A Unique Governance Learning Experience

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The frequency of turnover within post-secondary boards of governors presents particular challenges to the individual and collective ability of members to acquire and manage intellectual capital on board roles and responsibilities (Baptista, 2009, p. ii). As part of my graduate studies, I conducted a study in 2008-09 to examine how, through the application of knowledge management theory, a board can learn and share knowledge on a vital board responsibility – presidential search. 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 its next president. Seeking knowledge about this topic through a proactive and targeted approach is not common practice. However, in 2008, the Grant MacEwan College (MacEwan)[1] Board of Governors embraced a unique opportunity to learn about presidential search at a time when the institution was not conducting a search. 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 contributed to a comprehensive board succession plan for the MacEwan Board of Governors and, in 2010-11, was used to guide the institution's search for its fourth president.

Introduction

As part of my graduate studies, I conducted a study to examine how, through the application of knowledge management theory, a board can learn and share knowledge on a fundamental board responsibility – presidential search. Neff and Leondar (1992) observed that "a presidential search is the most important task a governing board undertakes" (p. xv). Block and 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). In its thirty-eight year history, the institution had recruited three presidents who had led the institution through distinct phases of its evolution. It was within this context of significance that the topic of presidential search was chosen as the area of learning to be explored within the study.

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[1] *Note: On September 24, 2009, Grant MacEwan College was renamed to Grant MacEwan University through Order-In-Council 481/2009 issued by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.*

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?

Within the Alberta public post-secondary system, 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.

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' 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. MacEwan's Board of Governors employs all of these learning strategies.

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.

This study was conducted between September 2008 and January 2009. Study participants included internally-elected and publicly-appointed board members, primarily Board Chairs, from public post-secondary institutions in Alberta and British Columbia. Current members of the MacEwan Board volunteered to participate throughout the full study. As well, there were recruitment specialists who provide executive search services to public post-secondary institutions in both provinces. Four data-gathering techniques were used in the 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.

Through the study, theoretical concepts related to knowledge management, knowledge transfer and board succession planning were assessed. These were explored throughout the four stage data-gathering exercise. Principal findings were grouped within five thematic areas: knowledge management within a board of governors, knowledge transfer within a board of governors, board succession planning, the learning topic - presidential search, and the learning experience of the participants. This paper reports on these findings of that study with a focus on the fifth theme, the learning experience of the participants.

Method

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. 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). 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. 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. 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 had the opportunity to contemplate their and others' experiences.

The research and sub-questions were explored by participants from Alberta and British Columbia public post-secondary institutions (primarily Board chairs), recruitment specialists, and MacEwan board volunteers who shared their experiences and perspectives through the lens of governance in the public post-secondary system. My study inquired 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. The second theme explored in my study, knowledge transfer, related to techniques and strategies used by boards to share knowledge. I also enquired as to how boards develop and manage their succession plan, including best practices for board succession planning. Regarding presidential search, eighteen distinct components were identified and explored through the research study: search process, search timeline, search committee models, membership, committee chair, 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, confidentiality, political sensitivities and ethical issues needing consideration, and organizational culture. While not all of these components were used in all search processes discussed in the study, they indicated a range of ideas that boards could consider. Best practices for presidential search and strategies for learning about it were also explored. The last theme of the study examined the value of the learning experience for the various participants.

Each step of the inquiry process required data analysis before proceeding to the next activity. The focus-group sessions, interviews and World Café group activity were all audio-recorded and immediately transcribed verbatim. 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. 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. The use of multiple iterative data-gathering methods in this study served to triangulate the perspectives of participants on each topic.

On-line survey. Basic information on the three primary topics (knowledge management, board succession planning, and presidential search) was gathered through the online survey from sixteen respondents. In terms of learning about presidential search, participants responded questions inquiring as to how they learned about conducting a presidential search process and all of the elements that are involved in a search, such as

- 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

They were also asked whether any of the following strategies were used to transfer knowledge to new board members during the search process:

- 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

Finally, participants were asked to briefly describe the orientation given to the new member(s) about the search.

Through the analysis of responses, themes were identified to explore in the next step in the research project, mini-focus group sessions.

Mini-focus groups. The on-line survey provided a starting point for two-way dialogue in the six mini-focus group sessions involving MacEwan and non-MacEwan participants. Board chairs from 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. Among the themes explored in the mini-focus group sessions, participants spoke to the strategies used to learn about presidential search, what motivated them to participate in the study, as well as their experience with the survey, the focus group, and the study.

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews. One-on-one interviews were held with each MacEwan board volunteer, nine in total. 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. Questions were posed about strategies typically used by board members to learn about presidential search (such as books, articles, other written resources, conferences), the learning acquired through participating in the on-line survey and the mini-focus group session, an indication of level of knowledge on the three thematic areas prior to participating in the study, any changes in the level of knowledge as a result of participating in the study, and recommendations for MacEwan's knowledge management strategy. The 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.

Modified World Café. Data from the survey, focus group sessions, and interviews were grouped according to the research topics. These were assessed and prioritized to identify six themes and a series of questions for each theme for the World Café activity: board succession planning, presidential search and selection process and timeline, role of board and role of search committee, trust and confidentiality, knowledge management (board orientation, education and development), stakeholder consultation and engagement. Nine MacEwan participants attended the modified World Café. At the conclusion of the World Café, participants were invited to share their thoughts and observations on the evening's activity as well as their experience with the study.

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.

Principal Findings

The findings of this study were grouped with the following thematic areas: (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.

Knowledge Management: 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. Suggestions for improving or enhancing governance learning strategies—board orientation, education, and development— were identified as well as an indication of how MacEwan participants could collectively and individually contribute to enhancing their programs.

Knowledge Transfer: 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. The term knowledge transfer was identified 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, participants shared observations about the role of interpersonal trust (benevolence, competence), the use of social networks, and factors

that motivate and influence knowledge transfer. Participants extended the concept of trust to include confidentiality during a presidential search and discussed strategies for building and maintaining trust within the board as well as between the board, the search committee, and the internal community.

Board Succession Planning: To continue my examination of knowledge transfer, I enquired as to how boards develop and manage their succession plan, and 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. 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 indicated they are taking a more active role in planning for their succession.

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.

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 indicated a range of ideas that boards could consider. Eighteen distinct components were identified and explored and best practices for presidential search as well as strategies for learning about it were also studied.

The Learning Experience: 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) (Baptista, 2009, p. 132).

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) (Baptista, 2009, p. 132). 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 World Café provided the greatest opportunity for group learning on specific aspects of the presidential search process and demonstrated how by progressing through cycles of continuous learning from the survey through to the World Café, individual knowledge evolved and was converted to shared knowledge.

As a result of participating in this study, MacEwan participants 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.

Feedback on Experience with the Study

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

> 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. However, 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 (Baptista, 2009, p. 137).

Study Recommendations

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

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. My research demonstrated knowledge transfer can be a constructed group learning process, particularly when: (a) the topic chosen for knowledge transfer is salient, (b) the process used to acquire and transfer the knowledge is unique, (c) the timing of the learning opportunity is right, and (d) the learning process is

equitable between participants and researcher—both parties gain useful knowledge about a process in which they would engage.

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

The concept of knowledge management underpins the business of board 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.

Following is some advice to boards relative to their knowledge management strategy:

- Create a knowledge management strategy to continuously cultivate and integrate individual and collective knowledge into intellectual capital.
- Observe when board members are absent from discussions and follow up with them to ensure they become informed on the topic and any related decision.
- Develop specific components related to governance roles, such as board succession planning, orientation, education, and development.
- 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. Develop strategies to facilitate ongoing learning and sharing of knowledge so as to keep overall intellectual capital intact.

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

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. Board should consciously develop 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. 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.

General 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. While there may have been some common elements in search 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. Search processes were purposefully tailored to the institution's needs and culture at a particular point in time. Some models incorporated strategies from recruitment firms; however none adopted an off-the-shelf approach. The current and future contexts of the institutions must be considered in terms of the leadership being recruited.

Implications for the MacEwan Board

Each of the preceding broad-based governance recommendations holds implications for the MacEwan Board of Governors in terms of its knowledge management strategy, individual and group learning, trust, and presidential search. Through my study, 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. Recommendations were provided in terms of the MacEwan Board's plans for board succession, orientation, and education.

Many of the recommendations and implications noted in the 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.

My study provided MacEwan board members with an opportunity to discuss trust within three contexts: knowledge management, board succession planning, and presidential search. Boards need to 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.Eighteen distinct aspects of Presidential Search were explored through my study. 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.

Implications for Further Research

Five potential areas for further research were identified as a result of my research: board succession planning, presidential search, best practices for board succession plans and presidential search processes, the role of professional board staff, and action research as a tool for board learning.

My project is evidence that participating in an action research project 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?

Conclusion

"Effective boards place a high value on their learning" (Smith, 2000, p. 193).

All participants in this study were enthusiastic contributors whose 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.

Participants 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) plan for continuity. 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. Four recommendations and associated implications for the MacEwan Board were provided in relation to the areas of knowledge management, board succession planning, and presidential search.

This was a unique and value-added learning opportunity for the MacEwan board members to examine several governance roles and responsibilities, including presidential search. Based upon feedback received, the experience of participating in an action research project that utilized various interactive and progressive data-gathering methods significantly contributed to the learning of each MacEwan participant and to the MacEwan board as a group. This study also 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, extended this to the context of post-secondary board governance, and identified potential areas for further research.

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 themselves" (p. 68). This shared organizational learning experience contributed to a comprehensive board succession plan for the MacEwan Board of Governors and, in 2010-11, was used to guide the institution's search for its fourth president.

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