from the board office, a

human resources department advisor, and a recruitment specialist. These individuals were chosen through a variety of options: appointment by the board or constituency, invitation from the board or constituency, election by constituency, or direct invitation from the incumbent president. A suggestion was noted that constituencies might consider asking former internal board members to serve as their representatives on the committee (WC235). Overall, it was agreed the vehicle for choosing constituency representatives should be left to the discretion of the associations.

Criteria identified in the focus groups, interviews, and World Café for individuals to serve on the committee included: (a) familiarity with the institution's goals and objectives, (b) seasoned key public board members with expertise in the institution's priority areas, (c) ability to make decisions and take a neutral stance without hidden or public agendas, and (d) capacity to represent the best interests of the institution, not serve as a group of individuals representing specific constituency groups. It was also suggested committee members must be able to commit the necessary time. A comparison with search committee members within the private sector was offered,

They are mainly external, arms-length members who believe in the organization and its best interests. There are no staff or anyone with a vested interest and the board chair may or may not be on the committee. A well-regarded member with time to dedicate normally serves as chair. (I635)

Committee Chair

Regarding who should serve as chair of the committee, options identified in the focus groups, interviews, and World Café included the board chair, board vice chair, chair of board human resources committee or another sub-committee, or a public board member who is likely to become the next board chair. In three models (see Table 7,

models A, B, and E), the board chair served as committee chair—the other three committee chairs were public members. Other options discussed in the World Café were a faculty member or senior administrator. Pros and cons of all options were discussed during the World Café.

On the topic of having a faculty member as committee chair, one participant observed, “I wouldn’t recommend a faculty member because there would be undue political pressure on the process” (WC619). A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant regarding a faculty member or senior administrator as committee chair: “It’s very difficult because they’re ultimately an employee involved in the selection of their boss” (W7241).

In terms of having the board chair serve in the role, participants supported the concept on the basis of the skills and knowledge the chair could bring to the committee. However, they felt this added role would “impose more work and more responsibility on the person that’s already doing a lot” (WC235). There was consensus that the board chair should be a member of the search committee:

By removing the chair from direct control of the process, the chair can play his or her usual role and be very helpful when the recommendation goes to the board. (WC619)

The chair can look critically at his or her selection committee and evaluate the work of the committee. If things aren’t going very well, then the chair can move in to offer advice and assistance. (WC937)

Suggestions presented as criteria for search committee chair included the ability to chair meetings, keeping everyone focused on the job at hand, ensuring that everyone is heard, and fostering respect.

Have a strong chair of the committee who is willing to listen and provide opportunity for each stakeholder group to have a say. (S5)

Someone who is articulate and concise, able to cope with conflict and facilitate discussion, command respect and remain impartial. (I94)

If there is a public member who is the apparent next chair, there could be value in having that person serve as committee chair. The person would interact with a broad-based committee and have a leadership role in choosing the next president. (WC937)

Policy, Practice, Plan, or Guidelines

There was an almost even-split in the number of organizations with a policy, practice, plan, or set of guidelines for presidential search—twelve survey respondents had a policy, while ten did not. Participants proposed such a document should be broad, flexible, and provide a general framework. They offered the following additional advice:

Set out the mandate rather than make it a policy. Keep it flexible and use common sense. (FG35)

It should be a framework versus a prescriptive policy and should indicate the board selects and the committee searches. (FG48)

Keep the parameters flexible. The terms of reference relate to the context of the current search. Confidentiality is an important element. (FG613)

Have a framework or policy with guidelines for discretionary action. Don't be prescriptive. Make it a framework about things such as: hire a search firm, have a committee, etc. (I428)

A roadmap or set of guidelines will help to keep everyone on the same page and avoid agendas and gamesmanship. Don't get into too much detail. (FG240)

You need a process, not a policy. The process needs to get to the personal qualities that you are seeking. (FG142)

Keep it flexible and broad. It needs to fit the new context. Seek external advice if you are preparing one (FG544).

Five focus group participants (two non-MacEwan and three MacEwan) suggested documenting the search process for historical record and as a way to share knowledge about the experience with future board members, the institution's community, and other institutions. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Auditor General of Alberta conducted an

audit in 2008 regarding systems used by Alberta agencies, boards, and commissions (ABCs) to recruit, evaluate, and compensate CEOs (Dunn, 2008). The audit found most of the 250 ABCs assessed did not normally establish CEO recruitment policies or plans.

Post-secondary institutions, however were highlighted as an exception to these findings. The report noted post-secondary institutions typically had plans that were “comprehensive, inclusive of various stakeholders and formalized” (p. 36). While suggesting recruitment policies should “objectively identify and evaluate candidates” and have a process is consistent with an overall CEO succession plan (p. 35), the report provided no guidelines for developing a presidential search policy or process.

Role of The Board and Committee Terms of Reference

Within each of the six models, there were different roles for the committee and the board. In all cases, the final decision on the candidate remained the board’s responsibility regardless of the process. It is important to note this point was mentioned by several survey respondents, all twelve focus group participants, nine interviewees, and nine World Café participants. “The board’s mandate is CEO selection” (FG48). A survey respondent suggested, as a best practice associated with a presidential search process, the board should “clarify that the final decision rests with the board not the search committee” (S35). This point was also strongly recommended in the Auditor General of Alberta’s October 2008 report on CEO selection, evaluation, and compensation:

In all cases, regardless of the process used (delegating selection responsibility to a board committee) the board as a whole should decide who is to be hired whether under its own authority or as a recommendation to the Deputy, or the Minister. This is arguably the most important task of a board. A clearly articulated policy and plan should set out how the board as a whole will be consulted and if it is to

have a greater role, such as interviewing short-listed candidates. (Dunn, 2008, p. 37).

Regarding a terms of reference for the committee, I realized after completing the survey instrument that I had neglected to include this within the list of options for question 7: “What aspects of a presidential search process were used in the last search” (see Appendix E). I brought the topic forward to the focus group sessions for discussion. “I think the terms of reference are particularly important to keep things from going off line” (FG436). All six external focus group participants indicated terms of reference were established in the pre-planning phase of the search. There was also consensus for establishing the mandate early, highlighting the importance of confidentiality, and having it “signed onto by the whole board to avoid interference by individual board members who may not be on the committee” (FG48). Those institutions with a template for the terms of reference mentioned the template is taken to the board with suggested changes to meet current search circumstances. These points are consistent with advice from Robertson (2008) regarding the respective roles of a board and its search committee.

Table 4. *Role of the Board and Role of the Committee*

| Model | Role of the Board and Role of the Committee |
|-------|---|
| A. | Board conducted the entire search process and made the final decision. (FG544) |
| B. | Committee, working without a recruitment specialist, defined candidate profile, developed advertisement, interviewed an initial list of candidates, and interviewed a short list. Committee provided regular reports to the board. Board and each constituency interviewed short listed candidates and Board made the final decision. (FG142) |
| C. | Committee, working with a recruitment specialist, developed candidate profile based on input from constituencies. Committee interviewed an initial list of candidates and recommended two finalists for the board to interview. Finalists met with each constituency. Board made the final decision. Committee provided regular reports to the board. (FG35) |
| D. | Within this single committee model, the roles of the board and the committee were similar to those used in model C. (FG544) |
| E. | Within this two committee model and working with a recruitment specialist, search committee developed candidate profile based on input from constituencies. Board approved the profile. Committee identified, short-listed and interviewed candidates, and recommended one finalist for interview by the board. Regular reports were made to the board. Human resources committee, with authority delegated from the board, developed compensation package and negotiated contract with the candidate. Two motions were presented to the board, one from the search committee recommending a candidate and the second from the human resources committee outlining parameters of a contract. (FG240) |
| F. | Within this two committee model and working with a recruitment specialist, the Board Presidential Search Committee (BPSC) established terms of reference for both committees including composition of the Presidential Search Advisory Committee (PSAC). The BPSC chose a search firm and provided input to the board on the candidate profile as part of a consultation process facilitated by the search firm. BPSC reviewed all applications, and short listed six candidates for interview by the board chair, a faculty member, and the recruitment specialist. BPSC identified the top ten challenges facing the institution in the coming 3 to 5 years and outlined a typical day in the life of a president. This input was provided to the PSAC for its interviews with a short list of three candidates. PSAC reviewed and ranked aspects of the candidate profile, interviewed a short list of three candidates, and recommended two candidates for interview by the board. Board made the final decision. (FG613) |

Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement

In the post-secondaries, you have this really unique situation that doesn't exist really in any other industry, and that is everybody gets involved in the search. That creates a huge amount of transparency and challenge for the candidates. It can also add anywhere from 6 to 12 weeks to the recruitment process. By comparison, a CEO recruitment for a publicly traded or privately owned company can be done in 12 to 16 weeks. It's almost impossible to do that in a post-secondary institution. (S8)

Eighty per cent of survey respondents engaged constituents during the search, and 60% used an internal consultation process, which included such aspects as consultation with the leadership team (60%) and public forums (30%). This topic was brought forward to the focus group sessions for further discussion. With the exception of one institution, stakeholder input was sought to assist in developing the position profile. In general, the consultation process was coordinated by a recruitment specialist, who met with groups on campus and received input through a dedicated email address, a presidential search website, or both. The recruitment specialist articulated the profile, which was presented to the board or search committee for approval. Within several search processes, stakeholders engaged in public forums—a series of question and answer sessions with finalists.

The stakeholder groups identified by focus group and World Café participants included: board members, students, support staff, faculty, out-of-scope staff, alumni, administrators, the present incumbent, and senior institutional leaders including those positions reporting directly to the president. Neff and Leondar (1992) observed boards are not obligated by bylaws or government regulations to involve stakeholder groups in a presidential search process. However, they suggested, “The guiding principle should be

to approach this issue with the objective of giving the person ultimately selected the greatest possible amount of credibility and acceptance by all constituent groups” (p. 6).

The benefits and drawbacks of stakeholder consultation and engagement were discussed during the World Café. Receiving broad-based input into the position profile can assist in creating consensus on what the institution is seeking in a new leader. One participant noted, “We can’t work in isolation. We need to lay stakeholder input against criteria identified by the board. This needs to match or we will have problems” (WC834). By engaging stakeholders in the search process, they “have an opportunity to express their views, wishes, and expectations” (WC834), “are more likely to feel a sense of ownership about the process” (WC619), and will “feel better about the ultimate selection” (WC235).

Among the drawbacks, participants cautioned confidentiality can be a challenge within a multi-faceted consultation process and recommended constantly reminding all involved parties of the critical importance of respecting it. Another point was presented related to managing stakeholder expectations. Participants proposed this could be addressed through outlining at the outset a clearly defined process, which provides opportunity for input and clarity regarding the board’s decision-making responsibility. Some concern was expressed about stakeholders being able to maintain objectivity, as this “could ultimately straightjacket the board and take the board down the wrong road” (WC235).

Concerning open or public forums, participants suggested these should not be town-hall meetings, and a moderator should be used to facilitate dialogue. Further, it was recommended forums be structured to allow candidates to ask questions of the

stakeholders and have the selection committee attend to hear the issues being expressed by stakeholders. Inviting stakeholders to identify three challenges or issues for discussion at the open forums was noted as another suggestion. “The open forums can be a healthy exercise giving everyone a chance to reflect on where the [institution] is going and their role in its future” (WC443).

World Café participants also commented on the importance of ongoing communication with stakeholders to ensure they feel informed and valued: “You really can’t communicate too much” (WC536). One participant proposed asking stakeholders to serve as “ambassadors” (WC937) to introduce the new president within the local community. The topic of organizational culture in relation to stakeholders was discussed during the World Café, and participants observed, within a collegial environment, stakeholders have expectations of involvement in a presidential search process.

I think this is the most critical part of all of this. The reason there have been so many failures of presidents in the system can be attributed to a misread of the culture by the incoming president, a major misread. A second reason is the inability to match culture with the players [candidates] and the values. They have to fit your culture. (WC328)

Participants further remarked the process could provide an opportunity to express the institution’s culture to potential candidates. A separate section in this chapter expands on the World Café discussion of the relationship of organizational culture to the presidential search process.

Board Visioning Exercise

Of the ten institutions who responded to the survey indicating they had conducted searches in the past five years, five reported they had engaged in a board visioning exercise. This activity typically took place at a board retreat and involved discussion of

the strategic plan and vision. “You don’t want to hire to the current need” (FG142).

Another external focus group participant advised, “This exercise helped us with developing the institution and candidate profile. My caution is you shouldn’t be making radical changes to your plan and vision without input from the new president” (FG240).

A somewhat different approach was used by another institution, which identified the top 10 challenges facing the institution in the coming three to five years and outlined a typical day in the life of a president.

We presented these to the [search advisory committee] to provide context and perspective and to get everyone on the same page about the qualities that we needed and the task ahead of the new president. This really set the tone and people started looking at these candidates from a very different perspective. (FG613)

Position Profile

Building upon points presented in the preceding paragraph, 70% of survey respondents reported preparing a position profile. While one institution chose to have the committee establish the profile, all others used a consultation process. In general, the profile was prepared in the pre-planning phase through a “gradual process facilitated by the recruitment specialist” (FG240). Commenting on the value of using a consultation process, one external focus group participant counselled, “My experience is if you don’t let people have a role in articulating what you are looking for, you will have a lot of debate later” (FG142). A similar point of view was expressed by another external focus group participant: “In hindsight, would I say the profile was any different than what the board might have prepared on its own, no. The benefit of the process was everyone felt like they were contributing to a general profile” (FG35).

The board provided direction on the institution's long-term strategy and general parameters—these factored into core competencies being sought to lead the organization for the next three to five years. Input was then invited from the search committee, constituent groups, and the broader institution community. Several participants mentioned there can be a challenge in developing the profile when the incumbent has demonstrated exceptional performance. They further acknowledged the goal of the profile and the search is not to attempt to replace an incumbent nor hire to meet current needs: “We need to find someone to meet emerging and future needs” (I343).

An external focus group participant reported their position profile sought someone who would bring contacts and influence to the institution to meet identified priorities. An alternate view was expressed by an interview participant: “Some may debate whether the institution creates the reputation for the president or vice versa. We would rely on the [institution's] reputation and influence on community and government versus seeking a candidate to bring their influences” (I343).

Typically, the consultation process sought feedback on criteria such as related experience, leadership skills, interpersonal skills, personal characteristics and traits, level of education, and competencies aligned with future strategic priorities. One interview participant suggested asking constituent groups to identify three organizational challenges for the board to analyze: “By doing that, you keep it at a high level” (I428). An external focus group participant recommended, “Keep the profile broad to capture as many resumes as possible. You don't want to cast a narrow net” (FG35).

Several focus group, interview, and World Café participants cautioned, without agreement on the profile, the potential exists for the search committee and the board to

have incompatible viewpoints in relation to final candidates. “If that happens, you re-strike the search committee, start again, and it’s a warning to the board that something is not right in Peru” (WC937). The importance of creating a comprehensive, quality profile was highlighted by another participant: “You need to set the right screen so the gems come through” (WC536).

Recruitment Specialist

Seven out of ten survey respondents reported using an external recruitment specialist during their search. One external focus group participant cited poor past experiences as a reason for not using a search firm for its most recent recruitment. Of the institutions that did use a search firm, the recruitment specialist provided varying degrees of service depending upon the institution’s needs and practices: (a) provide advice and counsel to the board and the search committee, (b) help the organization define the role and develop the profile, (c) manage the process for stakeholder input on the profile, (d) identify candidates based on criteria given by the board, (e) approach suitable candidates and encourage them to apply, (f) conduct pre-interviews with potential candidates, (g) prepare the committee and the board to conduct interviews, (h) conduct 360-degree reference and background checks, and (i) provide feedback to candidates for reflection.

When asked about the value of using a recruiter, external focus group participants mentioned the specialized experience and knowledge as well as impartiality, that search firms provided to their searches. “They bring valuable, professional and dedicated assistance and experience as well as a history and knowledge of what works and does not

work” (FG544). In terms of the marketplace and pool of candidates, participants referred to a search firm’s knowledge of niche markets and capacity to reach into local, provincial, national, and international markets.

Five of six external focus group participants commented on the criticality of the search firm’s ability to locate candidates. They noted very few applications are received in response to advertisements. “Recruiters use their networks to beat the bushes to identify candidates. They search, they don’t advertise” (FG436). One external focus group participant, however, underscored the importance of the advertisement to their search. The board took a decision to develop the advertisement themselves, spent several meetings working on it, and posted it in a variety of publications. “The most important part of this step is stating what you want, using positive statements about the goal you want to accomplish for your institution, and avoiding negative statements” (FG142).

On the topic of advice when selecting a search firm, all participants advocated for a fit with the organization’s culture—finding a firm that understands what is needed and can bring quality not quantity: “Be cautious about firms that cut and paste [their pool of candidates]” (I428), and “Getting the wrong search firm could be disastrous, useless and expensive” (FG436). Participants also recommended engaging the firm early so the recruitment specialist can learn about the institution.

Concerning the fee for hiring a search firm, participants noted there are two common options: a fixed rate or percentage of the new president’s estimated first year’s salary. The fee covers expenses associated with meetings, travel, advertisement, and interviews. A caution was expressed to avoid selecting the search firm on the basis of a

fee; instead, “the decision should be based on your confidence in their ability to meet your needs” (FG48).

Role of Human Resources Department

The role of an institution human resources department varied in the search committee models presented earlier in this section. According to six out of ten survey respondents, the human resources department provided information on presidential search processes to the board. In all six models, an individual from the department researched and provided guidance on developing a compensation package and contract for the new president. “A competitive compensation package is absolutely essential” (S33).

Depending on the size of the institution, this individual was either a director or vice president and attended search committee meetings serving in a staff role, but did not have voting rights. However, in Model B (see Tables 7 and 8), which utilized a four-member committee structure, the depth and breadth of assistance provided by the human resources person was significantly greater than that of other models. The individual provided background on past search processes, “gave us the pitfalls of using a professional team or not” (FG142), established a time-line, and assisted with developing the profile and interview questions: “Our HR person kind of drove the bus for us [and] really was the glue to the committee” (FG142). Providing perspective to the search committee on the organization’s culture and assistance with some logistical matters were also identified by several study participants as contributions made by the human resources staff person.

Regarding the compensation package and contract developed for new presidents, differences were noted between practices in British Columbia and Alberta. Focus group participants from Alberta indicated the board had sole responsibility for negotiating, developing, and approving the contract. In British Columbia, focus group participants reported the contract is negotiated and developed by the board then forwarded to the ministry for approval. As an interim strategy before the final contract was in place, two British Columbia institutions (FG35, FG613) negotiated a separate short-term consulting or advisory contract with the incoming president.

Interim President

Three out of ten institutions appointed an interim president. The reasons cited were: (a) the position had been vacant during the search, (b) the incoming president was hired on an interim basis until the contract was finalized, and (c) there was a need to accommodate vacation plans of the departing president. Overall, participants suggested the use of an interim president should only be considered under extenuating circumstances. One interview participant cautioned,

Don't use an interim or acting president because it creates status quo and that is not in the long term best interest of the organization. Let the new president come in early if there is a need to bridge the time with the incumbent. (I428)

Participants expressed a preference for providing a transition between the incumbent and the incoming president. They suggested, if there is a need to accommodate vacation plans for the incumbent, these should be done within normal policy guidelines related to such absences.

Transition Plan

“I believe the transition portion once a new president is chosen is VERY important to ensure the best chance of success for the new president” (S37). A transition plan was developed and utilized by 50% of survey respondents. This topic was explored further in the focus group sessions and interviews. All participants advocated for a transition plan should be tailored to the needs of the institution, the incumbent, and the incoming president. “The board needs to be flexible so the incumbent can gradually move away from the situation.

The plan must accommodate the needs of the incumbent and the new president based on what makes sense for the institution” (I428). While participants agreed there should be no overlap between the incumbent and the president, in most cases there was some level of debriefing between the individuals. In all situations, the new president assumed responsibility on either January 1 or July 1, representing the mid-point or start of the institution’s academic year.

One participant indicated this was the first time a transition plan was developed and used by the institution. “I believe the plan we developed significantly contributed to the success of our new president’s transition to [the institution]” (FG240). The plan covered a four-month period, with the incoming president providing one-month’s notice to their institution and then taking a one-month vacation. The person arrived in the new city two months prior to taking over the position and spent time meeting, off campus, with an assigned administrative mentor and key individuals in the community.

The incoming president also attended a board planning retreat as an observer. A second planning retreat was held three months later, at which time the new president

presented a strategic plan to the board. While there was a briefing session with the incumbent, there was minimal involvement to allow for “a clean break” (FG240).

Another institution’s transition plan took place over three months, with the new president meeting all staff and faculty in small groups. There was no overlap as the position was vacant during the search process. A third institution made a full announcement—internal and external—following which the incumbent and new president debriefed on their own terms, the incumbent went on vacation for one month, and the senior academic leader assumed responsibility as per the institution’s policy related to vacations and absences.

A fourth institution had the incoming president meet in person or through phone calls with board members, senior team members, and internal stakeholders. There was no external aspect to the plan as the incoming president brought an established network and contacts to the new role. Four participants advised boards need to discuss a particular challenge that exists with the transition of a popular incumbent and how “the change in that relationship can be tough for people” (I237).

Communication Strategy

In terms of communication, an internal strategy was employed by 70% of survey respondents, with 40% providing search details through a public-facing website. The use of a website was seen as a relatively new tool to elicit input on the position profile and provide status reports to the institution and the local community. The websites were developed using the expertise of the search firms, and an e-mail address associated with the search was created. In all six search committee models discussed in the focus groups,

regular reports were made to the board from the committee. As noted earlier in the section on stakeholder consultation and engagement, ongoing communication was seen by World Café participants as important for ensuring stakeholders feel informed and valued during a search process: “You really can’t communicate too much” (WC536). A suggestion was received during the World Café discussion to create a communication strategy that provides committee members with parameters for responding to queries from colleagues during the search process. Specific details as to the elements of, or mechanisms used in the internal communication strategy were not requested nor presented through the survey or subsequent focus group discussions.

Confidentiality

“Confidentiality must be understood if there is to be integrity on the committee” (I428). The topics of trust and confidentiality in relation to a search process were discussed in the interviews and World Café. As mentioned earlier in the knowledge transfer section on interpersonal trust, a breach of confidentiality could seriously damage a candidate’s career and cause the institution to be deprived of a good candidate. One participant observed,

On our board, I have trust in the members and am able to express myself knowing the discussions stay in the in-camera meeting. But I find during presidential searches, it’s amazing the type of stuff that can come out of these meetings. So I think the law has to be laid down to the search committee—it is critically important that you keep this inside because you’re dealing with people’s lives. (WC619)

A strategy suggested by participants to mitigate potential problems was creation of a confidentiality agreement at the start of the search process, which would be signed by board and search committee members. The agreement would outline consequences for

non-compliance that the board chair and search committee chair would have authority to enforce. One participant remarked, “When you’re talking about confidentiality, it’s important that we get frequent reminders so that it becomes part of our culture” (WC937). Another suggested the board chair meet with constituency groups to outline the complexities of a presidential search process and emphasize the importance of respecting confidentiality particularly the effect that a breach could have on potential candidates. “This is all about personal integrity. You get the right people in the roles and talk about confidentiality at the beginning” (WC536).

It’s a firing offence. If [the confidentiality agreement] is broken, the person must be prepared to suffer damages related to the cost of the search. If they’re not prepared to live by that, then don’t be a member of the committee. (WC443)

One participant correlated the issue of maintaining confidentiality with lack of or poor communication: “People get impatient if they don’t hear anything for a while. So you need to have communication strategies to keep them informed of what’s happening” (WC328). It was also argued the problem can be compounded near the end of the short-listing process by any vested interests on the part of search committee members or the recruitment firm. To alleviate this, it was suggested the names of finalists be provided directly by the committee to the board for the final interview stage. The challenges associated with confidentiality during a presidential search were highlighted by Neff and Leondar (1992), who advised search committees to pay attention to the issue throughout the process: “The key to success is to inform all persons involved about the ground rules and not change them unless absolutely necessary” (p. 27).

Potential Sensitivities and Ethical Issues Needing Consideration

While discussing the topics of trust and confidentiality, World Café participants were asked to identify any sensitivities or ethical issues that a board may need to consider during a search. Participants discussed the potential for incompatible viewpoints regarding final candidate selection, which could create a conflict situation between the search committee and the board. Noting there have been some situations where candidates have included fraudulent statements on their resumes, the importance of verifying credentials and qualifications was stated. It was also mentioned that, within the pool of candidates for post-secondary leadership positions, all candidates have the potential to become colleagues of one another. This created an awareness to ensure candidates are treated with respect throughout the process, including how feedback is provided to unsuccessful candidates.

Regarding reference checks, participants debated whether or not committee members should independently enquire about candidates through their own network of colleagues. One participant cautioned, “Anytime people go off independent of the committee to do things, they’re off side. They may think they are helping but the road to hell is paved with those good intentions” (WC235). Another participant expressed a similar opinion: “I have no business independently passing on information to other members or trying to change the dynamics of the competition” (WC619).

While others agreed with these points of view, they saw value in going beyond the list of references to get broader and deeper perspectives. Participants also expressed a belief that board and committee members have an obligation to bring such information forward. The following advice was offered:

Consider the materiality, source, and potential influence of the information before passing it along. (WC619)

When making inquiries or checking references, be discreet and don't break any privacy regulations. (WC328)

Reference checks should not be done until the committee chair, in consultation with the candidate, indicates it is okay to proceed. (WC536)

Realize it is difficult to control unsolicited opinion so you need a process for dealing with it. (WC235)

Present the information to the board chair or committee chair but not to other members. (WC536)

Breaches of confidentiality or privacy were identified as serious issues requiring immediate action. However, participants acknowledged it can be difficult to respond to colleagues who ask about progress with the search. It was suggested committee members be provided with communication parameters—a confidentiality “party line”—to use in these circumstances.

Another sensitivity pointed out by participants related to the possibility of having the search derailed during contract negotiations, which could result in having to start a new search. This reinforced a need for the board to understand the decision between the board and the candidate is mutual. Being sensitive to the needs of the candidate's family within the scope of the search was also mentioned. Participants shared experiences where they knew of a good candidate who had not applied for a position and how they worked to find a way to appropriately encourage the individual without overstepping any boundaries. As well, a situation was presented where the candidate was well-known to a committee member. This required the member to declare the potential of bias or conflict of interest and abstain from voting.

Participants discussed sensitivities related to maintaining the incumbent's integrity, accountability, and responsibility during the search process and "avoid the lame duck syndrome" (WC328). All agreed there is only one president at a time, and the board has an overarching responsibility to support the president. Having the incumbent serve as a resource to the committee, keeping the incumbent apprised of progress in the search, and having an appropriate transition plan were noted as points to be considered.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture featured as a theme throughout this study and related to processes for knowledge management, board succession planning, as well as presidential search. In terms of knowledge management, having a culture of respect and trust within the board was viewed as a way to facilitate open, frank discussion both formally and informally. When preparing a board succession plan, it was suggested consideration be given to finding members whose skills and expertise align with organizational priorities and who demonstrate a passion for education and for the institution. Boards were also encouraged to tailor their board succession plan to the needs and culture of the board and the institution.

The relationship between organizational culture and presidential search featured in participants' observations. "The culture of the organization needs to be understood and linked with the [presidential search] process" (S28). "It's not up to the board to define the organization culture. It's got to be defined inside" (WC536). Two external focus group participants commented on choices made in their respective search processes as a strategy for influencing changes in their institution's culture.

Our institution was not healthy. We felt our previous search processes had been tainted with interference and hidden agendas and this created challenges for us. We changed our process so we could change the result and have someone able to listen to the whole institution, have people bring forward solutions rather than problems, and have the whole institution working harmoniously in a certain direction. (FG142)

This was our first transition plan. Through it, we challenged the institution's traditions and broke unwritten rules. But nobody has complained because [the president's] skills transcended that rule and everybody said, "Oh wow." (FG240)

Of note is that MacEwan's 1996 presidential search process also reflected aspects of the culture that was prevalent in the institution at that point in time: "I was very impressed with the process conducted here in 1996. I felt there was so much emphasis on getting stakeholder input which was and is a part of our culture" (I534). As noted in the earlier section on recruitment specialists, study participants promoted finding a fit with the institution's culture as a criterion for selecting a search firm. The collegial nature of post-secondary institutions and stakeholder expectations around participating in presidential search processes was also highlighted in the study.

In some of the larger post-secondary institutions, there is a kind of remoteness and you can't get involved. [Institution] is still small enough that you know the stakeholders; you know they want to be involved in finding their president, and they should have a voice in some way. (WC741)

Further, participants viewed the search process as an opportunity to express the institution's culture to potential candidates. "We have undergone a bit of change as we've grown. But there are still some core values we strive to maintain. The search committee must ensure the incoming president can conform to those values" (WC619). As mentioned earlier in the section on stakeholder consultation and engagement, misreading an institution's culture and failing to match culture and values with the incoming president can be detrimental to the search process.

A general weakness when recruiting is a board's inability to transcend its own world and understand the complexities of a large, collegial organization. It is also often difficult for people inside an organization to understand the president works for the board. In the end, fit is key—find someone who can listen, understand, and motivate people to change, someone who is not bringing their own agenda, someone who has transitioned an organization, someone who understands the real work has to be done by the people inside the organization. (I428)

Best Practices for Presidential Search

Study participants acknowledged presidential search as being “the most important duty any board has [and therefore] it needs to be strategic and carefully planned” (S40).

Among best practices that could comprise a presidential search process, participants suggested: (a) clearly communicating that responsibility for leading the process and making the final decision rests with the board, (b) having a small search committee with a clear mandate and processes for dealing with differing viewpoints, and (c) keeping a focus on the future. They encouraged boards to develop a well-thought-out plan of action and consensus on a position profile that includes the top challenges the new president will face over the next five years.

Tailoring the process to fit the organization's culture was another feature mentioned by participants: “You have to respect the unique characteristics and culture of the institution and tailor the search to this” (I141). Finding a search firm that fits with the institution's culture, utilizing these services early in the process, and promoting the opportunity as widely as possible were seen as best practices.

Participants recommended designing a process that is open and transparent to the internal community, inclusive of internal constituencies, and provides opportunity for stakeholder input. Regarding candidate compensation, survey respondents and external focus group participants advised it is essential to have a competitive package. Having an

appropriate transition plan was mentioned as a best practice that contributes to the success of the incoming president. Other advice included being prepared for the search to take longer and be harder than anticipated, having a search committee chair who is willing to listen and provide opportunity for stakeholders to give input, and creating a culture of trust between the board and the search committee.

Interview and World Café participants were asked to consider how they could personally contribute to MacEwan's next presidential search process. They offered to participate on the search committee if this was the direction of the board, contribute to the pre-planning phase of the process, and participate in activities during the search such as interviews and open forums. Participants expressed an obligation to continue informing themselves about presidential search processes through reading written materials on the topic, attending conferences, and having discussions at the board table. They volunteered to make themselves available to respond to questions from the search committee and the internal community, as well as potential candidates.

Noting several board members, internal and public, have a profile within the institution, participants proposed helping in any way they could to link with internal stakeholders. In terms of chairing the search committee, it was proposed the individual chosen must be able to "keep people on track, provide guidance without dominating, and ensure stakeholders are consulted" (WC443). Participants also offered to draw on their professional and community networks to assist with the transition strategy. Recognizing the forthcoming turnover on the board and the need to transfer knowledge, one participant offered to "share my experience [with incoming board members] of being part of this study" (I534).

Learning about Presidential Search

Starting with the online survey and throughout each subsequent step in the study, I asked participants about the strategies and techniques they used for learning about presidential search. Out of twenty-three survey respondents, eight replied to the question asking how they learned about presidential search and its various elements. Six respondents indicated they participated in conversations with business associates and used information provided by the organization's human resources department during their search process. Reading books, articles, and other written resources on the topic of presidential search was a strategy used by five of eight respondents.

Half of the respondents had past experience with a search process while on another board outside the post-secondary sector and one had experience with a search process while serving on the current post-secondary board. Conversations with friends helped four respondents learn about presidential search. Attending a conference was a strategy used by three respondents while two learned about presidential search through an education or development plan. One respondent participated in board colleague networks. None of the respondents learned about presidential search by attending presentations by industry experts or paid consultants.

The response related to conversations with business associates—six of eight respondents used this as a learning strategy—surprised me so I decided to probe more deeply into this during the focus group session. Participants reported they valued the opportunity to learn from the experiences of business associates who had conducted searches within the public or private sector. This was tempered with an acknowledgement of different expectations and approaches used for searches in the post-secondary sector.

They also reported these conversations proved helpful for understanding the cultural imperative of an organization and its impact on search processes.

Finally, they used the opportunity to gather input on the role of their institution and their president in the community in preparation for their recruitment profiles. While only two institutions reported they debriefed on their search processes, all respondents commented there would be value in doing so. Further, several suggested documenting the process for future reference and to share with others. All survey respondents and external focus group participants indicated they were pleased with their search processes and the results.

When I started this study, I hypothesized that turnover on a board during a presidential search would present challenges to that board's ability to transfer knowledge. In fact, the boards participating in my study experienced little turnover during their search processes. Of those that did experience membership changes, there were no challenges with transferring knowledge. Seven of ten survey respondents reported they had no change in members during their search time-frame. Of two institutions that did experience change, one had a succession plan. The institution without a succession plan in place "simply required the members to get on board" (S13). In light of these findings indicating there was little membership change during the search process,

I initially found answers to a subsequent question about strategies used to transfer knowledge to new board members to be confusing and contradictory. Respondents placed a heavy reliance on recruitment specialists (86%) to transfer knowledge during their search. Other strategies included: board orientation process (57%); background documents about the search (57%); retreat (43%); and books, articles and other written

resources (29%). After reviewing my survey questions, I came to the conclusion this question was out of sequence, lacked clarity, and may have been confused with earlier questions about board orientation, education, and development strategies, as well as elements of a search process and how participants learned about searches. Finally, the circumstances experienced by participants in my study may not reflect those of other post-secondary institutions within Alberta, British Columbia, or other provinces. As a result, I found I was unable to prove or disprove my original hypothesis.

The Learning Experience

With the goal of this action research project being to provide a progressive learning experience for MacEwan board volunteers, I solicited feedback on the effectiveness of various learning strategies and techniques related to presidential search, including the study itself. Interview participants were asked to comment on the value of four learning approaches: (a) reading books, articles, and other written resources; (b) attending conferences; (c) completing the online survey; and (d) participating in the focus group or other experiential learning.

Of those who had read books, articles, and other written resources, there was consensus around receiving good general, broad-based information, including advice to boards to carefully consider various elements of a search process: search committee composition and terms of reference, role of search firm, stakeholder input, transition plan, and the board's decision-making responsibility. Five interview participants had attended conference sessions on the topic of presidential search. They found the sessions provided good frameworks with models and reference points and "were like focus groups with an

opportunity to discuss experiences, what you've read and ask questions, thereby building a broader base of knowledge" (I343).

The online survey highlighted many aspects of presidential search that a board might consider. The survey was viewed by interviewees as an excellent trigger (I428), a helpful starting point (I534), a good tactic to get cognition going, and a basic way to identify gaps in knowledge and areas needing improvement: "It was sort of like getting your toe in the bathtub because it starts you thinking about the task at hand" (I343). The focus group sessions provided the greatest overall learning experience for participants, who indicated they found significant value in learning about another institution's search experience. Of those interview participants who had previously participated in an executive search process, only one had first-hand experience with a presidential search. The similarities and differences of these search processes were acknowledged as points requiring future discussion.

Participating in this study made me aware of the three aspects of knowledge management, board succession planning, and presidential search. I had not thought about knowledge transfer before. I now have a better understanding of the impact [of these factors] on organizational momentum. This research will be valuable to other organizations. (I237)

Level of Knowledge about Presidential Search

As part of the interview process, I enquired about each individual's level of knowledge about presidential search prior to participating in the study and whether there had been any change. Seven of nine interviewees stated they had limited or no knowledge and experience prior to the study. One indicated no change in level of knowledge because of having considerable knowledge of, and past experience with presidential searches as well as other senior level recruitments. Another reported past experience in the private

sector with “a variety of ways to carry out a search through which a sort of intuitive sense has developed” (I635). This participant also mentioned a new understanding that the search process in a post-secondary organization could require a different approach. One interviewee referenced a conversation with a colleague who had experienced a recent search at another institution and my presentation to the board at its fall retreat as starting points for increasing awareness on the topic.

As a result of participating in the study, eight out of nine interviewees experienced a change in their level of knowledge about presidential search and their sense of confidence. Their responses demonstrated a range of change and highlighted potential areas requiring additional learning or attention:

My level of knowledge is changing greatly as this study unfolds. My sense of confidence has totally increased. (I534)

I’m learning more about the intricate details of the process including dealing with consultants, the relationship between the board and constituencies, as well as the board and the external community’s multi-faceted and very complex relationship. My confidence has increased, and I think I am much better positioned to make a positive contribution to a search process. (I819)

This experience has deepened my thinking and made an impression on how critical some aspects are. My confidence has extensively increased. I feel like I actually have the right questions to ask now, and I have the confidence to help build our own process. (I141)

I’m always learning stuff. Through this study I’ve learned about different approaches especially in the post-secondary sector. (I635)

I had limited knowledge before. While I have increased knowledge and more confidence, I want to learn more about how we determine the candidates. (I94)

I had some past experience with vice president searches. I’ve learned more through this about presidential search. This has reinforced for me the importance of having the right search expert and that you get more results from recruiting by word of mouth and contacts rather than advertising. (I736)

My knowledge has increased and I'm more aware. I'm gaining more confidence but still have a sense of anxiety about getting it right. A good process should bring good results. To do that, we need to have a bunch of tools and some experts and be able to pre-plan. (I237)

This has brought more clarity about the process and time-lines. I am more confident in terms of going forward (I343).

Level of Knowledge about Board Succession Planning

During the interviews, I also invited participants to provide an indication of their level of knowledge about MacEwan's board succession plan prior to participating in the study and whether there had been any change. Of nine interviewees, two had extensive experience with, and knowledge of, MacEwan's board succession plan. While one reported no change, the other pointed out a relationship between board succession planning and knowledge transfer: "I have an increased awareness of and thinking about upcoming changes and the need for transfer of knowledge. It is more than replacing people—it's about how you transfer knowledge from a retiring member to a new member" (I428). Of the remaining seven, responses ranged from limited to basic to good: "I was aware of the importance but not the process" (I635); "I want to learn more about the public member recruitment process" (I94).

Referring to the presentation I provided to the MacEwan board at its September 2009 retreat about the elements of my study, several participants mentioned their level of knowledge had substantially increased as a result of that experience:

My level of knowledge took a major leap when you presented at the retreat. (I237)

We had a good structured and focused discussion at the retreat. The matrix provided me with an at-a-glance snapshot. It was very helpful. (I141)

This will help us identify niches and skills as we plan for replacement over the next two to three years. (I819)

While conducting the interviews and based on my extensive experience working with members of MacEwan's board, I noticed some inconsistencies among participants' responses about the specifics of MacEwan's board succession plan. I realized some of this could be related to whether or not the member was involved with the board's human resources committee or had participated in in-camera sessions where there is often discussion about public member recruitment.

Also, I noted one member had been unable to participate in the recent retreat discussion about board succession planning and, thereby, had no background knowledge to draw upon. During these interviews, I was able to respond to interviewees by clarifying information about MacEwan's board succession plan. These participants subsequently indicated an increased level of knowledge on the topic and a greater sense of confidence toward contributing to the plan, including identifying characteristics of future board members and suggesting names. Commenting on this, one interviewee observed, "Prior to this study, I had good knowledge and could have participated more in the process. With this increased knowledge and appreciation for board succession planning, I can now suggest names" (I534).

Subsequently, I brought the topic forward to the World Café. I coordinated the table participants to include individuals with extensive knowledge and experience along with those who had less familiarity. Participants were asked within their small discussion groups to (a) describe the plan, (b) identify similarities between the processes for board succession and presidential search, (c) consider how to synchronize MacEwan's board succession plan with a future presidential search, and (d) discuss their personal contribution to the board succession plan. As a result of this exercise, participants

demonstrated a clearer and more consistent understanding of the current process of board succession planning and the timelines for the next three-to four-year period: “I now feel as though I can share this responsibility with the board chair and be on the watch for potential new members” (WC536); “I am more cognizant of MacEwan and the board’s needs (WC834).

Comparing board succession planning and presidential search, World Café participants noted both activities require a strategic approach that ultimately creates a sense of leadership continuity: (a) design processes that are tailored to the needs and culture of the institution, (b) create a candidate profile, (c) identify future opportunities and challenges including gaps, (d) seek candidates through a defined process, (e) make a recommendation or decision, (f) provide a transition, and (g) provide feedback to candidates for reflection. The value of taking a similar strategic approach for both internal and public board recruitment as mentioned in the interview stage was again highlighted.

World Café participants reiterated a need for balance between having a strategy for internal member recruitment and not interfering with the autonomy of constituencies to recruit and elect their board representatives. While respecting the minister’s responsibility for appointing public members, it was suggested, “There is a danger with leaving this to chance. We can mitigate any issues by having a plan and making sound suggestions” (WC741). Participants also acknowledged board succession planning should be a shared responsibility of all members, rather than relying to a large extent on the board chair to facilitate the process.

Feedback on Experience with the Study

At the conclusion of the World Café, I invited participants to share their thoughts and observations on the evening's activity as well as their experience with study.

This was an excellent format. I enjoyed the exchange of views. I found as I moved from one table to another a concurrence of views on many of the issues. (WC619)

It's been a fabulous learning process for me. You've really nudged all of us to think about these things at an appropriate time. Thank you for doing that, it's great. (WC741)

Very well organized project and a great learning process. (W14)

Everyone knows how I feel. We've been happy to assist with your project. This has been a good learning experience for all of us. (WC443)

Normally a topic like this would get my attention for about 10 minutes, but I seem to have hung in there for about 2 hours. That says a lot about you and your process. (WC235)

I echo everyone's comments. It's been a great exercise. (WC328)

This will cause us to strengthen all the processes that we touch. I've been most impressed. You've emptied my brain on everything on this process. You've heightened the awareness of the whole board around these subjects. You've introduced me to subjects I hadn't even thought about and I'm quite surprised. I think it's a wonderful research project that you carried out perfectly. (WC937)

The whole thing is just absolutely fantastic and has been so much better than the conference workshop we attended on presidential search. You need to take this on the road. This has been a master's made in heaven for you and for our board. I'm so grateful you choose these topics, and we had the opportunity to participate in this experience. (WC834)

Reflecting on these comments, I realized the experience of participating in an action research project that utilized various interactive and progressive data-gathering methods had significantly contributed to the learning of each MacEwan participant and to the MacEwan board as a group. I wondered if their high level of engagement was a result of being provided with the opportunity to share their thoughts and ideas within the auspices

of research. Further, I remained curious whether or not the same degree of learning would have occurred through the efforts of a consultant rather than those of a graduate student with whom they had a relationship. These points may be areas for exploration in future research projects.

Study Conclusions

The research question studied in this action research project was “How can the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors acquire and transfer knowledge about presidential searches?” The sub-questions were:

1. What techniques do boards use to gather information about presidential searches?
2. How do boards consider best practices when developing search processes?
3. What role do external recruitment specialists play in board member education about best practices in presidential search?
4. How is this information transferred when board members change?
5. How can the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors translate this knowledge into a plan for its next presidential search?

Specific responses by participants to the first four sub-questions were contained within preceding sections under the headings of knowledge management, knowledge transfer, board succession planning, and presidential search. Sub-question five was explored by MacEwan participants through the interviews and World Café as they reflected upon and shared with one another what each had learned through the research and identified ways they could personally contribute to the next presidential search.

However, sub-question five will require further synthesis of what MacEwan participants learned about the various elements of presidential search before the knowledge is translated into a plan. This exercise will likely occur at a time when the institution is preparing to engage in its next presidential search process.

The research and sub-questions were explored by sixteen survey respondents, six focus group participants, and nine MacEwan board volunteers, who shared their experiences and perspectives through the lens of governance in the public post-secondary system. Their enthusiastic participation and candid observations demonstrated a commitment to, and universal belief about, principles of governance. They found common ground on many aspects of their practices associated with recruitment, orientation, and education of board members. They revealed an appreciation for the unique culture of institutions and how this impacts many aspects of presidential search processes.

They discovered board succession planning and presidential search have similar requirements: (a) design processes that are tailored to the needs and culture of the institution, (b) create a candidate profile, (c) identify future opportunities and challenges including gaps, (d) seek candidates through a defined process, (e) make a recommendation or decision, (f) provide a transition, and (g) provide feedback to candidates for reflection. Participants gained a better understanding of the complexity of these important board responsibilities and an appreciation for the roles they can play individually and collectively in facilitating them.

Managing Knowledge

My analysis of MacEwan's orientation, education, and development programs reflected themes identified in my literature reviews on knowledge management and knowledge transfer. There was differentiation between factual, explicit knowledge of operations and policies as compared to subjective, contextual knowledge associated with governance roles and responsibilities. However, rather than being viewed or experienced as extremes on a continuum, there was an ongoing, dynamic relationship between both components of knowledge. MacEwan board volunteers and external participants reported acquiring both explicit and implicit knowledge through a variety of formal and informal tools, techniques, and experiences.

Through my study, they acquired additional explicit and implicit knowledge on board orientation, education, and development programs, as well as presidential search. Each participant brought unique knowledge to the collective team. By progressing through cycles of continuous learning from the survey through to the World Café, individual knowledge evolved and was converted to shared knowledge. Participants critically assessed their orientation, education and development programs, identified areas for improvement, and suggested strategies to collectively and individually contribute to enhancing their programs.

Transferring Knowledge

Regarding the relationship of interpersonal trust to knowledge transfer, external focus group participants and MacEwan board volunteers confirmed benevolence and competence plays a role in transferring knowledge between governors within the same institution and to colleagues at other institutions. While they viewed trust as being in

place at the start of board members' relationships, they acknowledged a need to find ways, both formally and informally, to maintain and strengthen those relationships.

Participants extended the concept of trust to include confidentiality during a presidential search. They recognized strategies must be put in place for building and maintaining trust within the board as well as between the board, the search committee, and the internal community. They also discussed the impact of breaches in trust and confidentiality and the need to establish consequences to address such situations. These observations are consistent with those of Abrams et al. (2003) who suggested interpersonal trust can be promoted within an organization by (a) establishing and ensuring shared vision and language and (b) holding people accountable for trust. My findings also support Levin et al. (2006), who linked perceived demographic similarity between participants, social interaction and behaviour, and shared perspective as three bases upon which trust can be built.

My experience with this study supported several theories related to motivation and knowledge transfer. The degree to which these study participants were motivated to acquire and transfer knowledge was influenced by relational ties through their governance roles in the post-secondary sector, a sense of reciprocity, and the knowledge and abilities they had acquired through training and experience. Their informal network provided them with an opportunity to learn from the trial-and-error experiences of one another and thereby facilitate knowledge transfer.

The experience of these participants reflected Chait et al.'s (2005) suggestion that "boards act as communities of practice creating multiple opportunities for the entire board or particular committees to pool usable knowledge and thereby learn together"

(p. 144). My study also confirmed Argote et al.'s (2003) observation that an individual's ability, motivation, and opportunity serve as mechanisms affecting successful knowledge management. As well, my findings corroborated Lucas and Ogilvie's (2006) finding that successful knowledge transfer is based on whether or not participants see one another as partners, know one another well, and "view knowledge as something to be shared with their colleagues" (p. 18).

Participants in my study were aware of the other person's expertise and viewed it to be of value in resolving a particular problem—acquiring and transferring knowledge about the topics of knowledge management, board succession planning, and presidential search. They perceived they could access the information from the knowledge owner and believed seeking the information would not be too costly in terms of either interpersonal risks or reciprocal obligations incurred. The relational factors around an individual's decision to seek information within social network, as examined by Borgatti and Cross (2003) also held in my study.

Finally, motivation associated with strategic similarity was evidenced in my study and supported Darr and Kurtzberg's (2000) conclusion that strategic similarity and the context created through having a similar business strategy are useful for successful knowledge transfer, while geographic and customer similarity have less of an impact. The six focus group participants involved with my study were located across Alberta and British Columbia. With the exception of two situations, participants did not know one another prior to participating in my study. In the case of four focus group participants (two MacEwan and two non-MacEwan) who knew one another, none had worked together professionally, nor had they served together on a board. As well, none had

previously worked together on a presidential search. While they acknowledged differences between their approaches to board succession planning and presidential search, based on institutional needs, all participants in my study demonstrated similarities on the basis of being governors in the post-secondary sector.

Planning for Board Succession

Although the approaches to board succession planning varied among the boards involved in my study, participants agreed there is value in having a framework for providing input into recruitment of board members. Whether the framework was planned or ad hoc depended upon the specific needs and practices of the boards. Nonetheless, boards in the public and private sectors are taking a more active role in planning for their succession. My findings on board succession planning corroborated this trend identified in Bugg and Dallhoff's (2006) *National Study of Board Governance Practices in the Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector in Canada* and the (2008) study of Crown Corporations by The Conference Board of Canada.

My study also substantiated the merits of taking a strategic approach as suggested by The British Columbia Board Resourcing and Development Office (2005), Lakey (2007), Nicholson and Kiel (2004), Smith (2000), and The Muttart Foundation and Alberta Culture and Community Spirit (2008). MacEwan participants critiqued the MacEwan board succession plan to identify areas for improvement and propose strategies they could collectively and individually make to enhance the plan. They also discussed and agreed on the importance of boards synchronizing their board succession plans with the time lines for an institution's presidential search exercise.

Learning about Presidential Search

One of the primary goals of my study was to help the MacEwan board volunteers acquire and transfer knowledge on a specific board role—presidential search. As evidenced in this chapter, these individuals extensively expanded their knowledge about a repertoire of elements associated with conducting a presidential search within a post-secondary environment. They accomplished this by reflecting upon what they individually learned from the experiences of others, sharing this knowledge with their board colleagues, and having conversations to create a shared understanding of the complexities of a presidential search. They developed consensus on several elements and acknowledged a need for further dialogue on others.

MacEwan participants agreed the decision-making role of a board in a presidential search process is paramount. They were also in agreement about employing the services of a recruitment specialist to assist with a search. With the acknowledgement that details would have to be outlined, having a transition plan was another point of concurrence. As a result of the study, participants gained an appreciation for the time-line associated with a presidential search exercise.

While there was consensus that a search process needs to engage constituencies in a meaningful way, participants realized further dialogue is required about specific methods and strategies to do so. They also recognized the influence of organizational culture, in particular within a post-secondary institution, on presidential search. Six search committee models were presented during the study (see Tables 7 and 8). MacEwan participants discussed some elements of each model; however, they did not examine the models in their entirety. The topics of committee composition, committee

chair, and the relationship between the board and search committee were discussed to a great extent during the World Café. Although participants demonstrated increased clarity on these topics, they reached no conclusions—further discussion is required.

Through the survey, focus group sessions, and interviews, there was a shared understanding around having a broadly-stated, flexible policy related to presidential search rather than a prescriptive one. Trust and confidentiality featured as key themes throughout the study and were considered within two contexts: knowledge transfer (discussed earlier in this section) and presidential search. Participants gained more awareness of, and appreciation for, the complexities of trust and confidentiality during a search exercise. They discussed strategies for establishing expectations, bringing issues forward, and addressing violations.

During the World Café, participants had an initial opportunity to identify several sensitivities and ethical issues a board might need to consider—additional discussion would be of benefit. The role of the incumbent in the search process and the board's responsibility for supporting the incumbent were confirmed. As well, MacEwan participants shared with one another how they could personally contribute to a search process.

In conclusion, this study added to existing literature on board succession planning and presidential search within the post-secondary sector. It contributed to research on the topics of knowledge management and knowledge transfer and extended this to the context of post-secondary board governance.

Scope and Limitations of the Research

This action research project provided a progressive learning experience for members of the MacEwan Board of Governors. Through this study, they assessed several governance roles including recruitment, orientation, education, and development of board members. As well, they focused substantial time on learning about presidential search. Although the outcomes of this study were successful, there were limitations to the research.

Applicability to Public Post-Secondary Sector

These findings and the personal perspectives shared by participants may only be relevant to the context of western Canadian public post-secondary institutions, as my study was limited to Alberta and British Columbia. There were some comparisons with private sector presidential recruitment experiences and practices; however, these were not extensive or in-depth. Out of forty-four institutions, fourteen had conducted a search in the past five years, and six were in the process of recruiting presidents. Sixteen individual institutions responded to the survey, and five, including MacEwan, participated in the focus group sessions. From the four search firms I had approached, two contributed to the survey and focus groups. As noted in the findings, each institution took a unique approach to their presidential search to meet their needs and context. It would be reasonable to presume, therefore, that more participants would have contributed additional insights. At the same time, the small number of participants created the conditions needed for individualized and group learning to occur throughout the study. During the data-gathering timeframe, there were eleven members on the MacEwan board, and nine actively participated in the various activities. As the student position was vacant,

this perspective was not incorporated into the study. In summary, while there are several overarching governance principles related to the post-secondary sector, this study has the most relevance, validity, and reliability for MacEwan.

Presidential Search Topics

Seventeen distinct topics associated with presidential search were explored in varying degrees throughout the study. While extensive, this list does not purport to capture all of the aspects of presidential search. Only a few topics were discussed in more depth during the World Café, and participants did not have sufficient time to report out from their small group discussions. Further dialogue on all topics would be beneficial.

Research Methods

In Chapter 3, I outlined the research methods and tools used in my project. I also identified several challenges I experienced in the process of implementing these methods and tools. For example, conducting the survey required considerable time and effort on my part to garner responses. In the end, I received twenty-three out of a potential forty-nine responses. Of these, nine responses related to MacEwan participants thus leaving fourteen external perspectives to be included. Data gathered through the survey reflected the perspectives of these institutions and was not extrapolated to a broader audience.

The six mini-focus group sessions brought great value to the participants and reflected several different approaches to board succession planning, knowledge management, and presidential search. However, the sessions were conducted by telephone with two participants and, therefore, did not provide an opportunity for broader perspectives or in-person group interaction. While I was able to listen for verbal cues, I

was limited by being unable to observe physical cues. This may have provided me with additional insights into each individual's responses.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, applying the principles of the World Café proved to be my greatest research method challenge. Participants shared their individual perspectives with one another; however, they did not collectively connect perspectives, identify patterns, nor harvest new discoveries. While they discussed six topics fairly extensively, they did not have an exhaustive dialogue, nor did they cover all of the topics presented in the research methods preceding the World Café. There was also insufficient time for recapping table discussions, comparing notes with each new round of participants, and reporting out to the whole group. To accommodate participants' schedules, I was required to conduct the session in the evening rather than for a half or full day. More time would have been helpful for completing the dialogue process. I also experienced issues with the audio recording software, and this compromised some of my data, causing me to miss out on specific points presented by participants on two topics.

Researcher Skill, Professional Background, and Bias

As a novice researcher, I acknowledged my skills were evolving as the project proceeded and continually sought advice and assistance to mitigate any impact on the project and the participants. Through my role as the sole administrator responsible for the operations of the MacEwan board, I brought biases as a researcher conducting an inquiry within and about my workplace. I had to remain balanced during all interactions, keeping my conceptual baggage in check and letting the conversations flow while still providing guidance. My theoretical framework of knowledge management helped to construct how

I viewed the study. Taking a systems, social constructionist, or behaviourist perspective might have required a different approach, interpretation, and presentation.

Although this project did not involve an assessment of the preferred individual learning styles of each MacEwan participant, it did highlight for me the differences that existed. My goal was to cross-populate information through interactive, relational techniques. I relied on my expertise in board governance, my experience of working with board members, as well as my position and relationships with these current board members to help me recognize and meet their unique learning needs. I was able to identify and minimize inconsistencies in information being communicated.

Available Literature

While the literature review topics I used were relevant to many aspects of my study, available research on several topics was limited, particularly within the context of governance within the public post-secondary and non-profit sectors. Within Chapter 5, I provide additional context and comment on the following areas for potential future research:

What are the specific guidelines used to create frameworks of board succession plans within the post-secondary system and non-profit sector?

What best practices do boards within the post-secondary sector consider when developing board succession plans and presidential search processes?

How do professional board staff contribute to the operations of boards of governors?

Is graduate level research, particularly action research, useful as a tool to facilitate individual and group learning within boards of governors?

Summary

In summary, in this chapter I presented the findings, conclusions, and limitations of my action research project. Although my study may not be transferable outside the MacEwan board, it provided a unique and value-added learning opportunity for these board members to examine several governance roles and responsibilities, including presidential search. The interactive and progressive nature of the methods chosen for this project validated what Abrams et al. (2003) found: “Numerous studies confirm that people prefer to get useful information and advice from other people” (p. 73). The participative approach of my project also achieved what Wheatley (2006) prescribed as “the best way to create ownership is to have those responsible for implementation develop the plan for themselves” (p. 68).

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In the first section of this chapter, I present recommendations based on research findings and conclusions described in Chapter 4. The second section reviews specific implications for the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors, based on my overall findings as well as comments on implementation. Finally, I present some suggestions for further research in the areas of knowledge management and knowledge transfer within a board of governors, board succession planning, and presidential search.

The timing of this learning experience requires noting, as Grant MacEwan College and its board of governors were not in the process of a presidential search at the time. My project provided MacEwan's board members with a chance to learn from recent presidential search experiences of other post-secondary institutions and draw on industry expertise to proactively create a valuable knowledge base. Kaye and Jacobson (2002) observed, "Building legacy and sharing it with others requires continuous learning by an individual and continuous transfer of that learning to others" (p. 287).

The purpose of this action research inquiry was to engage MacEwan participants in a reflective exploration of post-secondary board governance knowledge management, focusing especially on the topic of presidential search, through a sequence of data-gathering approaches and interactions. MacEwan participants also shared perspectives on their experience as action research participants engaged in acquiring and transferring knowledge. This sequence of interactions resulted in MacEwan Board members discovering how other western Canadian post-secondary institutions address these issues. The experience collectively led the MacEwan Board to engage with each other to share

information about different institutional strategies and develop its own strategies; an enactment of what Wheatley (2006) maintained is a critical organizational competency—broad distribution of organizational intelligence.

Study Recommendations

Several themes emerged from the research around the broad context of board governance, including knowledge management as a component of board governance, the value of a group learning experience through a unique approach and focused on a salient topic, trust as a vital element of organization relationships and culture, and organizational culture as an influencing factor of presidential search.

Recommendation #1: Explore and Activate Unique Opportunities to Facilitate Individual and Group Learning

Education was defined as one of six competencies of effective boards by Chait et al. (1993), who suggested strong boards are ones that consciously create opportunities for members to learn about the institution as well as governance roles and responsibilities. Traditionally, board members learn their various governance roles by participating in activities such as orientation programs, conferences, workshops, meeting agendas, retreats, committee assignments, institutional events and activities, as well as reading governance books, topical articles, and organizational documents. On occasion, board members present at conferences, and these joint experiences can foster teambuilding and group learning.

My study utilized an action research methodology to provide a unique opportunity for a group of people—MacEwan board members—to step out of their comfort zone and come together to learn about the specific governance role of presidential search. Stringer

(2007) contended one of the benefits of action research is that it “provides the means to systematically investigate issues in diverse contexts and to discover effective and efficient applications of more generalized practices” (p. 6).

As part of the knowledge acquisition and transfer process, individuals external to MacEwan contributed insights from their direct experiences with presidential searches. MacEwan participants received and reflected upon this knowledge on an individual basis. Subsequently, they shared this knowledge with their MacEwan board colleagues through a facilitated group activity. My research demonstrated knowledge transfer can be a constructed group learning process. Through a series of focused discussions in my study, members of the MacEwan board and external participants examined, compared, and identified improvements related to their current strategies for board succession planning and knowledge management.

Four important elements of the learning experience provided through my study require noting: (a) the topic chosen for knowledge transfer was salient, (b) the process used to acquire and transfer the knowledge was unique, (c) the timing of the learning opportunity was right, and (d) the learning process in this action inquiry was equitable between participants and researcher—both gained useful knowledge about a process in which they would engage. Presidential search is a critical governance role for boards. While board members may attend conference sessions on the topic of presidential search, their most extensive learning often takes place at the time the board and the institution are engaged in a recruitment process.

During the time of my study, MacEwan was not conducting a presidential search. Nonetheless, the MacEwan board members demonstrated a compelling readiness to take

part in a group learning experience about this governance role. “Creating an esprit de corps through the choice of topic set an overarching tone for the project. You, as facilitator and researcher, pulled people together to discuss a passionate governance role” (R. Cook, personal conversation, April 1, 2009).

Recommendation #2: Value and Support Knowledge Management as an Integral Component of Good Governance

A board of governors requires an array of skills and knowledge to perform its role in achieving an organization’s goals. Individual board members draw upon their personal and professional backgrounds to bring certain skills and knowledge to board deliberations. Board members function at the highest decision-making level of an organization, yet by virtue of their volunteer nature and regulations surrounding board governance, they are temporary members of the organization. During their tenure, they acquire significant knowledge about their organization’s operations and culture as well as trends and issues associated with the field in which the organization operates. Through the experience of serving on a governance board, members individually and collectively garner additional knowledge and skills within a different context—board governance. Therefore, the concept of knowledge management underpins the business of board governance.

To conduct its business, a governance board relies upon explicit knowledge contained in organizational documents and procedures as well as tacit knowledge possessed by individuals. Within a governance board, knowledge is further differentiated between board knowledge (i.e., governance roles, responsibilities, and board operations), institution knowledge (i.e., mission, vision, mandate, strategic plan, and institution

operations), and organizational culture knowledge, including tacit knowledge of how things get done within an institution. There is a dynamic nature to knowledge wherein interaction between individuals brings meaning to that knowledge regardless of whether the knowledge is explicit or tacit. Theoretically and practically, knowledge cannot be viewed as an object or an organizational entity independent of the individual and the myriad relationships existing within the organization.

Whether the term, organization, is used to describe a board of governors, a department, or the entire organization, knowledge is integral to these relationships. Recognizing knowledge management as a vital component of the governance process is a first step. This acknowledgement must then be followed by creating a knowledge management strategy to continuously cultivate and integrate individual and collective knowledge into intellectual capital. Another component of a knowledge management strategy relates to observing when board members are absent from discussions and following up with them to ensure they become informed on the topic and any related decision. Within the overall knowledge management strategy, consideration should be given to developing specific components related to governance roles, such as board succession planning, orientation, education, and development.

Through a pro-active, comprehensive, and future-oriented board succession plan, a board of governors can acquire a diversity of necessary knowledge and skills. Creating an orientation plan, as well as an education and development plan tailored to each new member, can capitalize on individual strengths and build new capacities. Incorporating opportunities for individuals to interact with one another builds relationships and brings meaning to the knowledge being managed. The experience of individuals involved in my

study, who examined their governance strategies and identified ways to personally and collectively contribute to improving them, reflected Wheatley's (2006) argument: "The best way to create ownership is to have those responsible for implementation develop the plan for themselves" (p. 68).

Considering the ongoing changes in board membership, boards should be alert to the impact of turnover on each individual, within the group as a whole, upon the institution, as well as to the integrity of the board's knowledge base. In addition to changes in people, many organizations exist in a constantly shifting environment, where the capacity for acquiring and transferring knowledge can mitigate risk and positively contribute to organizational success. There is a need for boards to develop strategies to facilitate ongoing learning and sharing of knowledge so as to keep overall intellectual capital in tact. This requirement for continuous learning within a perpetually changing group dynamic was acknowledged by Weisbord (2004), who observed a need for each new generation to engage in its own learning process rather than relying on "the myth that you can build in practices to ensure continuity of new norms".(p. i).

It is necessary to view a board of governors subjectively and contextually as a community of practice or a social network that exists in relationship to itself and others. "Knowledge grows inside relationships from ongoing circles of exchange where information is not just accumulated by individuals but is willingly shared. Information-rich, ambiguous environments are the source of surprising new births" (Wheatley, 2006, p. 104). By embracing a holistic interpretation of knowledge and engendering a knowledge management culture, boards may be in a better position to address challenges

experienced as a result of membership changes, create a dynamic and sustainable base of knowledge, and ultimately, achieve their governance mandate.

Recommendation #3: Develop and Utilize Strategies that Contribute to Creating a Culture of Trust

Commenting on the complexity of relationships, Wheatley (2006) encouraged placing a focus on processes that foster relationships by becoming “better at listening, conversing, [and] respecting one another’s uniqueness” (p. 39). Trust is at the heart of relationships, whether those relationships involve two people, a group of people, or an entire organization. Throughout my study, engendering a culture of trust and respect featured as a persistent theme within the three contexts of knowledge management, board succession planning, and presidential search. Transferring knowledge requires trust between participants. Bringing new people into a group such as a board of governors requires a commitment to developing trust within a new set of group dynamics.

Engaging in a presidential search process to choose the organization’s leader requires trust within the board, the search committee, and the organization. Having a culture of trust does not infer an organizational philosophy that is based solely on agreement and harmony. On the contrary, a trusting environment is one where people can have open and frank discussions as well as debates. This is essential to an organization’s governance and decision-making processes and, ultimately, to its viability. Kouzes and Posner (2007) argued trust is essential to leadership, and leaders must work hard to create and maintain trust. When a trusting climate exists, Kouzes and Posner posited people are more innovative, more willing to open up and let go of control, and more open to

listening to diverse viewpoints and allowing others to influence decisions, which ultimately leads to world-class organizational performance.

Trust is fragile and cannot be taken for granted. Myriad examples exist in society to show how trust, when compromised, is lost. Rather than leaving trust to chance, boards should consider consciously developing strategies for building and maintaining trust within the board as well as between the board and the organization. At a time when the organization is engaged in a presidential search, particular focus should be given to strategies that build trust within the board, the search committee, and with the internal organization. Expectations regarding confidentiality and issues about breach of confidentiality and related consequences should be addressed at the outset of the search process.

It is unlikely all board members will participate on a search committee. However, the process can involve all board members in meeting final candidates and expressing a preference for the candidate they feel would do the best job. It is not feasible to involve the entire organization in the decision related to hiring a president. Having strategies and processes in place to build trust and facilitate communication are critical to the success of a search and the transition of a new president into the organization. Neff and Leondar (1992) suggested a presidential search experience, while it involves considerable work on the part of the board and others in the institution, can “breed mutual understanding, and understanding breeds trust,... [and] many board chairs have testified to the healing and harmonizing effects of close cooperation in a common cause” (p. 88).

Establishing and ensuring a shared vision, creating personal connections, and holding people accountable for trust are ways that trust can be promoted within an

organization (Abrams et al., 2003). Consideration should be given to any unique characteristics of the organization's culture and associated expectations of stakeholders, such as the collegial nature of post-secondary institutions, and expectations around stakeholder participation in presidential searches. Trust takes time to build and people need formal and informal opportunities to "interact with one another and in the process form more trusting, more collaborative relationships" (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 246).

Recommendation #4: Design a Presidential Search Process to Fit with Organizational

Context and Culture

The relationship between a presidential search process and an organization's context and culture came forward in my study as an important area for consideration by boards. My research supported Neff and Leondar's (1992, p. xv) observation that each recruitment exercise is unique even within the same institution. Suggesting boards should view a presidential search as a change imperative critical to an institution's development, Block and McLaughlin (1993) recommended boards work diligently to match the leader's "skills, interests, and background [with] the needs of an institution in a particular phase of its development" (p. xv). In addition to finding a fit between the new president and the institution, my study highlighted the need for, and value resulting from, designing a search process that fits with the organization's culture.

The six search models (see Chapter 4, Search Committee Models) presented in my study were purposefully tailored to each institution's needs and culture at a particular point in time. While some models incorporated strategies from recruitment firms, none adopted an off-the-shelf approach. The current and future contexts of the institutions were considered in terms of the leadership being recruited. In two situations, choices

related to the presidential search process were deliberately made to effect change within the organizations' cultures. The results were positive for these institutions within their respective contexts. In several cases—but not all, finding a search firm that understands and relates to the institution's culture, creating a transparent and inclusive internal consultation process, and facilitating a transition plan between the incumbent and the new president were identified as valued presidential search strategies. While there may have been some common elements in the models (e.g., having a search committee, developing a position profile, utilizing a search process, communicating within the institution, ensuring confidentiality, and placing the final decision with the board), each of the models explored in my study were further defined and refined in ways distinct to the institution.

Organizational Implications

Each of the preceding broad-based governance recommendations holds implications for the MacEwan Board of Governors.

Knowledge Management Strategy

As outlined in the organizational overview (see Chapter 2), MacEwan has, and will continue to, experience significant change within its internal and external environments. Similarly, based on current board members' terms of appointment, the potential exists for a 100% change in members on the MacEwan board. This presents a significant potential loss of intellectual capital and skill set within a small group of twelve people, who are responsible for providing governance to the institution and making critical decisions related to its future. Through my research experience, MacEwan participants acknowledged a need to increase individual and group awareness and

thinking about forthcoming changes in membership and the associated need for knowledge transfer. This means the MacEwan board will need to continually examine and adjust its knowledge management strategy specifically related to its plans for board succession, orientation, and education. Continuous learning and pro-actively researching new information to share with the rest of the board would be a highly effective way to promote learning.

In terms of board succession planning, the MacEwan board should review its matrix of current members' terms and skills on a bi-annual basis in addition to any review that takes place when vacancies are coming forward. These reviews should be conducted through in-camera meetings, retreats, and facilitated discussions by the Board's Human Resources Committee. The board succession plan should be future-oriented and include the following elements: (a) creation of a skills profile for the vacancy that is tailored to the needs and culture of the board, (b) identification of future opportunities and challenges including any gaps, (c) a process for recruiting candidates, (d) a process for recommending the preferred candidate to the Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, and (e) a transition and orientation strategy for the new member.

While the current orientation plan used by MacEwan's board is relatively effective, my study identified several ideas to enhance the plan. Some participants identified the value of a mentor or buddy system in the orientation of new members. The MacEwan board should initiate a mentor or buddy system, whereby the new board member is matched with a current member, and they meet on a regular basis. In addition to the mentor, regular check-ins by the board chair and board manager would identify any

gaps in knowledge requiring focus. Secondly, the new member should connect with the retiring member to get background on their experience as a MacEwan board member. Providing campus tours and introducing the new board member to staff and programs at each campus would be helpful for building the new member's institutional knowledge and relationships. Offering an educational session about governance roles and responsibilities would increase the new member's knowledge and skills as a governing board member. This could also be extended to regular governance sessions for all board members as an overall strategy to enhance members' knowledge and skills about governance.

The orientation manual used by the MacEwan board contains explicit information about the board, the institution, and the post-secondary sector. To enhance the value of the manual, the MacEwan board should have the new member and an experienced member engage in conversation about the written contents of the manual in contrast to having the new member read the manual alone. Through these conversations, experienced board members would help new members understand some of the contextual pieces that are part of any board decision. The orientation program should be conducted over a one-year time frame using a variety of techniques and resources and tailored to meet the new member's needs.

To improve its education and development plan, the MacEwan board should identify strategic topics for discussion at its retreat and meetings and find ways to improve the quality of these educational presentations. Participating in conferences and courses related to governance, including conducting presentations at conferences, would help members remain current in this field. Taking the opportunity to discuss governance

roles and responsibilities would help members to focus on the governance level of the organization and avoid any tendency to move into administrative matters.

Members should also find opportunities to learn more about MacEwan, other post-secondary institutions and their board governance processes, as well as trends in the post-secondary sector. This information would help inform board decisions and deliberations about strategic organizational priorities within a relevant context. Attending formal and informal institutional events and activities would assist in increasing members' knowledge about MacEwan and build relationships with the internal community. Similarly, attending formal and informal board events and activities would increase members' knowledge of one another and foster relationships within the board. As mentioned in Recommendation #1, MacEwan board members will also need to be alert to situations where a board colleague is absent from discussions and initiate follow up with the individual to ensure he or she becomes informed on the topic and any related decisions.

Implementing each of these suggestions will require individual members to commit additional time and energy. This presents a dilemma, as MacEwan participants in my study also cited a need to respect the volunteer nature of their role as board members and the time they have available to meet this obligation. The MacEwan Board's Human Resources Committee will need to assume responsibility for facilitating some of this activity. As well, my role as Senior Manager of Board Operations is impacted in terms of managing the MacEwan board's orientation, education, and development processes and the people involved in each process.

Individual and Group Learning

Many of the recommendations and implications noted in the preceding section on knowledge management relate directly to individual and group learning within the MacEwan board. When developing or enhancing its orientation and education strategies, consideration should be given to the unique characteristics and needs each MacEwan board member brings to the group. A common theme arose in the research where MacEwan participants expressed preference for orientation and education plans tailored to members' needs. They also suggested members be provided with the option to self-identify and self-select their learning plans. Creating processes and opportunities for members to acquire and transfer knowledge in ways that fit their individual style and needs would be of benefit to the overall knowledge management strategy of the MacEwan board. It is also important for the MacEwan board to be aware of the impact member turnover has on each individual's knowledge base, as well as the group's knowledge base, and take a proactive approach to transfer knowledge.

When choosing learning activities, the MacEwan board should apply the principles noted in Recommendation #2: (a) choose a salient topic, (b) use a unique and equitable process for acquiring and transferring the knowledge, and (c) select an appropriate time for the learning opportunity. To generate excitement about and interest in the topic and activity, a variety of group interaction techniques, including non-traditional ones, should be used for presentations and discussions at retreats and meetings. The MacEwan board should conduct group presentations at post-secondary governance conferences to share its governance strategies and learn from other boards. Board members who attend conferences or participate in other learning activities should

be asked to provide an overview of these experiences to other MacEwan board colleagues.

The MacEwan board should also incorporate an assessment of individual learning into its annual evaluation activity, whereby members would identify any new learning that has taken place in the preceding year. Acknowledging and building upon each board member's past experiences and prior learning, encouraging interaction between members, matching facilitating strategies with the learning needs and styles of each member, providing a variety of learning experiences, and changing strategies to meet evolving context and content are principles MacKeracher (2006) associated with successful adult learning.

By creating and engaging in these individual and group learning opportunities, the MacEwan board has the chance to experience what Senge (1990) described as the cornerstone of a learning organization: "a learning team [that] continually fosters other learning teams through inculcating the practices and skills [and knowledge] of team learning more broadly" (p. 237).

Trust

Boards need a phenomenal degree of trust and respect for each other to be able to face challenges. They need to be able to talk openly and frankly about all subjects, all the time and operate with a no surprises policy. Trust reflects credibility. Boards can accomplish a lot and get through difficult things in a professional manner if trust is there. (FG240)

This statement by a focus group participant captures the integral role trust plays within a governance environment and, ultimately, to the success of the institution. As mentioned in the organizational overview in Chapter 2,

MacEwan has experienced several significant changes in its internal and external environments: a new mandate to offer undergraduate degrees, a new mission statement, and a new academic governance model. More change is inevitable. Each of these change factors influences and is influenced by MacEwan's organizational culture, which places a high priority on collegiality and participation in decision-making. At the core of that culture is the principle of trust. Trust underpins every aspect of the MacEwan's board's operations, from relationships within the board to those between the board and the internal community.

My study provided MacEwan board members with an opportunity to discuss trust within three contexts: knowledge management, board succession planning, and presidential search. The MacEwan board participants in my study remarked upon the high degree of trust and confidence existing within the current board (see Chapter 4, Study Findings: Interpersonal Trust). They also acknowledged a need to sustain this throughout upcoming changes in board membership. Finally, they specifically highlighted a need to develop trust between the board, the search committee, and the institution's community at the time of the next presidential search.

The MacEwan board must consciously and continuously work to engender a culture of trust within the board and between the board and the institution's internal community. This must be done individually by each board member as well as collectively by the board. In terms of board succession planning, the MacEwan board should include trust as a characteristic desired in new members and seek out candidates who have a reputation based on trust. When examining and implementing elements of its knowledge management strategy, the MacEwan board should include dialogue about trust.

Through a mentor or buddy system, current members could engage with a new member, discuss the importance of trust, and facilitate opportunities for one-on-one as well as group relationship-building. A similar conversation between a retiring member and a new member could identify situations where trust was challenged and how the situation was resolved. The topic of trust should form part of the new member's orientation meeting with the board chair and president. Trust should feature as a regular part of a retreat or in-camera meeting agenda and be discussed within a variety of contexts. It should also be brought forward for discussion at meetings between the board and internal constituencies with a focus on organizational culture and stakeholder expectations. When participating in or presenting at conferences or engaging with external board colleagues, the MacEwan board should present the topic of trust for discussion.

At the time when MacEwan engages in its next presidential search, the MacEwan board should place a priority on incorporating trust into the various search activities and processes. To ensure people are appropriately informed of progress on the search and to create a sense of transparency around the search, the MacEwan board should have a communication strategy in place. Trust will be a factor in the relationship with the recruitment firm. Trust will play a role in relationships within the board, between the board and the search committee, and between the board, the search committee, and internal stakeholders. Confidentiality will also be a critical element of the next presidential search, and the MacEwan board should develop a confidentiality agreement related to the search. The agreement should include processes and consequences to address any breaches of confidentiality. The board should publicly state its position

regarding trust and confidentiality. However, the board cannot rely on a written agreement to produce trust and confidentiality. Ultimately, it will be through dialogue and experience that trust is created.

Presidential Search

MacEwan board participants in my study acquired significant information about the topic of presidential search. The MacEwan board should engage in an activity whereby this knowledge can be shared with other board members in the near term and on an ongoing basis. As a continuous learning strategy on the topic of presidential search, MacEwan board members, individually and as a group, should regularly participate in conferences and workshops as well as actively seek out and read written materials. The MacEwan board should develop a policy or set of guidelines on presidential search. Such a policy should be broad, flexible, and provide a general framework that can be adapted to fit the institution's context and culture.

During MacEwan's next presidential search process, the board should thoughtfully and proactively consider each of the elements featured in the Study Findings section of my report. As I outlined in the organizational overview in Chapter 2, the previous search conducted in 1996 occurred within a context that is dramatically different from the current one, and MacEwan's organizational context continues to evolve in myriad ways. A guiding principle for the MacEwan board regarding the next presidential search should be to carefully consider the context of the institution at the time of the search and into the future.

In the early pre-planning phase, the board should have a general concept of the search process. The plan should include the following elements: timelines, informal and

formal notice from the incumbent, a visioning exercise to create an institution and candidate profile, establishment of a search committee, and hiring of a recruitment specialist. Other elements of the plan would relate to an internal consultation or stakeholder engagement process, a process for short-listing candidates, an interview process, a process for conducting reference checks, parameters of and a process for developing a compensation package, and a transition strategy.

Regarding the search committee model, the MacEwan board should develop consensus on membership, committee chair, terms of reference, and relationship between the committee and the board. The board's visioning exercise and resulting institution and candidate profile should focus on current and future organizational needs. In addition to discussing confidentiality and together creating a confidentiality agreement, the board should consider any potential sensitivities and ethical issues related to the search. When hiring a recruitment specialist, the board should seek a fit with MacEwan's organizational culture. Similarly, organizational culture should feature in how the stakeholder consultation and engagement process is designed.

A communication strategy for internal and external audiences should be developed utilizing a variety of processes, venues, and technology. The board should confirm the role of the institution's human resources department in relation to researching and providing guidance on a compensation package and contract for the new president. The board should discuss the circumstances under which an interim president would be appointed including any potential issues. A transition strategy should be developed to meet the needs of the incumbent, the new president, and the institution. As a guiding

principle, the MacEwan board should consider the institution's needs and culture within every aspect of the search and throughout the search process.

MacEwan's current president is an experienced, well-respected, and well-known leader in the post-secondary sector, provincially, nationally, and internationally, as well as within the local community. He is also a highly popular leader within MacEwan. As it enters into the next search, the MacEwan board will need to consider a couple of factors related to the incumbent: (a) the role of the incumbent in the search process including transition; (b) how to maintain the integrity, accountability, and responsibility of the incumbent during the search; and (c) the imminent change in the relationship between the incumbent, the board, and the institution. As well, the MacEwan board should reflect on characteristics and skills desired in a new leader.

The MacEwan board should actively seek out opportunities to promote and profile the institution within the Canadian post-secondary sector as a strategy to eventually market the recruitment opportunity. The board should be active, yet discrete, in informing itself about potential presidential candidates. As well, the board should inform itself on issues and trends in the Alberta and Canadian post-secondary sector, so as to remain current and bring this knowledge to a visioning exercise for the institution and the position profiles. MacEwan board members should identify ways in which they can individually and collectively contribute to the next presidential search process. This may include participating on the search committee or in activities related to the search. With the forthcoming change in membership on the MacEwan board, members should commit to transferring knowledge about presidential search to board colleagues as a governance practice.

Implications for Future Research

In this section, I identify five areas for potential future research within the broad parameters of board governance. I also point to specific applicability within the context of the public post-secondary system of governance.

Board Succession Planning

Available literature on the topic of board succession planning within the post-secondary education system and non-profit sector was limited. Having a framework was identified as an important governance trend; however, few details or guidelines were presented in the literature. Further research on frameworks used by boards to identify, recruit, and select members would be of value, as well any challenges boards experience in these processes. Under the general principle of “getting the right people on the board”, it would be interesting to assess specific skills, competencies, and personal attributes sought and acquired in board members. For example, what is the impact on the board’s effectiveness of having or not having a board member with financial or legal expertise?

Do boards make strategic choices to seek out members with unique skill sets in property development or linkages to key sectors such as the aboriginal community or medical sector? What is the impact of these choices on the board’s effectiveness over a five-term term? It would also be helpful to get a deeper and broader understanding of the types of orientation, education, and development plans utilized by boards to train members about their governance roles as well as trends and issues in the post-secondary sector. Finally, it would be of value to assess how successful boards are in transferring knowledge between departing members and incoming members. Conducting such research on a national level would provide valuable context and comparison to data

collected in my study. It may also identify best practices that could be adopted across a variety of governance sectors.

President and CEO Succession Planning

Succession planning relative to the president and CEO is receiving increased attention within all sectors, particularly in the corporate area. Corporate succession plans often identify individuals for movement within the organization and facilitate their leadership development through various educational and experiential strategies. While there has been some progress in the post-secondary sector, there remains a reluctance to engage in such conversations and planning on a strategic basis. Post-secondary institutions often have a plan to address short-term emergencies; however, few have developed strategic plans and protocol for leadership turnover. The unique egalitarian culture of the post-secondary environment is often resistant to singling out individuals with more promise than others as heir-apparent successors. Creating a plan while the current president is still resident may not be embraced.

Within an educational environment, the concept of leadership development may not be encouraged because administrative positions may be viewed as less important than faculty positions, which relate to the core of the institution's mission. While some boards have engaged in conversation on the topic of succession planning, there remains a great deal of work to be done in socializing the concept within institutions as well as creating and implementing leadership development plans. With the projected turnover of presidents in the next five to seven years, it would be interesting to investigate whether or not post-secondary institutions are pro-actively engaged in succession planning, the strategies adopted for leadership development, and any impact this might have on their

ability to develop successful leaders within their organization and across the provincial and national post-secondary network.

Best Practices for Board Succession Plans and Presidential Search Processes

My second research sub-question focused on best practices boards might consider when developing board succession plans and presidential search processes. The topic of best practice within these contexts was not defined in my literature review chapter because I was unable to locate relevant research. Nonetheless, a consistent theme throughout Chapter 4 was the advice provided by participants to tailor plans to the needs and culture of the institution. These include plans for board succession, orientation, education, development, and presidential search.

Essentially, I learned the best practices for a board and institution are the ones that work best for them. Further research on a national and North American basis regarding the success or non-success of tailored board succession plans and presidential processes would provide a resource for institutions engaging in these activities. As well, it would be useful to learn whether institutions link their board succession plan and presidential search process. For example, do boards make strategic choices regarding member recruitment in preparation for a forthcoming presidential search? If so, do such choices transcend the presidential transition process and what value, if any, does that bring to the new president and to the board?

The Role of Professional Board Staff

A fourth area of deficiency in current research related to the role of individuals who provide support to post-secondary boards. As the founding member of two networks of professional board staff colleagues, one in Alberta and the other at a national level, I

am intimately familiar with the limited resources for professional development and absence of research in this field of work. Throughout my career, in an effort to fill this void, I have reviewed and prepared a broad spectrum of printed resources on governance topics. In many cases, these resources have featured the role of professional board staff. I have also attended and presented at several conferences on these and other governance topics.

Kerr and Gade (1989) commented on the need to provide good staff service to manage the business and operations of boards of universities and colleges. They identified several areas requiring particular attention by professional board staff: facilitating board orientation, preparing meeting agendas and reports to the board, discussing controversial topics with presidents and board chairs, providing board members with advance information on policy matters, liaising between constituencies and the board, and coordinating information flow between the president's office and the board office as well as within the institution.

Kerr and Gade noted a variety of models are used for providing these staff services, ranging from part-time to full-time and, in some cases, combining the role with another position in the organization such as a vice president or assistant to the president. They further acknowledged a wide variation in the responsibilities associated with the position of board staff. Beyond general observations such as those made by Kerr and Cade, the literature fails to more deeply examine the role of board staff in the governance process.

There is also a vacuum in the literature relative to succession planning for professional board staff. Areas of inquiry could include identifying qualifications,

training, and responsibilities of professional board staff. As well, it would be helpful to assess current demographics of professional board staff and ascertain succession strategies being used for these positions. In terms of professional development, it would be of value to gather information on the range, availability, and utilization of educational opportunities by professional board staff. Another area to investigate would be the role of professional board staff within the governance structure relative to the roles and responsibilities of board members. For example, what role do professional board staff play in knowledge transfer within boards of governors? How do professional board staff contribute to the recruitment, orientation, and education of boards? What is the role of professional board staff in a presidential search process? Finally, what opportunities and challenges do professional board staff face in developing and enhancing their professional skills, sharing their expertise, and providing service to boards?

Action Research as a Tool for Board Learning

A fifth potential area for future research relates to the use of an action research project as a group learning technique for boards of governors. My project is evidence such an experience can have a significant and positive impact on board members' learning, both individually and as a group. One question to pose in a follow-up study with these participants is whether this was a result of participating in a higher-level learning experience through a graduate research project or related to the methodologies (i.e., survey, focus group, interview, and World Café group activity) or other factors. It would be helpful to expand the scope of my study on a national and North American basis to inform board governance activities on a broader basis.

While it is not unusual for board members to complete surveys on governance topics, participation in action learning is not common practice. For example, an area to explore is how boards can expand their education and development role to include action learning. It would be interesting to assess board members' motivation for, and success with, personally taking on tasks to gather knowledge. Another question to consider is whether one can outsource knowledge acquisition and transfer. Do individuals experience the same results through a project conducted by a paid professional such as a consultant in contrast to a graduate research project carried out by someone with whom they have an existing professional relationship? What role, if any, does understanding the context of the organization play in successfully transferring knowledge? Does having one person serve as a constant factor throughout a knowledge transfer experience contribute to the degree of learning experienced by each participant and the group?

CHAPTER SIX: LESSONS LEARNED

The dance of this universe requires that we open ourselves to the unknown. Knowing the steps ahead of time is not important; being willing to engage with the music and move freely onto the dance floor is what's essential (Wheatley, 2006, p. 116).

Dancing has been a passion throughout my life. I have often looked upon dance as a metaphor for how I live my life—sometimes it's impromptu, at other times choreographed, sometimes it's chaotic, sometimes synchronized, sometimes it's an energetic jive or twist, at other times it's a graceful waltz, sometimes I dance to a favourite old song, at other times it's a new favourite. When I began this program two years ago, I was looking to expand my academic dance repertoire. I wanted to rekindle the rhythm in my professional dance routine. I wanted to be curious, experiment, take risks, and stretch myself. My learning journey over these past two years has been a fascinating dance to experience—academically, as a leader, and personally.

My Academic Dance

For my entire life, I have had a thirst for knowledge so deeply ingrained inside of me that, when I have not been engaged in learning either formally or informally, I feel stagnant, empty, and unfulfilled. Learning is a lifelong dance for me and my learning map is never complete. This graduate program caused me to delve deep inside myself, challenge my strengths and weaknesses, and dance with a variety of people in an uncharted experiment.

Prior to the Master of Arts in Leadership program, I had spent more than twelve years as an adult learner pursuing my undergraduate degree on a part-time basis in traditional classroom settings and through independent distance learning, including

correspondence and videoconference. I found a valuable aspect of this program was the opportunity to critically analyze my learning style and identify my learning needs along with strategies that work and do not work for me. For the first time in my adult learning life, I developed a comprehensive and integrated picture of my learning style and needs. I discovered the interplay between how and why I dance—where my energy for dancing originates; the way I dance when I need to be introspective and reflective; my need to experiment and be creative when choreographing my dance routines; my desire to help other dancers attain their success; my insatiable need to learn new dance steps and techniques, as well as my obsession with organizing and coordinating every element of my life's dance. I experienced many "Ah-ha!" moments and much of this new awareness has brought me value, educationally and professionally, over the past two years.

As an introvert, I realized I needed a lot of time for deep thinking before contributing to the online discussion forums and group activities. I found many opportunities to display my expressive, enthusiastic, and creative sides during each residence: when preparing online postings, working within groups, and writing papers. Developing relationships within small groups or one-on-one satisfied my relational needs. Throughout the two years, I coordinated Sunday morning "pyjama" phone calls with several classmates—these were often sanity-saving conversations and I remain eternally grateful to Meike, Geoff, Joan, Nicole, and Redd for their sage advice as well as for picking me up, dusting me off, and sending me back to the dance floor when I needed it. I am also very appreciative for the support from my classmates in Edmonton who danced with me literally and figuratively many times over the past two years: Vickie, Ken, Kelli, Christine, Diane, Brian, and Sheila.

Another significant insight about my learning style was the extent of my need for visual learning strategies. My oversized whiteboard and corkboard, recycled from the trash at my workplace, were constant partners through this academic dance. It is interesting to note that each and every time I deviated from dancing with them, I struggled. Getting lost in databases and books fed my curiosity and my insatiable need for gathering myriad perspectives. Learning and using new tools and technology for my academic dance also proved to be an important part of my learning style. From the Royal Roads University online communication tools to online databases and e-books through to enhancing my skills with Word® and learning RefWorks®, Write-N-Cite®, SurveyMonkey®, Audacity®, and transcription software, I now have a larger catalogue of tools with which to dance personally, professionally, and with others.

A particular learning experience continues to resonate with me. From the start of the program, I wrestled with keeping a reflective learning journal. While there was some advice provided in course overviews, I could not find a rhythm or technique that worked for me. I chose to challenge myself by making this my self-directed learning project in the first online course. This became my foray into the graduate research dance, as the steps I used mirrored those of the research project experience. For this rehearsal, I researched the topic through two post-secondary libraries, conducted interviews, tested various techniques and media, reviewed an array of structures for journals, and prepared a paper (Baptista, 2007) outlining my findings. Since that time, my paper has been used as a resource by learners at Royal Roads, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and Grant MacEwan College. Creating an innovative learning resource for other dancers brought me great satisfaction.

My action research project provided me with an opportunity to choreograph a special dance experience for myself and for the MacEwan board volunteers. This dance allowed us to experiment with a variety of media, a range of venues, and different audiences. Some of the dance routines were solo (survey and interviews), others involved pairs (focus groups), with the final one being an outstanding ensemble performance (World Café). As the researcher, I chose a passionate piece of music for the research dance—board governance and presidential search. I located and assembled dancers, choreographed sequences, organized performances, experimented and improvised when necessary, interpreted the dancers' insights, proposed a new synergistic dance routine, and suggested areas for future dancers to explore. Together, we created a unique and exciting piece of academic and governance art for others to learn from and enjoy.

My Self-Awareness Dance

My journey of self-discovery and growth began from the first discussion forum and continued through to the last page of this report. We used a wide variety of psychological assessment tools and techniques in this program. While useful for gaining insight on one's personality styles and those of others, such tools required personal interaction and shared experiences to bring them to life. Through every experience, I discovered parts of the dancer inside me. Sitting in the garden during first residence, I rediscovered my passion for myself. With each course, my strengths and weaknesses were tested. I pulled and pushed myself toward each goal, often with the help of classmates, friends, and family. I learned to be honest with myself about my skills and talents and to seek out others to complement and contrast what I had to offer. I also learned the value of diversity in compiling a team of dancers. I found a sponsor, whose

skills and insights differed from mine, and who was able to challenge my routines and interpretations. My faculty supervisor has an extensive research background and showed passion for my dance right from the beginning of the research process. As I danced through the first few months of the program, I found a new friend, a student from a 2006 cohort, who quietly guided me through many of the twists and turns of my learning journey. Although I have technical and writing skills, I knew I did not have the APA flair to produce a quality graduate piece of work on my own. Therefore, I sought and chose an editor with talent par excellence, who was able to teach me many new dance skills.

At the end of the first residence, I had a profound experience, which taught me how connected we all are in our universe. Students from a preceding cohort were honouring their classmate who had passed away two months prior. As I listened to them sing the song they wrote for her, I realized I knew the person they were remembering. While I had been aware my friend was a student in the program, I did not know she was in that particular cohort. She and I had shared a passion for learning and dancing. I was touched by the way these students celebrated the heart and soul of my friend and by the connection this brought between two cohorts of strangers. On these and other occasions throughout this program, I lived first hand what Kouzes and Posner (2006) called “self-revealing moments [where] adversity introduces you to yourself” (p. 144).

Wheatley (2006) described “the dance of creation” (p. 119) as a process of growth requiring us to disintegrate, descend into chaos, notice when we’ve reached the end, and finally “emerge changed, stronger in some ways, new” (p. 119).

As human beings we are complex and multi-dimensional entities living in an equally complex and multi-dimensional world – there is so much to learn about ourselves, particularly in relation to others. The key, in my mind, is being open to

the learning that needs to take place throughout our lives” (Personal Reflective Journal, November 22, 2007).

At the mid-point of year one in the program, I almost quit. I was physically and mentally exhausted and had spiralled into a place of chaos and self-doubt. I retreated into a space of internal isolation. While I had no problem helping others when they reached out to me, my independent nature—also known as stubbornness—was keeping me from reaching out for help. My classmate, Nicole, and instructor, Donna, intervened and kept me from falling over the edge. This taught me the value of finding the person(s) with whom we can be authentic and reach out before we get to the edge. The principle of support that our cohort included in our mission statement had a deeper and more personal connection for me after this experience. To be an effective leader, it is my contention that I must engage in an ongoing dance of self-discovery, as my failure to do so will significantly limit my potential as a leader and as a human being.

My Leadership Dance

Through this section, I will reflect on, and expand upon, concepts I explored in my leadership philosophy statement (Baptista, 2008). As a metaphor for leadership, dance captures many concepts associated with my leadership philosophy. Through the choreography of my leadership dance movements, I am continuously shaped by myself and by those with whom I have the privilege to dance. My leadership philosophy is one of passion, enthusiasm, relationships, partnerships, and diversity. Perpetual self-development and the development of others are integral components. Creating a culture that motivates and empowers others to dance is essential in my leadership dance. My leadership legacy is defined by the quality of leadership I foster in others on a daily basis.

I have an intrinsic sense of passion, which translates into energy that is visible to, and influencing upon, those with whom I interact. Prior to starting the Master of Arts in Leadership program, my dance had become lacklustre and filled with boring, repetitive steps. As I moved through the program, interacting with classmates and faculty, experiencing the two residencies, reading interesting literature, and writing about leadership, my energy and passion were rekindled. This also translated into my professional dance theatre, where I shifted roles and responsibilities for myself and my colleagues. Together we have a new buoyancy and sense of professional fulfilment.

Kouzes and Posner (2006) observed, “The best leaders turn their followers into leaders, realizing that the journey ahead requires many guides” (p. 91). One of my aspirations as a leader is to create more dancers, whether that is in my professional dance theatre, my volunteer one, or my personal dance theatre. I am keenly aware of the importance of creating an organizational climate that releases the motivation inside people. What inspires and motivates varies from one person to another. The key is to listen authentically to what the person identifies as their source of motivation and create an empowered climate where people are fully engaged in meaningful work and able to pursue their dreams. As a leader who believes in and values the people I work and live with, I fervently support their renewal and facilitate opportunities so each person can reach his or her leadership potential—whatever that may be. I had the privilege throughout this graduate learning experience to mentor, and be mentored by, classmates, friends, and colleagues.

In the context of the leadership dance, it is certainly possible to dance solo; however, having a partner or partners produces a different momentum, generating

numerous opportunities for shared discovery, creativity, and synergy. Each partner brings unique skills, gifts, and energy to co-create the dance. “No one can hope to lead any organization by standing outside or ignoring the web of relationships through which all work is accomplished” (Wheatley, 2006, p. 165). Relationships, and in particular, networks have been an integral part of my professional life. Throughout my career, I have led the creation of provincial, national, and international networks of my peers. We share a bond of trust and we harness, distribute, and learn about a unique body of knowledge—board governance.

Relationships also featured as an essential theme throughout my studies, including the research project. Through the assistance of my colleagues and board members across Alberta and British Columbia, I was able to gather valuable insights on a several key governance topics: board recruitment, orientation, education, and presidential search. My cohort of learners was also a valued network of relationships, vital to my success on this learning journey. My experience with networks is reflected in Wheatley’s (2006) observation,

A network is fuelled more by passion than by information....Members find each other, learn from each other, and develop strategies and actions....Once the network has momentum, passion and individual creativity propel it forward” (p. 182).

The metaphor of dance also captures the rich concept of diversity. Every dancer is different in the ensemble. We all bring a different lens to the leadership dance floor: one that encompasses our individual experiences, knowledge, skills, and perspective. The styles of dance and leadership are as varied and complex as the world in which we live and work. Such dances can be traditional, contemporary, classical, regional, cultural,

impulsive, synchronized, solo, or with a partner. They should be appreciated for their uniqueness and shared across many audiences. They give us an opportunity to look inside and embrace our culture and the culture of others.

Conclusion

As this dance performance comes to a close, I'll put aside my whiteboard, curl up in a chair with my dog beside me, and lose myself inside a great book. I look forward to many nights of dancing with my husband, family, and friends. My research project is not over; the real work is just starting. I will be dancing with many of these participants for the next few years as I take the learning of my research forward to guide ongoing processes for board renewal, knowledge acquisition and transfer, and perhaps, an actual presidential search process. Together, we will travel along on the enthusiasm generated through this joint learning journey. I have broadened my dance repertoire, but it will continue to evolve with each new experience and relationship that comes into my life. I hope each day I leave the dance floor better than I found it and achieve what Kouzes and Posner (2006) evoked:

You just never know whose life you might touch. You just never know what change you might initiate and what impact you might have. You just never know when that critical moment might come. What you do know is that you can make a difference. You can leave this world better than you found it"(p. 181).

So with each twist and turn of this ongoing dance of self-discovery, I will live my vision statement: Life is a new dance everyday—embrace it!

REFERENCES

- Abrams, L. C., Cross, R., Lesser, E., & Levin, D. Z. (2003). Nurturing interpersonal trust in knowledge-sharing networks. *Academy of Management Executive*, 17(4), 64-77.
- Argote, L. (1999). *Organizational learning: Creating, retaining and transferring knowledge*. Norwell, MASS: Kluwer Academic.
- Argote, L. (2005). Reflections on two views of managing learning and knowledge in organizations. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 14(1), 43-48.
- Argote, L., McEvily, B., & Reagans, R. (2003). Managing knowledge in organizations: An integrative framework and review of emerging themes. *Management Science*, 49(4), 571-582.
- Baptista, T. M. (2007). *Reflective learning journals: A self-directed learning project*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Baptista, T. M. (2008). *The dance of leadership: A personal philosophy*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Berg, B. L. (2004). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books
- Block McLaughlin, J. (1993). Selecting the chief executive. In Richard T. Ingram and Associates (Ed.), *In governing public colleges and universities: A handbook for trustees, chief executives, and other campus leaders* (1st ed., pp. 112–125). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.
- Bollinger, A. S., & Smith, R. D. (2001). Managing organizational knowledge as a strategic asset. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 5(1), 8–18.
- Borgatti, S. P., & Cross, R. (2003). A relational view of information seeking and learning in social networks. *Management Science*, 49(4), 432-445.
- Brown, J., & Isaacs, D. (2005). Conversation as a core process: Co-creating business and social value. *Reflections*, 6(4), 23-28.
- Bugg, G., & Dallhoff, S. (2006). *National study on board governance practices in the non-profit and voluntary sector in Canada*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://www.cvsrd.org/eng/docs/Policy%20and%20Practice/National%20Study%20of%20Board%20Governance.pdf>

- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. (1998 with 2000, 2002 and 2005 amendments). *Tri-council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans*. Retrieved April 8, 2008, from <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm>
- Chait, R. P., Holland, T. P., & Taylor, B. E. (1993). *The effective board of trustees*. Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.
- Chait, R. P., Ryan, W. P., & Taylor, B. E. (2005). *Governance as leadership: Reframing the work of nonprofit boards*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Christensen, P. H. (2007). Knowledge sharing: Moving away from the obsession with best practices. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 11(1), 36-47.
- Coghlan, D., & Brannick, T. (2007). *Doing action research in your own organization* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Curran, K., & Casey, M. (2006). Expressing emotion in electronic mail. *Kybernetes*, 35(5), 616-631.
- Darr, E. D., & Kurtzberg, T. R. (2000). An investigation of partner similarity dimensions on knowledge transfer. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 82(1), 28-44.
- Davenport, T. H., & Prusak, L. (2000). *Working knowledge: How organizations manage what they know* Harvard Business School Press.
- Davis, G. (1997, Summer). Orientation and professional development of trustees. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 98, 21.
- DiBella, A. J., & Nevis, E. C. (1998). *How organizations learn: An integrated strategy for building learning capability*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Dixon, N. M. (2000). *Common knowledge: How companies thrive by sharing what they know*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Dunn, F. E. (2008, October). *Report of the Auditor General of Alberta*. Edmonton, AB. Canada: Government of Alberta.
- Glesne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). New York: Longman.
- Government of Alberta. (2009). *Ministerial orders-in-council*. Retrieved February 18, 2009, from http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca/display_orders.cfm

- Government of British Columbia. (2009). *Ministerial orders-in-council*. Retrieved February 18, 2009, from <http://www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/oic/>
- Government of British Columbia, The Board Resourcing and Development Office. (2005). *Best practice guidelines: BC governance and disclosure guidelines for governing boards of public sector organizations*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from <http://www.lcs.gov.bc.ca/brdo/governance/corporateguidelines.pdf>
- Grant MacEwan College. (1997). *Finding the right CEO*. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from <http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/ims/client/upload/FindWEB.pdf>
- Grant MacEwan College. (2006). *Board policy C5052 ethical review of research with human participants*. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from <http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/ims/client/upload/C5052%20Ethical%20Review%20of%20Research%20with%20Human%20Participants.pdf>
- Grant MacEwan College. (2007a). *Academic governance*. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from <http://www.macewan.ca/academicgovernance>
- Grant MacEwan College. (2007b). *Roles of the Board of Governors*. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from <http://www.macewan.ca/boardofgovernors>
- Grant MacEwan College. (2007c). *International centre*. Retrieved January 27, 2008 from <http://www1.macewan.ca/web/international>
- Grant MacEwan College. (2008). *Mission, vision, mandate, strategic directions, and values*. Retrieved January 27, 2008, from http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/board_gov/about/DetailsPage.cfm?id=488
- Grant MacEwan College. (2008, October 16). *Quick facts and trends*. Retrieved February 28, 2009, from http://www.macewan.ca/web/services/ims/client/upload/Fact%20Sheet%2016_10_08.pdf
- Hart, C. (2003). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hinds, P., & Pfeffer, J. (2003). Why organizations don't "know what they know": Cognitive and motivational factors affecting the transfer of expertise. In M. S. Ackerman, V. Pipek & V. Wulf (Eds.), *Sharing expertise: Beyond knowledge management* (pp. 3–26) Retrieved from netLibrary database
- Huysman, M., & de Wit, D. (2003). A critical evaluation of knowledge management practices. In M. S. Ackerman, V. Pipek & V. Wulf (Eds.), *Sharing expertise: Beyond knowledge management* (pp. 27–51) Retrieved from netLibrary database

- Kaye, B., & Jacobson, B. (2002). Legacy consciousness: An essential leadership role. In L. Segil, M. Goldsmith & J. Belasco (Eds.), *Partnering: The new face of leadership* (pp. 281–287). New York: AMACOM, a division of American Management Association.
- Kerr, C., & Gade, M. L. (1989). *The guardians: Boards of trustees of American colleges and universities, what they do and how well they do it*. Washington, DC: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.
- Kirby, S., & McKenna, K. (1989). *Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins*. Toronto, ON. Canada: Garamond Press.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (1987). *The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2006). *A leader's legacy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2007). *The leadership challenge: The most trusted source on becoming a better leader* (4th ed.). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lakey, B. M. (2007). *The board building cycle: Nine steps of finding, recruiting, and engaging nonprofit board members* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: National Center for Nonprofit Boards.
- Levin, D. Z., & Cross, R. (2004). The strength of weak ties you can trust: The mediating role of trust in effective knowledge transfer. *Management Science*, 50(11), 1477–1490.
- Levin, D. Z., Whitener, E. M., & Cross, R. (2006). Perceived trustworthiness of knowledge sources: The moderating impact of relationship length. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(5), 1163-1171.
- Li, L. (2005). The effects of trust and shared vision on inward knowledge transfer in subsidiaries' intra- and inter-organizational relationships. *International Business Review*, 14(1), 77-95.
- Lucas, L. M., & Ogilvie, D. (2006). Things are not always what they seem: How reputations, culture, and incentives influence knowledge transfer. *The Learning Organization*, 13(1), 7-24.
- MacKeracher, D. (2006). *Making sense of adult learning* (2nd ed.). Toronto, ON. Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Marouf, L. N. (2007). Social networks and knowledge sharing in organizations: A case study. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 11(6), 110–125.

- Mazzoni, D. (2007). *Audacity (Version 1.2.6) [Computer software]*. Retrieved November 6, 2008, from www.audacity.sourceforge.net
- Morton-Cooper, A. (2000). *Action research in health care*. Oxford: Blackwell Science.
- Neff, C. B., & Leondar, B. (1992). *Presidential search: A guide to the process of selecting and appointing college and university presidents*. Washington, DC: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.
- Nicholson, G. J., & Kiel, G. C. (2004). Breakthrough board performance: How to harness your board's intellectual capital. *Corporate Governance*, 4(1), 5-23.
- Nonaka, I. (2002). A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation. In C. W. Choo, & N. Bontis (Eds.), *The strategic management of intellectual capital and organizational knowledge* (pp. 437–462). New York: Oxford University Press.
- O'Callaghan, P., & Korbin, J. (1995). *The Workers' Compensation of British Columbia board governance review report and recommendations*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/reports/historical_reports/ocallaghan_korbin_report/korbin.pdf
- Palys, T., & Atchison, C. (2008). *Research decisions: Quantitative and qualitative perspectives* (4th ed.). Toronto, ON, Canada: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Patriot Act, 107 U.S.C. § HR 3162 RDS. (2001).
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Post-Secondary Learning Act. 2003, c. P-19.5 [Alberta]. Retrieved August 23, 2008, from <http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca/documents/Acts/P19P5.cfm>
- Robertson, R. (2008 May/June). *Recruiting your next CEO: Practical advice for Canadian boards*. Retrieved September 17, 2008, from http://www.iveybusinessjournal.com/article.asp?intArticle_ID=760
- Robinson, M. K. (2001). *Nonprofit boards that work: The end of one-size-fits-all governance*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Rothwell, W. J. (2005). *Effective succession planning: Ensuring leadership continuity and building talent from within* (3rd ed.). New York: AMACOM, a division of American Management Association.
- Royal Roads University. (2007). *Research ethics policy*. Retrieved January 2, 2008, from Research at Royal Roads University Web site:, from <http://www.royalroads.ca/research/ethical-reviews/ethics-policy.htm>

- Ruhl, G. D. (1995). *Grant MacEwan Community College: The first two decades - A retrospective*. Edmonton, AB. Canada: Grant MacEwan Community College.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art & practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday.
- Smith, C. J. (2000). *Trusteeship in community colleges: A guide to effective governance*. Washington, DC: Association of Community College Trustees.
- Snowden, D. (2002). Complex act of knowing: Paradox and descriptive self-awareness. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 6(2), 100–111.
- Snowden, D. (2005). From atomism to networks in social systems. *The Learning Organization*, 12(6), 552–562.
- Stringer, E. T. (2007). *Action research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- SurveyMonkey. (2008). *SurveyMonkey (Professional version) [Computer software]*. Retrieved September 15, 2008, from www.surveymonkey.com
- The Conference Board of Canada. (2008). *Board practices in Canadian crown corporations--2008*. Retrieved December 11, 2008, from <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/documents.aspx?DID=2803>
- The Muttart Foundation and Alberta Culture and Community Spirit. (2008). *Board development: Board building-Recruiting and developing effective board members for not-for-profit organizations*. Retrieved August 18, 2008, from <http://culture.alberta.ca/bdp/workbooks/boardbuild.pdf>
- Weisbord, M. R. (2004). *Productive workplaces revisited: Dignity, meaning and community in the 21st century*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wenger, E. (2004). Knowledge management as a doughnut: Shaping your knowledge strategy through communities of practice. *Ivey Business Journal Online*, (January/February), 1–8. Retrieved from ProQuest database
- Wheatley, M. J. (2006). *Leadership and the new science: Discovering order in a chaotic world* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Williams, R. (2006). Narratives of knowledge and intelligence ... beyond the tacit and explicit. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 10(4), 81–99.
- Wolford, T. (2008). *Building leaderful organizations: Succession planning for nonprofits*. Baltimore: The Anne E. Casey Foundation.

APPENDIX A: COPYRIGHT PERMISSIONS

Nonaka

From: "Academic Permissions" <Academic.permissions@oup.com>
Sent: 24 June 2008 01:43
To: Margo Baptista [mailto:BaptistaM@macewan.ca]
Subject: Copyright permission

Dear Theresa, Thank you for your enquiry. You have our permission to use the OUP Material you list in your email below in your thesis for submission to Royal Roads University. If at some future date your thesis is published it will be necessary to re-clear this permission. Please also note that if the material to be used is acknowledged to any other source, you will need to clear permission with the rights holder.

Best wishes,
Ben Kennedy, Permissions Assistant
Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Direct tel. +xx (x)xxxx xxxxxDirect fax +xx (x)xxxx xxxxx
e mail: xxx.xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx <mailto: xxx.xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx >

From: Margo Baptista [mailto:BaptistaM@macewan.ca]
Sent: 23 June 2008 16:03
To: Academic Permissions
Subject: Copyright permission

Good day, I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Leadership program with Royal Roads University in Victoria, B.C. I would appreciate your assistance and direction to request copyright permission from the author of the following chart that I would like to use in my research activity. After contacting your Canadian office with this request, I was directed to contact your U.K. office through the website www.oup.co.uk/rights. Attached is a completed copyright request form as directed on your website (I've included both rtf and Word formats). Also attached is a sample copyright permission letter from my university.

Figure 24.1 Modes of knowledge conversion. From "A Dynamic Theory of Organizational Knowledge Creation," by I. Nonaka, 2002. In C. W. Choo and N. Bontis (Eds.), *The Strategic Management of Intellectual Capital and Organizational Knowledge* (p. 442), New York: Oxford University Press. Copyright @ 2002 by Oxford University Press.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call or email me as noted below. Thank you for considering my request.

COPYRIGHT PERMISSION – GRANT MACEWAN COLLEGE

This letter confirms the authorization of Margo Baptista to use any documents associated with Grant MacEwan College as part of her thesis/major project for the partial requirements of a Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University.

I understand that this thesis/major project will be available to other learners and scholars and approve the use and copy of the documents. The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of the thesis/major project, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of the dissertation by UMI.

Permission is also granted with full understanding that Library and Archives Canada has been given non-exclusive permission to sell, copy, and distribute copies of the thesis/major project and Royal Roads University has been given permission to copy and distribute the thesis or major project either in print or electronically.

Your signing of this letter will also confirm that Grant MacEwan College owns the copyright to the above-described material.

Name of copyright holder: Dr. Paul J. Byrne

Title: President and CEO

Signature: (original signed by Dr. Paul Byrne) Date: February 10, 2009

Company: Grant MacEwan College

APPENDIX B: TELEPHONE CONTACT FORM

Hello, my name is Margo Baptista and I am conducting a research project as part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership from Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Gerry Nixon, Acting Program Head, MA-Leadership Programme, School of Leadership Studies, at xxx-xxxx. My faculty project supervisor is Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Ph.D., xxx-xxx-xxxx ext. 4101. In my professional capacity, I am the Senior Manager of Board Operations with Grant MacEwan College.

I am calling to let you know that a survey will be sent to your organization shortly regarding my research project and to ask for your assistance in distributing this survey to your board members. The objective of my research is to examine how boards of governors acquire and transfer knowledge on presidential search.

As participants, your board members are being asked to complete a survey and indicate their willingness and availability to participate in a mini focus group session. While focus groups normally involve between 4-6 participants, my study will pair MacEwan participants with participants from other organizations to engage in a mini focus group session facilitated by me. The sessions, to a maximum of 6-8, may be conducted in-person or via telephone, audio or video conferencing depending upon geographic location and participant availability. Their participation in the survey is anticipated to last fifteen minutes while the mini focus group session will last approximately one to one and a half hours. The questions will refer to their experiences with your organization's most recent presidential search exercise including transferring this knowledge through a board succession plan.

The software being used for this online survey is Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). As an American company with servers in the US, it is subject to the U.S. Patriot Act and therefore all data may be seized by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. You are advised that its governments, courts, or law enforcement and regulatory agencies may be able to obtain disclosure of the survey data.

They will also be advised that information may be recorded in hand-written or electronic format, audio and/or video-taped and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process and every precaution will be taken to ensure anonymity. Research data will be kept in a locked cabinet and electronic files will be password protected. At no time will any comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. Participants will have an opportunity to verify the accuracy of their contributions prior to the publication of the findings. A copy of the part of the report containing participants' contributions will be provided upon request.

Risks to participants is minimal, however the sensitive nature of the topic may present some challenges with sharing lessons learned and advice. To encourage confidentiality,

participants will be asked to speak about their own experiences and processes rather than about specific individuals.

The survey component of my research project will be administered by Dr. Steven Joyce, Acting Senior Manager, Evaluation & Analysis, with Grant MacEwan College's Strategic Planning Office. who is a third-party to this project. Dr. Joyce is a third-party to this project not connected with either the intended project participants or me. Dr. Joyce will review survey responses and chose potential participants for the mini focus group sessions based on relevant criteria. In this way, I will not know who chose not to volunteer to be part of the project and who simply was not chosen in the random selection process. This third-party process is being done to mitigate any potential conflict of interest or undue influence, perceived or real, in relation to my direct working relationship and background with the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors as the Senior Manager Board Operations.

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with Grant MacEwan College. These findings may also be of interest to other board of governors and organizations involved in conducting presidential searches. Should this be the case, this information may be presented at provincial, national, or international board conferences, shared with colleague networks and published in related journals.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Board members are not compelled to participate in this research project. If they do choose to participate, they are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if they choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

This telephone call is not considered to be one of the research methods for this project. As such, information is not being recorded beyond a notation that I contacted you to advise you of my project and the forthcoming survey.

Your assistance in distributing this survey to your board members is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email at baptistam@xxxxxx.xx.

Thank you.

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INVITATION FOR SURVEY AND MINI-FOCUS
GROUP

[Date here]

Dear [Prospective Participant],

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership from Royal Roads University. My name is Margo Baptista and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling my sponsor Richard Cook, Dean, Centre for the Arts Development with Grant MacEwan College at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

The objective of my research project is to examine how boards of governors acquire and transfer knowledge on presidential search. My sponsoring organization is Grant MacEwan College. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with Grant MacEwan College. These findings may also be of interest to other board of governors and organizations involved in conducting presidential searches. Should this be the case, this information may be presented at provincial, national, or international board conferences, shared with colleague networks, and published in related journals.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because of your experience with and knowledge of presidential search processes as well as your indicated willingness to participate in my research. You are being asked to participate in two activities, a survey and a mini focus group session. While focus groups normally involve between 4-6 participants, my study will pair MacEwan participants with participants from other organizations to engage in a mini focus group session facilitated by me. The sessions, to a maximum of 6-8, may be conducted in-person or via telephone, audio or video conferencing depending upon geographic location and participant availability. Your participation in the survey is anticipated to last fifteen minutes while the mini focus group session will last approximately one to one and a half hours. The questions will refer to your experiences with your organization's most recent presidential search exercise including transferring this knowledge through a board succession plan.

The survey component of my research project is being administered by Dr. Steven Joyce, Acting Senior Manager, Evaluation & Analysis with Grant MacEwan College's Strategic Planning Department who is a third-party to this project, not connected with the Board of Governors of Grant MacEwan College. Dr. Joyce will review survey responses and chose potential participants for the mini focus group sessions. He will select the twenty-six individuals with experience in conducting a presidential search in the past five years. . Others who expressed interest in volunteering for the mini focus group will be thanked. This third-party process should mitigate any potential conflict of interest or undue

influence, perceived or real, in relation to my direct working relationship and background with the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors as the Senior Manager Board Operations.

Risks to participants is minimal, however the sensitive nature of the topic may present some challenges with sharing lessons learned and advice. To encourage confidentiality, participants are being asked to speak about experiences and processes rather than specific individuals.

Information may be recorded in hand-written or electronic format, audio and/or video-taped and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process and every caution will be taken to ensure anonymity. Research data will be kept in a locked cabinet and electronic files will be password protected. At no time will any comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. Participants can verify the accuracy of their contributions at any time during the process. A copy of the documents specific to participants' contributions will be provided upon request.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. For the survey portion of this exercise there will not be a debriefing session. However, there may be a debriefing session following the mini focus group.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me at:

Name: Margo Baptista

Email: baptistam@xxxxx.xx or margo.baptista@xxxxx.xx

Telephone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

My Major Project Supervisor for this project from Royal Roads University is Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Ph.D., Core Faculty in the School of Leadership Studies. Dr. Agger-Gupta may be contacted at xxx-xxx-xxxx ex/xxxx.

Sincerely,
Margo Baptista

APPENDIX D INFORMED CONSENT FOR SURVEY AND MINI FOCUS GROUP
SESSION

My name is Margo Baptista and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership from Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Gerry Nixon, Acting Program Head for the MA-Leadership Programme, at xxx-xxx-xxxx. This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project, the objective of which is to examine how boards of governors acquire and transfer knowledge on presidential search.

As a participant, you will be asked to complete a survey and indicate your willingness and availability to participate in a mini focus group session. While focus groups normally involve between 4-6 participants, my study will pair MacEwan participants with participants from other organizations to engage in a mini focus group session facilitated by me. The sessions, to a maximum of 6-8, may be conducted in-person or via telephone, audio or video conferencing depending upon geographic location and participant availability. Your participation in the survey is anticipated to last fifteen minutes while the mini focus group session will last approximately one to one and a half hours. The questions will refer to your experiences with your organization's most recent presidential search exercise including transferring this knowledge through a board succession plan.

The software being used for this online survey is Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com). As an American company with servers in the US, it is subject to the U.S. Patriot Act and therefore all data may be seized by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. You are advised that its governments, courts, or law enforcement and regulatory agencies may be able to obtain disclosure of the survey data.

Information may be recorded in hand-written or electronic format, audio and/or video-taped and, where appropriate, will be summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process to protect the anonymity of participants and every precaution will be taken to ensure confidentiality of the original data. Research data will be kept in a locked cabinet and electronic files will be password protected. At no time will any comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. Participants will have an opportunity to verify the accuracy of their contributions prior to any publication of the findings. A copy of the part of the report containing participants' contributions will be provided upon request.

Risks to participants is minimal, however the sensitive nature of the topic may present some challenges with sharing lessons-learned and advice to board members. To encourage confidentiality, participants will be asked to speak about their experiences and processes rather than about specific individuals.

The survey component of my research project will be administered by Dr. Steven Joyce, Acting Senior Manager, Evaluation & Analysis, with Grant MacEwan College's Strategic Planning Office. Dr. Joyce is a third-party to this project not connected with either the intended project participants or me. Dr. Joyce will review survey responses and chose potential participants for the mini focus group sessions based on relevant criteria. In this way, I will not know who chose not to volunteer to be part of the project and who simply was not chosen in the random selection process. This third-party process is being done to mitigate any potential conflict of interest or undue influence, perceived or real, in relation to my direct working relationship and background with the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors as the Senior Manager Board Operations.

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with Grant MacEwan College. These findings may also be of interest to other boards of governors and organizations involved in conducting presidential searches. Should this be the case, this information may be presented at provincial, national, or international board conferences, shared with colleague networks and published in related journals.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

My Major Project Supervisor for this project from Royal Roads University is Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Ph.D., Core Faculty in the School of Leadership Studies. Dr. Agger-Gupta may be contacted at xxx-xxx-xxxx ex/xxxx.

APPENDIX E: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Please indicate the number of years of experience you have as a board member with:
 - public not-for-profit organizations
 - private for-profit organizations
2. Are you currently a member of (indicate all that apply):
 - a public not-for-profit board in the post-secondary sector
 - a public not-for-profit board in another sector (i.e., community league)
 - a private for-profit board
3. Briefly describe the mandate(s) of the organization(s).
4. What is the size (estimate) of the organization(s) in terms of the following, where applicable and where the information is publicly available?
 - number of employees
 - number of students
 - annual operating budget
5. Describe the composition of the board(s), e.g. publicly appointed members, privately appointed members, elected members, internal constituent members, etc.
6. Has one or more of your organization(s) conducted a presidential search in the past 5 year? If so, indicate the year in which it was done?
7. What aspects of a presidential search process were used in the last search (indicate all that apply):

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Board visioning exercise• Autonomous search committee• Board search committee• Assistance from external recruitment specialist(s)• Assistance from government agency• Interim president• Internal communication strategy• Internal consultation process | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage constituents• Consultation with current leadership team• Public forums eg. open question and answer sessions• Advice from informal networks• Position profile• Transition plan for new president• Public website providing details of search• Other, please describe _____ |
|--|--|
8. How did you learn about conducting a presidential search process and all of the elements that are involved in this (indicate all that apply)?
 - Past experience with a search process while on this board
 - Past experience with a search process while on another board
 - Board education/development plan
 - Attend a conference
 - Read books, articles and other written resources
 - Attend presentations by industry experts
 - Attend presentations by paid consultants

Acquiring and Transferring Knowledge at MacEwan 201

- Information provided by Human Resources Department
 - Participate in board colleague networks
 - Participate in conversations with business associates
 - Participate in conversations with friends
 - Other (please describe) _____
9. Does the organization have a policy, practice, plan or set of guidelines in place regarding presidential search. If yes, what are these, and may we have a copy of any written documents on this? (Please forward the document(s) by email to joyces2@xxxxxx.xx)
10. Was your last experience with a presidential search a satisfying, productive, and happy one? Please describe one event that stands out in your mind as representing how you felt about this experience.
11. In your opinion, what are the best practices that should comprise a presidential search process?
12. Did the board debrief on the search process/ If so, what did you learn from the debriefing experience about the rest of the team's experience? Were there elements of the search your team did well that you would do again in the future, and/or would not do again? Debriefing process, please describe _____
13. Did the membership of the board change during the search process? If so, was there a Board succession plan in place? If yes, how and when was this developed?
Succession plan details _____
14. Were any of the following strategies used to transfer knowledge to new board members during the search process (indicate all that apply)?
- Board orientation process
 - Mentor or buddy system
 - Books, articles, and other written resources
 - Background documents about the search
 - Retreat
 - Independent study of the topic through a library or other source
 - External board colleagues
 - Peer learning circles
 - Recruitment specialist
15. Briefly describe the orientation given to the new member(s) about the search.
16. Which of the following aspects apply to your board succession plan (indicate all that apply)?
- We have a formal board succession plan
 - We have an informal board succession plan
 - Our board succession plan is ad hoc, created as required
 - Our board conducts an annual analysis of board competencies and needs
 - Our board conducts an ad hoc analysis of board competencies and needs, created as required
 - We have a nominating or governance committee
 - We have an orientation program
 - We have an orientation manual

Acquiring and Transferring Knowledge at MacEwan 202

- We have an education/development program for our members
 - Our board staggers or strategically times its terms of appointment
 - We have an ongoing program to identify potential board members that is aligned with our strategic interests
 - We identify potential board members on an ad hoc, as required basis
17. Does the organization have a policy, practice, plan or set of guidelines in place regarding board succession planning (recruitment, orientation, etc). If yes, what are these and may we have a copy of any written documents on this? (Please forward the document(s) by email to joyces2@xxxxxxx.xx)
18. In your opinion, what are the best practices related to transferring knowledge within a board?
19. Do you have any additional comments or thoughts you would like to share about the topics of presidential search, board succession planning, and knowledge transfer within boards?
20. Would you be willing to participate in a subsequent mini focus group (two participants and the researcher) associated with this project? If yes, please provide your name and a way for us to contact you: phone number or email. By saying yes and disclosing your name and contact information, you are also agreeing to maintain anonymity of the other participants in your mini focus group session.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP EMAIL

Thank you for completing the online survey. Your input has been very helpful to my study. I am also grateful for your willingness to be part of a focus group to discuss the topics in more detail.

This is to confirm your teleconference focus group for **[day/date]** starting at **[time MST/PST]**. Please phone **[phone number]** to connect; there is no pass-code required. While our session is scheduled for one hour and I will do my best to meet that time-line, this is my first one so I would appreciate your patience should we need a few extra minutes.

To prepare for your session, I am attaching a brief bio on the other participant along with a copy of the survey which includes the letter of invitation, informed consent, overview of my study, and questions responded to online. Also attached is an overview of focus groups and some guidelines for the session.

Drawing on the feedback from the survey, the areas of focus for the teleconference are listed below. I encourage you to make notes during the session of any questions you might wish to ask before we finish. At the end of the session, I would appreciate your feedback on using a teleconference as a tool for conducting focus groups. It is a non-traditional approach so it would be helpful to gauge its effectiveness.

- **Introduction.** Introduce yourself and comment on
 - what you hope to achieve or learn in the session
 - factors that may have motivated you to participate in the survey and focus group, e.g. strategic similarity (ie post-secondary sector), demographic similarity (ie. governor, colleague network), opportunity to share and/or learn from the experience of others, interpersonal trust, etc
- **Board succession planning**
 - Brief overview of your plan for identifying, recruiting and selecting members
 - Indicate the types of activities that make up your board's education and development plan
 - Describe your board's orientation program including feedback you have provided for improvement.
- **Presidential Search**
 - Time-line
 - Search committee composition, terms of reference, and decision-making role relative to the Board
 - Internal consultation process and engagement of constituents
 - Role of recruitment specialist
 - Role of Human Resources Department
 - Knowledge learned through conversations with business associates and friends

- Development of candidate and position profile
- Transition plan for new president
- Debrief of search experience
- Comments and observations about having or not having a policy, procedures or guidelines

I'd like to reiterate a couple of points from the informed consent. The objective of this study is to examine how boards acquire and transfer knowledge on presidential search. When responding to the questions, please speak only about experiences and processes not specific individuals. The session will be audio-recorded. Unless agreed to, no comment(s) in the report will be attributed to individual participants.

Should you require any additional information to prepare for the session, please call or email me as follows: (xxx) xxx-xxxx, baptistam@xxxxxxx.xx

Attachment:

- Participant bio
- Copy of online survey including letter of invitation, informed consent, overview of study, and survey questions
- Overview of focus groups and guidelines for session

What is a Focus Group?

A focus group is essentially a group interview that encourages open speaking on a specific issue. It explores perceptions, feelings and ideas—more than facts. The goal is to build relationships through interaction, learning and by creating common ground among participants. Questions are open-minded and intended to elicit comment and opinion. They are pre-determined and sequenced through a round robin process to support a specific purpose or goal.

Guidelines/Rules of conduct

- Only one person speaks at a time
- Each person speaks for one or two minutes in response to the question
- No interruptions; allow others to have their say
- Next person takes a turn
- After each participant has answered the question, facilitator may repeat some of the key points mentioned or some of the themes that emerged. Facilitator may build the next question on one of the themes.
- Next round of questions takes place
- Participants are encouraged them to take notes and identify questions to ask at the end of the session.

APPENDIX G: MINI-FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you hope to achieve or learn from today's session?
2. Could you share any factors that may have motivated you to participate in this study, the survey and focus group? For example, strategic similarity (i.e. being in the post-secondary sector), demographic similarity (ie. being a governor), having the opportunity to share and/or learn from the experience of others, etc?
3. Interpersonal trust is a strong theme in the research on knowledge transfer. Researchers define two types: trust in a person's benevolence/goodwill and trust in a person's competence. Can you comment on the importance of interpersonal trust in transferring knowledge between governors within the same institution and to colleagues at other institutions?
4. One of the questions I am trying to answer in my study is how changes in board membership affect knowledge transfer, particularly if there are changes during a presidential search. I'd like to get a sense from you of your strategies and plans related to board succession planning. Describe your board succession plan. How are potential board members identified, recruited, and selected?
5. Having an orientation program and manual were identified as important tools for knowledge transfer and board succession planning. Describe your orientation program and any feedback you might offer to improve or adjust the plan.
6. What does your board education and development plan involve?
7. Having a buddy or mentor was also identified as a strategy for knowledge transfer. Describe how this is done.
8. How long did the search process take from when the President gave (informal or official) notice to when the new President was hired?
9. 100% of the respondents indicated they used a search committee. Could you describe the composition of the search committee: who, how many, who served as Chair?
10. Were there terms of reference for the search committee? If so, how were they developed? What was the role of the board relative to the committee? What decisions did the board make? What decisions did the committee make?
11. Describe the internal consultation process and how constituent groups were engaged in the search. Did they provide input on the search process and guidelines? Did they give input on candidate attributes? How was this done? If there were differing viewpoints, how was this handled?
12. Describe the role of the recruitment specialist in the search process. What advice was sought and received? Who led the process – board, committee, or recruiter? What is the value in using or not using a search firm?
13. Describe the role of the HR Department in the search process. What advice or information was sought and received?
14. Conversations with business associates and friends factored high in the survey as a way that board members learned about presidential search. Why?
15. How were the position profile and candidate profile developed? Who had input? Who made the decisions?
16. Describe the transition plan.

17. Some boards debriefed while others did not. If your board debriefed, what was learned? If your board did not debrief, would this have been of value?
18. Do you have any comment or observation on whether or not there should be a policy, procedure or set of guidelines for presidential search?
19. Please describe what was communicated, to whom and how.
20. Often boards learn about their roles through orientation, participating on committees, attending conferences, etc. Learning about presidential search usually takes place when a board is engaged in a search. My study took a unique approach to learning about this role. Please share any thoughts or comments about your experience with my study, for example, completing the online survey and participating in this focus group.
21. How was the timing and flow of the session?
22. Using a teleconference for conducting a focus group is a non-traditional approach. By contrast, most focus groups are done face-to-face and involve 6-8 people. They are set up to provide a comfortable, welcoming environment. Often a talking stick is used to move the conversation from participant to participant. Please share any thoughts or comments about the effectiveness of using a teleconference.
23. Did you have sufficient information to prepare for the session?
24. Do you have any questions or comments before we conclude?

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following set of questions were asked of individuals who participated in a mini-focus group session:

1. What books, articles or other written resources on the topic of presidential search have you read? What conferences have you attended on the topic?
2. What did you find of interest?
3. Could you give me an indication of your level of knowledge about presidential search prior to participating in this study?
4. Did your level of knowledge change? Has this impacted your sense of confidence about the topic of presidential search?
5. What did the person in the focus group say was their biggest learning from their experience with presidential search?
6. What did you find surprising in the session on the topic of presidential search? Please describe.
7. Based on your session, what would you say would be one or two recommendations you would suggest for MacEwan's own presidential search?
8. What could you do personally to further contribute to the Board and/or the college in terms of the next presidential search at MacEwan?
9. Are there any aspects of presidential search that were not covered in the survey or focus group session that you would like to learn more about?
10. What four ideas, points or themes about presidential search would you like to explore further either in the January 15 group activity or another venue (e.g. retreat) at a later date?
11. I am trying to understand what approaches would help our board learn about presidential search. How valuable has it been for you to learn about presidential search through:
 - a. books, articles and other written resources
 - b. attending conference sessions, such as the Association of Governing Boards, Association of Canadian Community College, Alberta Board Workshop, etc.
 - c. completing the online survey
 - d. participating in the focus group session or other experiential learning.
12. Tell me about your experience in the focus group? What did you observe; what did you learn from the focus group that was new for you?
13. Please comment on what you learned from the other participant in the focus group session about knowledge management strategies, such as board orientation, education and development, etc.
14. What did the person in the focus group say was their biggest learning from their experience with knowledge management strategies?
15. What did you find surprising in the session on the topic of knowledge management? Please describe.
16. Based on your session, what would you say would be one or two recommendations you would suggest for MacEwan's own knowledge management strategy?
17. What could you do personally to further contribute to or enhance the MacEwan board's knowledge management strategies?

18. Could you give me an indication of your level of knowledge about board succession planning prior to participating in this study?
19. Did your level of knowledge change? Has this impacted your sense of confidence about the topic of board succession planning?
20. What did the person in the focus group say was their biggest learning from their experience with board succession planning?
21. What did you find surprising in the session on the topic of board succession planning? Please describe.
22. Based on your session, what would you say would be one or two recommendations you would suggest for MacEwan's own board succession plan?
23. What could you do personally to further contribute to or enhance the MacEwan board succession plan?
24. During the focus group, I asked both participants to comment on the importance of interpersonal trust in knowledge transfer. Did you find the other participant displayed goodwill and was competent and knowledgeable on the topics of board succession planning and presidential search?
25. Were you comfortable discussing these topics? Are you confident that you received information that will be of value to you on these topics?
26. Do you have any final comments or observations to share on either of the topics: board succession planning, knowledge transfer within boards, and presidential search?
27. Is there anything I have not asked that would be helpful for you? Do you have any questions of me?

The following set of questions were asked of individuals who did not participate in a mini-focus group session:

1. Could you share any factors that may have motivated you to participate in this study?
2. Could you describe the MacEwan board succession plan for identifying, recruiting, and selecting members?
3. What would you say would be one or two recommendations you would suggest for MacEwan's own board succession plan?
4. What could you do personally to further contribute to or enhance the MacEwan board succession plan?
5. Could you give me an indication of your level of knowledge about board succession planning prior to participating in this study?
6. Did your level of knowledge change? Are there any aspects of board succession planning that you would like to learn more about?
7. Could you describe the MacEwan board orientation program?
8. Could you describe the MacEwan board education and development plan?
9. What would you say would be one or two recommendations you would suggest for MacEwan's own knowledge management strategy?
10. What could you do personally to further contribute to or enhance the MacEwan board's knowledge management strategies?

11. What books, articles or other written resources on the topic of presidential search have you read? What conferences have you attended on the topic?
12. What did you find of interest?
13. What advice would you offer the MacEwan board about
 - a. the timeline of a search process from time of notice by the current incumbent to hiring a new president?
 - b. the composition of the presidential search committee? Who, how many, who serves as Chair?
 - c. the terms of reference for the presidential search committee?
 - d. the role of the board relative to the role of the committee? What decisions should the board make? What decisions should the committee make?
 - e. internal consultation and engagement of constituents?
 - f. developing the candidate profile?
 - g. handling differing viewpoints that may arise during a search?
 - h. the role of the recruiter? What advice should be sought and received? What is the value of using or not using a search firm?
 - i. the role of the HR department? What advice should be sought and received?
 - j. a transition plan related to the departure of the incumbent and arrival of the new president?
 - k. having a policy, procedure or set of guidelines on presidential search?
 - l. maintaining confidentiality during a search?
14. What would you say would be one or two recommendations you would suggest for MacEwan's own presidential search?
15. What could you do personally to further contribute to the Board and/or the college in terms of the next presidential search at MacEwan?
16. Could you give me an indication of your level of knowledge about presidential search prior to participating in this study?
17. Did your level of knowledge change? Are there any aspects of presidential search that you would like to learn more about?
18. What four ideas, points or themes about presidential search would you like to explore further either in the January 15 group activity or another venue (e.g. retreat) at a later date?
19. I am trying to understand what approaches would help our board learn about presidential search. How valuable has it been for you to learn about presidential search through:
 - a. books, articles and other written resources
 - b. attending conference sessions, such as the Association of Governing Boards, Association of Canadian Community College, Alberta Board Workshop, etc.
 - c. completing the online survey
 - d. participating in experiential learning (e.g., this interview, retreats, conversations with others).
20. Do you have any final comments or observations to share on either of the topics: board succession planning, knowledge transfer within boards, and presidential search?

Acquiring and Transferring Knowledge at MacEwan 210

21. Could you comment on the importance of interpersonal trust (eg. a person's benevolence/goodwill and/or their competence) in transferring knowledge between governors?
22. Is there anything I have not asked that would be helpful for you? Do you have any questions of me?

APPENDIX I: LETTER OF INVITATION FOR INTERVIEW AND MODIFIED
WORLD CAFÉ

[Date here]

Dear [Prospective Participant],

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University. My name is Margo Baptista and my credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling my sponsor Richard Cook, Dean, Centre for the Arts Development with Grant MacEwan College at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

The objective of my research project is to examine how boards of governors acquire and transfer knowledge on presidential search. My sponsoring organization is Grant MacEwan College. In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with Grant MacEwan College. These findings may also be of interest to other board of governors and organizations involved in conducting presidential searches. Should this be the case, this information may be presented at provincial, national, or international board conferences, shared with colleague networks, and published in related journals.

Your name was chosen as a prospective participant because of your experience with and knowledge as a member of the Grant MacEwan College Board of Governors as well as your indicated willingness to participate. You are being asked to participate in two activities, a semi-structured interview and a modified World Café. A World Café is a group dialogue process where people gather at café tables each with a theme. While this technique is normally used with large groups, it will be modified to involve only MacEwan board participants. Your participation in the interview is anticipated to last one hour while the modified World Café will require one day. The foreseen questions will refer to your experience with and knowledge of presidential search exercises including transferring this knowledge through a board succession plan.

Risks to participants is minimal, however the sensitive nature of the topic may present some challenges with sharing lessons learned and advice. To encourage confidentiality, participants are being asked to speak about experiences and processes rather than specific individuals.

Information may be recorded in hand-written or electronic format, audio and/or video-taped and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. A facilitator may be used to assist with the modified World Café. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process and every precaution will be taken to ensure anonymity. Research data will be kept in a locked cabinet and electronic files will be

password protected. At no time will any comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. Participants can verify the accuracy of their contributions at any time during the process. A copy of the documents specific to participants' contributions will be provided upon request.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. There may be a debriefing session following the interview and/or the World Cafe.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me at:

Name: Margo Baptista

Email: baptistam@xxxxxx.xx or margo.baptista@xxxxxx.xx

Telephone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Sincerely,

Margo Baptista

APPENDIX J: INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW AND MODIFIED WORLD

CAFÉ

My name is Margo Baptista and this research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership from Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning Dr. Gerry Nixon, Acting Program Head for the MA-Leadership Programme, at xxx-xxx-xxxx. This document constitutes an agreement to participate in my research project, the objective of which is to examine how boards of governors acquire and transfer knowledge on presidential search.

As a participant, you are being asked to participate in a semi-structured interview and modified World Café. A World Café is a group dialogue process where people gather at café tables each with a theme. While this technique is normally used with large groups, it will be modified to involve only MacEwan board participants. Your participation in the interview is anticipated to last one hour while the modified World Café will require one day. The questions will refer to your experiences with and knowledge of presidential search processes including strategies transferring this knowledge as part of a board succession plan.

Information may be recorded in hand-written or electronic format, audio and/or video-taped and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. A facilitator may be used to assist with the modified World Café. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the research process and every precaution will be taken to ensure anonymity. Research data will be kept in a locked cabinet and electronic files will be password protected. At no time will any comments be attributed to any individual unless specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. Participants can verify the accuracy of their contributions at any time during the process. A copy of the documents specific to participants' contributions will be provided upon request.

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Master of Arts in Leadership, I will also be sharing my research findings with Grant MacEwan College. These findings may also be of interest to other board of governors and organizations involved in conducting presidential searches. Should this be the case, this information may be presented at provincial, national, or international board conferences, shared with colleague networks and published in related journals.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University, available online through UMI/Proquest and the Theses Canada portal and will be publicly accessible. Access and distribution will be unrestricted.

Risks to participants is minimal, however the sensitive nature of the topic may present some challenges with sharing lessons learned and advice. To encourage confidentiality, participants will be asked to speak about experiences and processes rather than specific individuals.

You are not compelled to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Similarly, if you choose not to participate in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence.

By signing this letter, you give free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

My Major Project Supervisor for this project from Royal Roads University is Dr. Niels Agger-Gupta, Ph.D., Core Faculty in the School of Leadership Studies. Dr. Agger-Gupta may be contacted at xxx-xxx-xxxx ex/xxxx.

APPENDIX K: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT REGARDING
TRANSCRIPTION

MACEWAN

Research Ethics Board

Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement

This form is used for individuals hired to conduct specific research tasks such as: transcribing, interpreting, translating, entering data, and shredding data.

Project Title:

I, _____, the _____ (specific job description, e.g., interpreter/translator) have been hired to _____. I agree to:

1. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., including but not limited to disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the Researcher(s). This study has been reviewed and approved by the MacEwan REB. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the REB.
2. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., including but not limited to disks, tapes, transcripts) to the Researcher(s) when I have completed the research tasks.
3. After consulting with the Researcher(s), erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher(s) (e.g. including but not limited to information stored on computer hard drive).
4. _____ other (specify, or N/A):

(print name)
Research Assistant

(signature)

(date)

(print name)
Researcher

(signature)

(date)

APPENDIX L: MODIFIED WORLD CAFE QUESTIONS

Topic: Board Succession Planning

1. Describe MacEwan's board recruitment and selection plan
 - a. What happens internally?
 - b. What happens externally?
2. How are the processes for board succession planning and presidential search similar?
3. How do we synchronize the board's succession plan with the upcoming presidential search?
4. What can you personally do to contribute to the board's succession plan?

Topic: Presidential Search and Selection Process and Timeline

1. How long do you expect the search process to take? What advice would you offer the board about the time-line of the search process?
2. What are the key elements of a search process, e.g., visioning exercise, search committee, interviews, etc?
3. What factors should be considered when developing a search process, eg organization culture, transparency of process, cost, etc?
4. What are the benefits and drawbacks of using a search firm?
5. What will you personally do to contribute to the search process?

Topic: Role of Board and Role of Search Committee

1. Should there be a search committee? If yes, why? If no, why?
2. What is the role of the board in the presidential search process?
3. What is the role of the search committee in the presidential search process?
4. Who are the members of the committee?
5. How are they chosen (e.g., elected, appointed, invited directly, invited via associations)?
6. What are the options for chair of the committee? Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each?
7. What advice about the search committee did you learn through the focus group?

Topic: Trust and Confidentiality

1. How can trust be established and maintained during the search process?
2. How can confidentiality be established and maintained during the search process?
3. What sensitivities about the search does the board need to consider?
4. Identify any ethical issues that could arise during the presidential search process, e.g., someone independently inquires about (conducts reference check on) a candidate through his/her network of colleagues?
5. What process should there be for bringing forward sensitive and/or ethical issues?

6. How can the integrity, accountability and responsibility of the incumbent be maintained during the search?

Topic: Knowledge Management: Board Orientation, Education/Development

1. Describe the current orientation and education/development plan?
2. Looking ahead to the changes in board membership over the next two years, what should the orientation and education/development plan include?
3. What role can you personally play in the orientation and education/development of incoming board members?

Topic: Stakeholder Consultation/Engagement

1. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of stakeholder consultation/engagement in the presidential search process?
2. Describe what stakeholder consultation/engagement might involve, e.g.
 - a. Who are the stakeholders?
 - b. Common practice versus best practice
3. What are the benefits and drawbacks of holding open forums
4. Discuss how stakeholders can be empowered (involved, providing input) while the board retains its decision making role.
5. What is the impact of organization culture?
6. How can stakeholder expectations be managed?

APPENDIX M: INVITATION TO WORLD CAFÉ



As the final step in my graduate research project, you are invited to participate in a World Café . The details are listed below.

The evening will involve a series of café-style conversations on the topics of my research: presidential search, board succession planning, and knowledge management.

The goals of the Café are to

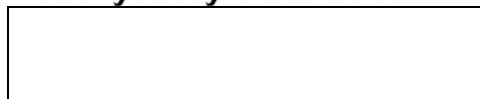
- Reflect on and share individual perspectives and learning gathered through the first three research steps: survey, focus group, one-on-one interviews.
- Create a shared understanding of the three topics, and
- Identify next steps.

Hot and cold hors d'oeuvres as well as refreshments will be provided.

I will contact you in the next couple of days to confirm your availability for the evening. If you have any questions in the meantime, please call or email me (780-497-5402, baptistam@macewan.ca). Thank you once again for being part of this learning journey with me.

Margo Baptista

Date: January 15, 2009
Time: 5:00-7:30 p.m.
Location: Royal Mayfair Golf Club



www.theworldcafe.com

APPENDIX N: INITIAL THEMES NOTED IN THE DATA

(Document provided to World Café table hosts for reference during table discussions)

Both processes have similar components:

| Presidential Search | Board Succession Planning |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a profile • Identify future opportunities and challenges including gaps • Seek candidates through a process • Make a recommendation or decision • Transition: orientation, education and development • Plan is tailored to organization's needs, culture and processes • Continuity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a profile • Identify future opportunities and challenges including gaps • Seek candidates through a process • Make a recommendation or decision • Transition: orientation, education and development • Plan is tailored to organization's needs, culture and processes • Continuity |

Board Succession Planning:

- Have a framework
 - Be strategic and professional v leave it to chance
 - Process: ongoing, dynamic, constant, rigour
 - Sub-committee to facilitate
 - Ensure Minister is aware of needed skills before bringing names forward
- Develop a matrix of strengths, needs, gaps; qualities and attributes, areas of expertise:
- Maintain an ongoing database of names
- Internal Process. Board members' input on qualities, attributes, skill sets, areas of expertise, names. Board members a) have general conversations with potential recruits, b) share info about college and board roles & responsibilities, and c) help to recruit their replacement. Board chair a) takes lead in connecting with potential recruits, b) provides input to Minister on advertisement (qualities and skills needed), c) reviews applications (with HR Committee Chair and President), d) ranks applications, e) recommends to Minister, and f) contacts MLA's for support of nominee
- External Process. Public advertisement through government website (also in local paper for Board chair position). Minister reviews and ranks applications, invites Board chair to make a recommendation, and seeks OC for nominee

Stakeholder Consultation and Engagement:

- Who, why and how
- Internal community, External community
- Organization culture
- Managing stakeholder expectations
- Open forums: benefits and drawbacks

Presidential Search & Selection Process and Timeline:

- Average 9-11 months (minimum 4-6 months; maximum 24 months). Minimum 5 months spent on pre-planning. Minimum 4 months active search
- Tailored to organization's needs and culture
- Best practices are those that work for you
- Maintain momentum for organization AND candidate(s)
- Start early; plan well, know your process; process takes longer than expected
- Elements/components of process
 - Board receives informal notice
 - Board receives formal notice
 - Board visioning exercise: institution and candidate profile
 - Hire recruitment specialist
 - Establish search committee
 - Facilitate stakeholder input/internal consultation
 - Conduct interviews with first round of candidates
 - Shortlist
 - Conduct interviews with finalist(s)
 - Negotiate contract
 - Transition from incumbent to new president
- Factors to consider:
 - Organization context
 - Organization culture
 - Inclusive process
 - Open, transparent process
 - Costs
 - Open forums

Trust and Confidentiality:

- Developing and maintaining trust
 - Within the board
 - Within the college
 - Within the search committee
- Developing and maintaining confidentiality
 - Within the board
 - Within the college
 - Within the search committee
 - Confidentiality Agreement including consequences for non-compliance
- Impact of Trust and Confidentiality on
 - Search process
 - Candidate(s)
- Facilitating Dialogue and Debate
- Communication with college community
- Potential ethical issue that could arise eg. someone independently inquires about (conducts reference check on) a candidate through his/her network of colleagues)

Role of Board and Role of Committee:

- Should there be a search committee? If yes, why. If no, why.
- Who are the members of the committee:
 - Board members: public, internal, Board Chair, Vice Chair, committee chairs
 - Constituencies: student, faculty, staff, administration, executives/direct reports, alumni, external community, etc.
 - Board staff person
 - Human resources representative
 - Recruitment specialist/Search firm representative
- How are they chosen
 - Board
 - Internal (elected, appointed, invited directly, invited via associations)
- Who chairs: Board chair? Vice Chair? HR Committee Chair? Experienced Public Member? Other?
- Continuity of board members on the committee (Board succession plan)
- Role and expectations, Terms of Reference:
 - Broad view, represent college as a whole
 - Search, recommend, make decisions
 - Confidentiality agreement
 - Roles: search, recommend, make decisions
 - # of candidates
 - Who interviews candidates
 - Who picks final candidate
 - Contract with new president
 - How is information communication to the college community
 - Progress reports provided to the Board
- Relationship with Board
 - Board sets process and maintains decision on candidate
- Six models identified and discussed by focus group participants

Knowledge Management: Board Orientation, Education and Development:

Orientation Components:

- Meet with Chair, President, and Board administrator
 - Overview of college and board
 - Conversation about opportunities, issues and challenges
 - Clarification of reason recruited to the board
- Buddy or mentor: formal or informal
- Comprehensive manual (vs government guidebook)
- Tour of campus(es)
- Meet with retiring board member
- Meet with college leaders eg vice presidents
- Participate on sub-committees, task teams, etc
- Conferences, workshops

Acquiring and Transferring Knowledge at MacEwan 222

- Retreat: if possible, attend first retreat early in term
- Network with colleagues on board and other board: formal and informal opportunities

Orientation Notes:

- Tailored to meet member's needs
 - Multiple, ongoing and varied interactions
 - Consistent versus ad hoc
 - 2 month check-in
 - Each member has a different level of knowledge about governance and the college
 - Repeat information through presentations, materials, etc.
 - Make the process personal, cozy and friendly
 - Student's short term requires more focus and assistance
- Understanding of governance
- Clarification of role and expectations
- Orient to processes, organization culture, standards of behavior
- Clarification of reason for being recruited and selected

Education and Development Components:

- Regular meetings including topical discussions (public and in-camera)
- Retreats
- Participate on board sub-committees, task teams, etc
- Buddy or mentor: formal or informal
- Network with colleagues on board and other college boards: formal and informal opportunities
- On-line governance tutorial
- Governance consultant/coach
- Books, articles and other written materials on governance
- Rotate meetings between campuses
- Regular contact: board chair and board member
- Conference participation including making presentations, special workshops on topics of interest (finance, audit, legal, strategic planning, etc)
- Relevant memberships
- Presentations: (a) from departments, faculties, schools, (b) from constituency associations, (c) on organization priorities and issues
- Sub-committees: start each academic year with an overview of issues and opportunities likely to come forward

Education and Development Notes:

- Annual and ongoing opportunities
- Board member self-selects areas of interest
- Board chair and/or HR Committee identify areas of development for individual or board as a whole