

Royal Holloway, University of London

Do leadership theories explain the behaviours of nonprofit board members?  
A contextual study of transformational leadership

by

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This thesis is submitted to the School of Management in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Egham, England

## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Gregory Bott, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Date: January 31, 2015

## Abstract

Transformational leadership has been the dominant leadership theory of the past three decades. Research on leadership, and specifically transformational leadership, has been dominated by positivist, deductive, methodological approaches, which have been unable to sufficiently problematize the concept of leadership. Researchers therefore continue to enter the field with a presupposition heavily weighted toward leader agency and a top-down unidirectional focus. Such research is also insensitive to capturing a full appreciation for the context in which organizational actors perform. One under-examined context is that of the leadership process at the board-level, and especially in the nonprofit sector. Board members reside at the highest level of an organization, and are potentially distant from other organizational actors. Recognizing that leadership is a co-constructed, complex, and fluid process, alternative ontological positions are necessary in order to advance our current knowledge of the leadership process. I utilized inductively designed critical incident interviews in order to fully appreciate not only board member behaviours, but also potential alternative influences (e.g. contextual factors and organizational actors other than formal leaders). While remaining open to surprises in the empirical material, I explored behaviours and relationships, while analysing a specific context – the nonprofit board-executive director relationship. The results of this study suggest that in a governance context, hierarchical actors do not fit neatly into the boxes defined by 30 years of research on transformational leadership theory, suggesting that the leadership process is more complex than portrayed by current dichotomizations. The results also indicated that board members display select behaviours that are said to be part of transformational leadership theory, while other behaviours prescribed by current theory are not found to be repetitive in the empirical material. The findings of this study ultimately led me to conclude that leadership behaviours should be examined unconstrained by transformational leadership theory, allowing for an in-depth examination of the intricacies and relational processes of the leadership process.

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## List of abbreviations

BC – Board chair – The board chair is the chairperson of the board of directors for the participating organizations. In each instance, this is a voluntary position.

BD – Board director – The board director refers to the member of the board of the participating organization who was interviewed, and is not the chairperson. In each instance, this is a voluntary position. When referring to board members in general (including the BC and BD), I use the term board member.

CEO – Chief executive officer – I use this term to denote the highest level of employee in an organization. When referring to the top internal position of participating organizations I use the term ED, instead of CEO. The term ED was more commonly used among respondents. However, the term CEO is used throughout the literature review when referring to for-profit CEOs.

CIT – Critical incident technique – see definition and usage of this technique in *Chapter three*.

ED – Executive director – The executive director is the highest level of employee in the participating organizations. I use this term as synonymous with the term CEO in the for-profit sector. In each instance, this is a full-time paid employee of the organization.

N – Nonprofit organization – The nonprofit organization refers to the participating nonprofit organization.

MLQ – Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire – The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire is the most commonly used questionnaire when examining transformational leadership behaviours. See *Chapter three* for a more detailed description.

With respect to the ED, BC, BD, and N, I denote each with the organization number. For example, ED3 is the executive director from nonprofit organization three, or N3.

# Chapter one: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Transformational leadership has been the most highly studied leadership theory among academics and practitioners over the past 30 years (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013; Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Despite the degree of attention and influence the theory has garnered, it has been plagued by conceptual and measurement problems (Spector, 2014; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999). Such criticisms include the diversity of behaviours within and between constructs, unsubstantiated claims of unidirectional influence and universal relevance, among others. Throughout this thesis, I highlight and interrogate such flaws in the model.

In this chapter, I briefly introduce the reader to the main conceptual and measurement problems of transformational leadership. While explaining how leadership researchers have been unable to fully appreciate the context in which organizational actors perform, I present the nonprofit board-ED (executive director) relationship as an under-examined context. Armed with the knowledge of such shortcomings in the leadership literature, and with the need for examining board members through a behavioural lens, I then present the research questions. A brief discussion of the most appropriate methodological positioning is then presented.

## 1.2 Unidirectional presupposition

Leadership studies have been dominated by positivist deductive research (Bryman, 2011a; Collinson and Grint, 2005; Gardner et al., 2010). Transformational leadership has certainly been no exception to this, and one could further argue that it has epitomized this phenomenon due to the theory originally having been advanced with mass homogenous military data, and a subsequent marriage to the most frequently used measurement instrument, the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire). Such research brings with it 30 years of researcher presupposition. Researchers subscribing to such a position accept that a transformational leader's influence is *unidirectional*, that



transformational leadership theory is a mostly *universal* theory, and that examining multiple conceptually diverse factors in the same model is unproblematic. Furthermore, quantitative research is relatively insensitive to *context* (Bryman, 2004), and unable to fully grasp the intricacies that are intertwined within specific situations (Ford, 2010).

Critics of leadership studies have noted that the (over) attribution of extraordinary capabilities and near mystical embodiment of leader(ship) has led to leaders being characterized as saints, saviours, and heroes (Bligh et al., 2011; Meindl et al., 1985). Such perceptions have led researchers to fixate on the exclusive examination of the leader, with little effort made to examining alternative or reciprocal influences (Yukl, 1999). Throughout this thesis, I argue that current methodologies are unable to challenge the underlying assumption of unidirectional influence. When researchers enter the field with a survey instrument (e.g. the MLQ) they are asking specifically about a leader's abilities. Therefore, leader agency continues to be found by design.

Although more inclusive leadership models have made theoretical advancements (e.g. Pearce, 2004; Pearce and Conger, 2003) in an attempt to counter balance the shortcomings of leader-centric models (Crevani et al., 2010; Gronn, 2009), such models have been slow to materialize in actual practice (Barnes et al., 2013). Therefore, what role leader agency (e.g. transformational leadership behaviours) plays and what role distributed forms of leadership plays (e.g. collaboration, mutual influence) within select contexts remain unclear.

### 1.3 Leadership in context

Kellerman (2012) suggests researchers should consider a leadership model as an equilateral triangle, consisting of the leader, the follower, and the context. Grint (2010a) similarly notes that "it is not possible to analyse leaders in the absence of followers or context" (2010a, p 7). When recognizing the importance of each of these factors, leadership is seen as more of a process than a universal and unidirectional cause and effect relationship. Despite vast quantitative studies having been carried out over the past few decades, the mixed evidence in leadership studies similarly suggests that other

factors may play a role in the direction and magnitude of a leader's influence on select outcomes. Wofford et al. (2001) note "it is time to take transformational leadership out of the domain of universal theories and to begin both theoretically and empirically to treat it within a situational framework" (2001, p 209).

More research is therefore necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of the contextual factors that (may) play a large part in defining our understanding of the leadership process as well as developing a further understanding of any limitations to leadership theories, particularly the dominant concept of transformational leadership. The quantitative methods currently employed in leadership studies are unable to properly address contextual or situational factors, not fully grasping the complexity of the leadership process (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010).

## 1.4 Research context

### *1.4.1 Research setting*

Societies around to world are increasingly looking to the nonprofit sector to address social problems that the private and government sectors have been unable to solve (Bugg and Dallhoff, 2006; Goldenberg, 2004). This factor, combined with increasing competition for private and public funding, has left nonprofit organizations experiencing many financial challenges. Such challenges have also led to increased pressure on boards for effective governance on the one hand and increased transparency and accountability on the other (Bugg and Dallhoff, 2006). The Canadian landscape is certainly not an exception, with the nonprofit sector comprising over 100 billion dollars of gross domestic product (Statistics Canada, 2009). Leadership in this setting is therefore an issue of immense practical significance, given its size. It is also potentially of theoretical interest, since it does not automatically follow that findings derived from the for-profit sector will be automatically applicable elsewhere.

Given that the current research also takes place within the Canadian context, recognition of how this affects the generalizability of the research is also necessary. Since nonprofits elsewhere, especially in other parts of Canada and in the United States,

share similar board structures (as a mechanism of governance), this research has a much wider relevance. How the research setting affects the generalizability of the findings is further detailed (e.g. local funding cuts, national culture, regulatory environment) in section 5.6 *Limitations and recommendations for future research*.

#### *1.4.2 Board member research*

Board members in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors have been criticized as being passive (Van den Berghe and Levrau, 2004), asleep at the wheel (Sonnenfeld, 2002), providing an impotent ceremonial and legal function (Drucker, 1974), for being rubber stampers (Drucker et al., 1990; Millstein and MacAvoy, 1998; Reid and Turbide 2012), and for being pawns of their CEOs (Lorsch and MacIver, 1989). Board members have also been criticized for generally becoming disengaged and disconnected from their organizations (Chait et al., 2005). Recent high profile scandals have led to internal and external pressures, whereby board members are being called upon to demonstrate leadership.

Agency theory has been the most commonly used governance theory, and drives a large proportion of policy initiatives. Agency theory has been criticized for having overly simplistic assumptions that are unable to explain the complexities of the governance process (Lan and Heracleous, 2010). Although the simplicity of agency theory and the notion of humans as self-interested have fuelled its popularity (Daily et al., 2003), such assumptions and their relatively narrow focus have also limited the theory's predictability (Cuevas-Rodriguez et al., 2012). For example, an assumption that the relationships described have an inherent and inescapable conflict of interest ignores the literature on trust (Tourish et al., 2010), whereby repeat interactions can reduce any potential conflict of interest between the social actors (Cuevas-Rodriguez et al., 2012), ultimately undermining a critical assumption of agency theory. Since it is "impossible for an organization to function without some measure of honesty, cooperation, and trust" (Hendry, 2002, p 110), agency theory overlooks alternative

explanations which involve human interactions, potentially explained by leadership theories.

Similarly, research on governance has traditionally emphasized formal board structures (Van den Berghe and Levräu, 2004). For example, topics of board composition such as diversity, committee structures, and CEO duality, have been at the forefront of academic literature. These topics are highly prevalent in the literature, and exploring such topics further is likely to have limited returns in advancing our knowledge of board effectiveness (Kroll et al., 2008), providing a false sense of security (Erakovic and Jackson, 2012; Gray, 2007). Furthermore, as “recent corporate failures have shown, living up to the “formal” standards is not enough” (Van den Burghe and Levräu, 2004, p 462). Not only have researchers failed to find evidence of systematic effects of such structural variables on organizational performance (He and Huang, 2011; Roberts et al., 2005), but such a focus on structure is in contrast to what practitioners find important, who tend to highlight behavioural perspectives (Van den Berghe and Levräu, 2004; Sonnenfeld, 2002). Therefore, a continued research effort examining the “usual suspects” will be unlikely to move the field of governance forward to a significant extent (Gabrielsson and Huse, 2004). This suggests that using other theoretical lenses is likely to be more fruitful for theory development.

A number of authors have suggested that governance models should be adapted to not simply be about control, but to include board members’ active involvement, with the purpose of the board being to add value to the organization by aiding it through a process of communication and collaboration (Erakovic et al., 2011; Nicholson and Kiel, 2004; van Ees et al., 2009). Erakovic et al. (2011) further propose, “it would be helpful to conceive of the primary purpose of the board to provide an environment that actively promotes leadership” (2011, p 6).

An examination of board member behaviours through a leadership lens addresses timely questions in the governance literature. Board member research has traditionally focused on the functions and roles of members, resulting in boards being examined

through the legal, economic, and financial theories of agency theory and resource dependency theory. As stakeholders are increasingly asking for more from board members, the oversimplified roles of monitoring, controlling, and resource acquisition not only provide a narrow definition of the role of the board, but also fall short of explaining the leadership behaviours and the heightened level of engagement increasingly called for by organizational stakeholders. When applying such theories to board governance, empirical research tends to focus on overarching board roles, overlooking the black box of board member behaviours (Bailey and Peck, 2013; Huse, 2005), while ultimately ignoring the fact that boards are composed of human groups (He and Huang, 2011).

Despite such contentions, a review of the literature reveals that research on governance and leadership appear to be two distinct topics, with only sparse or inferred overlap. A number of authors (e.g. Chait et al., 2005; Erakovic and Jackson, 2012; Erakovic et al., 2011) make a similar observation and further suggest that there is much to be gained by integrating the research efforts of the two subjects. These authors suggest that board members should take on a greater function, ultimately displaying leadership (Chait et al., 2005; Erakovic et al., 2011; McCambridge, 2004). Chait et al. (2005) make a similar observation in the nonprofit sector, noting that “governance and leadership have not been linked before, almost as if each concept has a magnetic field that repels the other” (2005, p xvii). I therefore find it pertinent to gain an understanding of the leadership process at the board-level.

#### *1.4.3 Nonprofit board research*

A large proportion of board governance research in the nonprofit sector attempts to blanket for-profit governance theories in an attempt to explain nonprofit boards (Speckbacher, 2008; Van Puyvelde et al., 2012), which arguably fails to recognize the unique aspects of the nonprofit sector. As the most frequently applied governance lens (Boyd et al., 2011; Roberts et al., 2005; Gabrielsson and Huse, 2004), agency theory provides a crisp example of this. Self-interest and lack of trust are fundamental

assumptions that underpin board research utilizing agency theory. However, such assumptions have been argued to be even more erroneous in the nonprofit sector (Caers et al., 2006). Therefore, currently applied for-profit board theories are unlikely to hold explanatory relevance in the nonprofit sector, where board executives and board members often enlist with relatively more humble motives (Austin, 1998; Ingles and Cleave, 2006). Once these troublesome assumptions are relaxed, agency theory no longer holds, which suggests the dire need for alternative explanatory theories (Machold et al., 2011).

Additionally, nonprofit board members take on different roles and have different objectives than for-profit board members. For example, a number of significant situations respondents chose to speak about in the current study were centered on tasks such as eliciting funding from donors or lobbying government bodies for funding. These tasks are specific to the nonprofit context. This generalizability of the findings of the current study is further discussed in section 5.6 *Limitations and recommendations for future research*.

## 1.5 The current research

The research questions in this thesis are built from the above shortcomings in the literature. From the leadership literature, it is important to understand whether or not leadership behaviours of transformational leadership (or of other leadership theories) are displayed at the highest level of an organization. Board member research features a number of peculiarities that are not present in traditional leadership research. For example, board members reside at the highest level, are (potentially) viewed as distant from the other organizational actors, and are (potentially) constrained by the structure of their governance model. Leadership models have rarely been examined in such a context. These intricacies have led to the following research questions:

How can the leadership behaviours of board members in the nonprofit organizations under analysis be explained?

Do these leadership behaviours support or deviate from transformational leadership theory?

In this thesis, I take the stance that leadership is a socially constructed (Meindl, 1985), fluid process (Tourish, 2014), which is influenced by multiple actors (Gronn, 2002; Shamir, 2007), and intertwined with contextual factors (Ford, 2010). Viewing leadership in this fashion highlights the complexity of the leadership process. Subscribing to this view suggests that universal laws to the study of leadership are unlikely to be obtainable or practically relevant. I thus argue that leadership is best captured through an interpretivist approach.

Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate how an interpretivist paradigm, while employing an inductive theory building approach, is better suited to problematize the leadership process, recognizing that leadership is a co-constructed process, and is more complex than advocates of positivist approaches would suggest. This approach allows me to challenge (or at least not enter the field with) the aforementioned (potentially erroneous) assumptions. Although the data is collected and analysed inductively, the results are then compared to existing leadership theories, primarily transformational leadership theory, for theoretical validation (Maxwell, 1992).

In order to answer the research questions, I employ the CIT (critical incident technique; Flanagan, 1954) as the primary approach to empirical material collection. This approach focuses the respondent onto a limited area (Bradley, 1992), allowing for an in-depth understanding of board member behaviours within the situations encountered, and chosen by the respondent. This technique is employed by conducting interviews with 53 participants from heterogeneous nonprofit organizations, providing 106 critical incident stories. Given the benefits in leadership studies of eliciting multiple perspectives (Rowold and Borgmann, 2013), the respondents include BCs (board chairs), BDs (board directors), and EDs (executive directors). This is then supplemented with further semi-structured interview questions and the collection of organizational documents.

These research questions, and the subsequent methodological choice, do not presuppose that the leaders under analysis will display attributes of transformational leadership or that their behaviours will be explained by any other leadership or governance theory. This approach remains open to findings of multiple influences, such as those from other organizational actors, and recognizes that board members (and other organizational actors) are intertwined within the specific context.

## 1.6 Structure of the thesis

I present this thesis in five chapters. In *Chapter two* I begin by presenting the dominant leadership theory, transformational leadership, along with embedded criticisms of the theory. I then critically analyse studies that claim to have found empirical support for the theory, argue for further sensitivity to context, and deliver an evolution from unidirectionality to distributed leadership to hybrid models. Alternative leadership models are also demonstrated, primarily in relation to transformational leadership theory. Since transformational leadership is a diverse theory, and has been claimed as an all-inclusive cure, such literature contains great breadth.

In *Chapter three* I present the call for diversification of methodologies and methods in leadership research. I then demonstrate why an inductive, theory building approach is the most appropriate in addressing the research questions. A large amount of space is then dedicated to presenting the appropriateness of the CIT for the current research, and for leadership more generally.

In the next chapter, *Chapter four*, I present the empirical material with respect to the detailed accounts of events, the detailed behaviours of multiple actors as individuals and as a collective, and the background context of the internal and external environment. While presenting board member behaviours, I remain sensitive to the situations in which those behaviours occurred, how the board context contributed to the leadership process, and to the influences of other organizational actors. In a number of instances, theoretical agreement with transformational leadership is affirmed in terms of the behaviours of board members in the participating nonprofit organizations being



explained by transformational leadership theory. Where behaviours deviate from transformational leadership theory, the themes and respective examples are presented.

In the last chapter of this thesis, *Chapter five*, I present a dialogue between my findings and the leadership literature. This involves a discussion of how the context of board leadership alters the ability of board members to exhibit leadership behaviours and influences how a leader is perceived. The discussion also focuses on the role played by alternative organizational actors in the leadership process. Implications for leadership theory stay at the forefront of this discussion. This chapter closes with a focused set of limitations, recommendations for future research, practical implications, and concluding remarks.

## **Chapter two: Literature review**

### 2.1 Introduction

Transformational leadership has been the single most studied and debated leadership theory among academics for the past 30 years (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013; Braun et al., 2013; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Rubin et al., 2005; Yukl, 2012). Burns (1978) was among the first scholars to conceptualize transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was then further operationalized in seminal work by Bass (1998, 1985). Burns (1978) used the term transforming leadership to define a leader who “looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the followers” (1978, p 4). He argued that such “leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p 20). Bass (1985) and colleagues (Bass and Riggio, 2006) similarly define a transformational leader as someone who raises the awareness of colleagues and followers, shifts them to higher level needs, influences them to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization, and to work harder than they originally had expected they would. Such an interaction, it is argued, results in followers having greater satisfaction and commitment, and ultimately results in followers behaving in ways that exceed expected performance (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

In the first section of this chapter, I start by introducing seminal work by Burns (1978) and Bass (1998, 1985) and colleagues (Bass and Riggio, 2006), which played a significant role in advancing transformational leadership. In this section, I define transformational leadership and present the components of the model, while contrasting the theory to earlier work on charismatic and transactional leadership. Whilst outlining the theoretical framework of transformational leadership, I highlight a number of conceptual problems (e.g. diversity of behaviours, conceptual ambiguity, lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria, including behaviours and effects) that are further

compounded in attempts to quantify the theory. Such problems undermine the last 30 years of empirical ‘evidence’.

As it would be hard to envision any organizational theory to have universal (always right) explanatory power (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007), I then move to examining contextual factors relevant to the current thesis. In this section, I demonstrate how current positivist research has been unable to properly address contextual factors (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010). Additionally, despite the growing literature claiming to undertake contextual research, I demonstrate how conceptual and modeling issues undermine such claims. Specifically, I challenge the implicit claim by empirical authors, which suggests that multiple proposed mediating/moderating relationships hold for all constructs, and within construct behaviours, of transformational leadership (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013).

In the next section, I present how positivist, deductive, researchers continue to enter the field with the presupposition of unidirectional influence. With minimal answers found in the literature on followership, I then present the evolution of research (back) toward distributed leadership models. However, despite the growing theoretical literature on distributed leadership, empirical findings continue to suggest (some type of) a role of leader agency within distributed models. This leaves open future research opportunity which remains open to exploring how individual behaviours, unconstrained by the ambiguity and multidimensionality of transformational leadership (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), are exhibited within the situations face by board members. Whilst conducting such research, the researcher must remain open to surprises in the empirical material (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Bryman and Bell, 2011). In the current research, I take an inductive approach that remains open to finding alternative influencing factors – being organizational actors beyond a formal hierarchical leader, or contextual/situational factors.

In order to further clarify transformational leadership theory, as well as justify the selection of this particular theory for the current research, transformational leadership is

then compared to a number of alternative leadership theories, specifically leader-member exchange and authentic leadership.

## 2.2 Transformational leadership theory

### 2.2.1 *Transformational leadership conceptually defined*

Bass (1998; 1985) and colleagues (Bass and Riggio, 2006) conceptualized and measured four components of transformational leadership, which include (i) idealized influence (behavioural and attributed), (ii) inspirational motivation, (iii) intellectual stimulation, and (iv) individualized consideration. Leaders displaying idealized influence talk about values and beliefs, and specify the importance of having a sense of purpose (Avolio and Bass, 2004). Such leaders can be counted on to do the right thing, as they consider the ethical and moral consequences when making decisions. These leaders, it is claimed, behave in a way that results in them being admired, respected and trusted by followers (Avolio and Bass, 2004; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

Idealized influence is intermittently examined as idealized influence behavioural and idealized influence attributed. Idealized influence behavioural refers to the actual behaviours displayed by the leader (e.g. actions centered on values), whereby idealized influence attributed refers to the perceptions followers attribute to the leader (e.g. feelings of trust or admiration; Antonakis et al., 2003; Castro et al., 2008). Most individual studies find that idealized influence has the greatest impact on predicting leader effectiveness out of the four components of transformational leadership. The hierarchy of correlations between the individual components and leadership effectiveness tends to be idealized influence/inspirational motivation (commonly termed charisma), intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Lowe et al., 1996). Not surprisingly, idealized influence and inspirational motivation have received the most attention in the literature.

The component of inspirational motivation seeks to explain leadership characteristics whereby leaders provide meaning and challenge to those around them

and behave in a way that motivates and inspires followers (Bass et al., 2003). The leader portrays an attractive future state, which followers can envision. They encourage the creation of a shared vision and then clearly communicate expectations toward meeting that vision. Leaders who practice inspirational motivation then demonstrate themselves as being committed to the shared vision (Bass and Riggio, 2006). In doing so, individual and team spirit are aroused (Bass et al., 2003).

Given the conceptual overlap between the components of idealized influence and inspirational motivation, the two dimensions are highly correlated with each other (Hinkin and Tracey, 1999; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). While contending the two constructs are unique behaviours, Bass (1998, 1985) and colleagues (Bass and Riggio, 2006) also recognized that they are often not empirically distinguishable (Avolio et al., 1999). For this reason, authors of theoretical and empirical studies (e.g. Bono and Ilies, 2006; Sosik and Dinger, 2007) commonly combine the two transformational leadership constructs of idealized influence and inspirational motivation into a single factor, referred to as charisma (Bono and Ilies, 2006; Kark et al., 2003; Murphy and Ensher, 2008; Sosik and Dinger, 2007; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013).

Charismatic leadership was originally the basis of its own distinct literature (Conger et al., 2000; Judge and Piccolo, 2004), whereby prior to Bass' (1985) conceptualization of the components of transformational leadership, a number of authors theorized charismatic leadership as a predictor of follower performance. Despite extensive research on transformational leadership and charismatic leadership, there is still confusion, inconsistency, contradiction, and conceptual ambiguity in how the terms relate to each other (Ilies et al., 2006; Yukl, 1999). Weber (1947) and colleagues (Weber et al., 1946) were among the earlier authors to associate charisma with organizational leadership (Ilies et al., 2006; Judge and Piccolo, 2004). In their influential work, Weber et al. (1946) defined charismatic leaders to be "holders of specific gifts of the body and spirit; and these gifts have been believed to be supernatural, not accessible to everybody" (1946, p 245). In a study analysing organizational contextual influences on the emergence and effectiveness of charismatic

leadership, Shamir and Howell (1999) use the following definition of the effectiveness of charisma: “the degree of its influence on followers’ self-concepts, values, and motivation” (1999, p 259). More recently, in analysing charismatic leadership in resistance to change, Levay (2010) claims charismatic leadership occurs when “a manager or informal leader in an organization gains a dedicated following, not because of formal position, but because he or she is seen as an extraordinary, especially gifted, and inspired person” (2010, p 128).

Charismatic and transformational leadership have in common their roots in ethical leadership, are agents of change, visionary, communicate high performance standards, and create strong emotional ties between the leader and the follower (Rowold and Heinritz, 2007; Wang et al., 2011b). Charismatic and transformational leadership have significant conceptual overlap (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), and converge in their empirical findings (Dvir et al., 2002; Keller, 2006; Shamir et al., 1993). For these reasons, a number of authors consider charismatic leadership and transformational leadership as synonymous theories (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013; Barling et al., 1996; Howell and Shamir, 2005; Ilies et al., 2006; Jackson et al., 2013; Spector, 2014; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Wang et al., 2011b).

Although transformational leadership is closely related to theories of charismatic leadership, Bass and Riggio (2006) contend “transformational leadership is broader, with charisma an important component of the transformational model, but also encompassing individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation” (2006, p 230). Authors of empirical studies and theoretical articles with this contention range between treating charisma as synonymous with idealized influence (Bass, 1985), and converging idealized influence and inspirational motivation into one construct termed charisma (Bono and Ilies, 2006; Kark et al., 2003; Murphy and Ensher, 2008; Sosik and Dinger, 2007).

Because the two theories are conceptually different, with transformational leadership including additional constructs, I move forward by treating transformational

leadership to include charisma, but being much broader. Thereby, transformational leaders by definition are charismatic, but charismatic leaders are not necessarily transformational leaders (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Yukl, 1999). However, throughout this thesis I present findings of both transformational leadership and charismatic leadership (both within the transformational framework and in isolation) studies primarily because the charismatic component of transformational leadership has been found to have the greatest impact on predicting leader effectiveness among the components of transformational leadership.

A major conceptual problem with transformational leadership is that it has been defined in terms of behaviours, perceptions, and effects (Avolio et al., 1999; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999; Yukl et al., 2002). For example, having perceptions of leadership effects on both the predictor and outcome side is problematic (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). This is particularly evident with idealized influence, which by definition includes behaviours as well as the perceptions (effects) that others attribute to the leader. The success of transformational leadership is thereby by design, because “such leadership is literally *by definition* effective” (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013, p 14; emphasis in original), ultimately resulting in a self-fulfilling outcome. This confounding definition allows for behaviours to be depicted as positive in a context of successful outcomes and the same behaviours to be “re-defined” as negative behaviours in the context of failure (Collinson and Tourish, in press).

Spector (2014) recently provided a compelling example to illustrate the problem with defining transformational leadership in terms of both behaviours and effects. In the era of recovery of the automotive industry in America, Lee Iacocca was often provided with sole credit from the media and numerous academics (including Bass (1985)) for the recovery of Chrysler, frequently being framed as being an ideal transformational leader. The credit and subsequent title of a transformational leader were given to Iacocca based on the (temporary) results of the organization during his tenure at the top. However, after a period of downward progress, a retrospective examination revealed that many (questionable) behaviours conducted by Iacocca were fundamentally at odds with

transformational leadership. This historical account highlights problems with defining a model by its behaviours, perceptions, and effects.

The use of results-based criteria for assessing leadership thus overlooks the means by which the results were achieved. Under such criteria, a coercive leader, for example, who provides positive organizational results, would be termed a leader (Grint, 2010a, 2005). Defining leadership in this way may also be dangerous as it sends cues to organizational actors that the processes by which the results are achieved (e.g. unethical, coercive) are unimportant.

Intellectual stimulation is defined as the ability of transformational leaders to “stimulate their followers’ efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p 7). Some authors refer to intellectual stimulation as a problem solving behaviour, concerned with helping followers work through complex problems with a view of being more innovative (Waldman et al., 2004). Transformational leaders practicing intellectual stimulation “encourage followers to “think out of the box” and to adopt generative and explorative thinking processes” (Jung et al., 2003, p 529). They are encouraged to pursue their intellectual curiosity and to use their imaginations to generate new ideas and solutions (Shin and Zhou, 2003). In the presence of a transformational leader, creativity is encouraged, followers are encouraged to try new approaches, and an individual’s ideas are not criticized when they differ from those of their leaders’ (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Not surprisingly, empirical studies have found intellectual stimulation to be more effective in leading research projects (which deal with radical innovation) than with development projects (Keller, 2006).

Ambiguity in the conceptual definition is especially problematic with idealized influence and intellectual stimulation (Yukl, 1999). The conceptual definition of intellectual stimulation, for example, does not provide a clear description of how (what the leader says or does) the leader influences follower behaviour (Yukl, 1999). Intellectual stimulation is often examined in its relation to employee creativity and



organizational innovation (e.g. Gong et al., 2009; Jaskyte, 2004; Jaussi and Dionne, 2003; Kahai et al., 2003). Not surprisingly, “stimulate their followers’ efforts to be innovative and creative” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p 7) is often found to be positively related to employee creativity – that is, by design!

Individualized consideration refers to the characteristic of transformational leaders who pay attention to an individual follower’s needs and recognize the need for individualized coaching and mentoring (developing followers). Developmental support occurs when transformational leaders advise staff on their career and encourage them to undertake further training (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006), and includes coaching and mentoring (Yukl, 1999). In paying attention to the individual follower, a leader advises individual followers and discovers what motivates each individual (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). Although Bass (1999) initially suggested that individualized consideration “is displayed when leaders pay attention to the developmental needs of followers and support and coach the development of their followers” (1999, p 11), there has been a “shift in the definition of individualized consideration away from developing subordinates to something more akin to supportive leadership” (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006, p 38). Supportive leadership has been defined as “showing consideration, acceptance, and concern for the needs and feelings of other people” (Yukl, 2002, p 20). Supportive leadership behaviours include listening carefully, effectively managing the emotions of followers, showing concern for followers’ welfare, evidence of caring, demonstrating consideration for the feelings of others, and the provision of sympathy (Amabile et al., 2004; Dawley, 2008; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 2012).

Inclusion of these distinct behaviours (e.g. developing and supporting) within the single component of individualized consideration has received only scant criticism (e.g. Yukl, 1999). In an empirical examination of employee attitudes in a large Australian public sector organization, Rafferty and Griffin (2006) found developmental and supportive leadership to be empirically distinct constructs, which correspondingly have different effects on followers. Recent scholars have also criticized the inclusion of supportive behaviours in the transformational leadership model, due to empirical

examinations having demonstrated weak relationships with desirable outcomes (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006, 2004; Yukl, 2002). Consistently, in a recent study of senior leaders from the private and public sectors in Canada, Arnold and Loughlin (2010) found leaders reported being more likely to engage in supportive leadership behaviours than behaviours intended to individually develop followers. For these reasons, I argue, such behaviours should not be in the same construct.

In this section, I have presented the theoretical framework of transformational leadership while highlighting conceptual problems with transformational leadership, including ambiguity in the definition, and diversity among and within constructs. Relatedly, van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) note the boundaries of transformational leadership are unclear, as theorists have not properly articulated why some behaviours are included while others are excluded. Transformational leadership has therefore been criticized for missing key behaviours that are represented in other leadership and behavioural models (Antonakis et al., 2003; Michel et al., 2011; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004; Yukl, 1999). For example, Michel et al. (2011) suggest that the full range of leadership should consist of categories of task-oriented behaviours, relations-oriented behaviours, change-oriented behaviours, and ethical-oriented behaviours. However, no model and subsequent measurement instrument will ever account for all possible behaviours (Antonakis et al., 2003).

This also provides an example of problems with the exclusive employment of quantitative approaches. Behaviours that are situationally and contextually used in varying degrees require rich narratives (e.g. critical incidents) in order for the reader to place the behaviour into context. Attempting to quantitatively model such a complex phenomenon reduces the phenomenon to a simplistic variable - thus overly simplifying the leadership process.

I, however, argue the opposite, contending that the diversity of behaviours within and among the dimensions is problematic. Diversity within the dimensions is not only conceptually problematic, but also creates measurement problems. For example, having

supportive and developmental behaviours within the same construct leads to measurement ambiguity, as the behaviours have been found to be activated at different times (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010), as well as to affect different outcomes (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 2002). After vast empirical research it is still not clear how the dimensions, or the behaviours within the dimensions, work together or whether/how they substitute for one another (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013).

The heterogeneity of influencing factors is also problematic, as it is implausible that all behaviours will lead to all outcomes (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Consistently, this makes the model impractical for practitioners (Hinkin and Tracey, 1999) – what does it mean to tell someone to be more transformational? After a recent critical review of transformational leadership, van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) thus boldly conclude that the field should “forego the label of charismatic-transformational leadership in favor of the study of more clearly defined and empirically distinct aspects of leadership” (2013, p 2) and “suggest that theory and measurement concentrate on conceptualizing and operationalizing more precise and distinct elements and effects of leadership without the handicap of the higher-order label of charismatic–transformational leadership” (2013, p 3).

### 2.2.2 *Transactional versus transformational leadership*

In order to further highlight the ambiguous definition of transformational leadership and a lack of clear inclusion/exclusion criteria, I present transactional leadership. In his seminal book, *Leadership*, Burns (1978) contrasted the leadership styles of transformational leadership and transactional leadership. In referring to how political transactional leaders motivate followers, Burns (1978) noted that transactional leaders “approach followers with an eye to exchange one thing for another; jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions” (1978, p 4). Transactional leaders in organizations therefore provide clarification of follower expectations and offer recognition or rewards when goals are achieved (Bass et al., 2003).

Bass (1998, 1985) was able to further conceptualize and quantify the concept of transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is comprised of two factors, contingent reward and management by exception (Vaccaro et al., 2012). Contingent reward is a leadership approach whereby the leader obtains agreement through a series of either promised or actual rewards in exchange for satisfactory actions of the follower (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Management-by-exception is a corrective action transaction whereby the leader monitors deviations in agreed standards and takes corrective action only as necessary. Management-by-exception can be further broken down into active or passive management by exception. When practicing active management by exception, the leader actively monitors for deviations from standards and takes necessary corrective action. Passive management by exception involves “waiting passively” for deviations from standards to occur before taking necessary corrective actions (Bass and Riggio, 2006).

A third component of the full range of leadership model is laissez-faire leadership (commonly referred to as non leadership), whereby the leader avoids making decisions, abdicates responsibility, and does not use his or her authority (Antonakis et al., 2003; Bass and Riggio, 2006). Although a few recent studies include laissez-faire in empirical analysis (e.g. Jackson et al., 2013), most current studies do not include it, as it represents the absence of leadership and is commonly found to not be positively related to desirable outcomes (Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Michel et al., 2011).

Burns (1978) initially argued that transactional and transformational leadership were “two fundamentally different forms” (1978, p 19) of interactions. Bass (1985) did not agree with the conceptualization that “transformational and transactional leadership represent opposite ends of a single continuum” (Judge and Piccolo, 2004, p 755), and further contended that the most effective leaders use a mix of both transactional and transformational leadership styles (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1998; Michel et al., 2011). Burns (2007) later acknowledged his earlier work overly dichotomized the two forms of leadership, whereby most leaders undertake practices that combine transactional and transformational leadership styles (Collinson, 2014). For example, a recent study of

registered nurses found empirical support that “the best leaders employ a mix of transformational and contingent reward behaviours” (O’Shea et al., 2009, p 251).

Using the full range of leadership model, Bass (1998) demonstrates that the theory of transformational leadership is not in conflict with transactional leadership theory, but that transformational leadership theory evolves transactional leadership to a more complete and comprehensive theory. Furthermore, Bass (1998) suggests “transformational leadership should account for unique variance in ratings of performance (or other outcomes) over and above that accounted for by active transactional leadership” (1998, p 10). Explanatory power of transformational leadership beyond that of transactional leadership has been referred to as augmentation.

In a meta-analysis, when controlling for transactional leadership, Judge and Piccolo (2004) found transformational leadership had explanatory power, for a number of desirable outcomes, beyond the effects of transactional leadership (Epitropaki and Martin, 2013). Their findings thus support the augmentation argument put forth by Bass (1985). Rowold and Heinitz (2007) similarly found that transformational leadership is differential to transactional leadership and therefore not redundant to transactional leadership. Consistent with other empirical studies (e.g. Edwards and Gill, 2012; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Wang et al., 2011a), the authors were able to conclude that transformational leadership augments transactional leadership for both subjective and objective criteria measured.

Conversely, Waldman et al. (2001) found that transactional leadership did not have any explanatory power in explaining CEO (chief executive officer) performance beyond the effect of transformational leadership. In a study of 38 manufacturing organizations from the United Kingdom, Edwards and Gill (2012) found transformational leadership to be effective across all hierarchical levels examined, while transactional leadership was only effective at lower levels of the organization. In addition, the pathways in which the two styles produce outcomes are quite different (Epitropaki and Martin, 2013; Rubin et al., 2005), with transactional leadership focusing solely on exchange.

A number of studies have found high correlations between transactional and transformational leadership constructs (e.g. Avolio et al., 1999; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Rowold and Heinitz, 2007; Rubin et al., 2005), which suggests that the two constructs have a degree of overlap. Avolio et al. (1999) note that high correlations between transactional and transformational leadership can be expected because both styles represent active forms of leadership and effective leaders display varying amounts of both leadership styles. In addition, transactional leadership provides a foundation for effective leadership, “but a greater amount of effort, effectiveness, and satisfaction is possible from transactional leadership if augmented by transformational leadership” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p 11). For example, a consistent honoring of agreements (a reciprocal transaction) is an antecedent to fostering trust and respect (transformational leadership) in the leader (Avolio et al., 1999).

Based on such claims, and the individual studies, it would appear that transactional leadership should represent what transformational leadership is not. However, the two leadership styles are frequently found to be highly correlated (Judge and Piccolo, 2004) and used to complement each other, suggesting that such a dichotomization is unwarranted. Similarly, this also calls into question why certain behaviours such as providing recognition, which is usually more personal and intrinsic, is also included in contingent reward (Yukl, 1999), ultimately highlighting the lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria of transformational leadership. Even if the two concepts are conceptually distinct, it “may be difficult to separate the unique effects of constructs that correlate at such a high level” (Judge and Piccolo, 2004, p 763).

The verbal hook in the development of transformational leadership has been to contrast it with transactional leadership, with theorists “depicting transactional leadership as the dull, mechanical, carrots-and-sticks leadership that would be more ordinary and customary – a background against which charismatic-transformational leadership shines all the more bright” (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013, p 12). This

contrast has led to a dichotomization privileging transformational leadership through elevating it as good leadership (Collinson, 2014; Hollander, 2009).

The fact that the two, supposedly distinct, leadership styles are often found to overlap adds to the ambiguity of the definition of transformational leadership, and further highlights the lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria of transformational leadership. Dichotomization is one of a number of simplification strategies in leadership studies (Collinson, 2014; see section on romance of leadership for another detrimental example) that help positivist researchers seemingly isolate variables in order to examine empirical relationships. However, such a simplification often fails to recognize the complexity, inter-connections, and shifting relationships that characterize organizational realities (Collinson, 2014). Despite the long list of conceptual problems with transformational leadership, the theory remains the most frequently applied and examined leadership model. In order to demonstrate how such conceptual problems spill over into practice, I now provide an overview of measurement practices of transformational leadership, followed by empirical ‘evidence’.

### *2.2.3 Measuring transformational leadership*

Leadership studies have been dominated by positivist research (Collinson and Grint, 2005; Ford, 2010; Gardner et al., 2010) that tends to draw heavily on behaviour description questionnaires (Bryman, 2004; Yukl, 2012). Transformational leadership has been especially susceptible to relying heavily on a narrow paradigm due to its association with the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire). Despite conceptual problems, the field of leadership research has, for the most part, not taken a step back to examine the underlying model. Instead, leadership research has been characterized by positivist, deductive research that fails to critically examine the underlying model, while further enforcing the (self-fulfilling) constructs of transformational leadership (e.g. behaviours and effects in the same model, a focus on leader agency).

Positivist deductive research has been unable to challenge underlying assumptions (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013), is less likely to problematize the concept of leadership (Bryman, 2004), reinforces leader agency (Collinson and Tourish, in press), and is relatively insensitive to context (Ford, 2010; Bryman, 2004). This section focuses on a more pragmatic level – measurement issues associated with the dominant measurement instrument for transformational leadership, the MLQ. Specifically, I demonstrate how conceptual ambiguities have spilt over into measurement problems. More fundamental issues of problematization and inability to challenge current underlying assumptions are dealt with in later sections on romance of leadership and methodology, while an inability to properly consider situational context is developed in a later section dealing with contextual factors of leadership.

The MLQ has been the most frequently employed instrument by academics and practitioners in assessing the components of the full range of leadership theory (Antonakis et al, 2003; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Michel et al., 2011; Muenjohn and Armstrong, 2008; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999). To emphasize the dominance of the MLQ it is worth noting that most meta-analyses of charismatic or transformational leadership include only studies that have used the MLQ (e.g. Leong and Fischer, 2011; Lowe et al., 1996; DeGroot et al. (2000) include only two studies (of 23) which did not use the MLQ). Given the instrument's popularity, a discussion of it is necessary in order to help further conceptualize transformational leadership. Furthermore, as researchers have almost exclusively used the MLQ for measuring transformational leadership (Diaz-Saenz, 2011), transformational leadership is in a large sense defined by what the MLQ measures (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Following this logic, an assessment of the MLQ is (in part) an assessment of transformational leadership (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). For examples of other instruments see Conger et al. (2000) and Podsakoff et al. (1990). Since these instruments are used with considerably less frequency, and the quantitative empirical studies in this thesis draw almost exclusively from studies using the MLQ, a review of these instruments is beyond the scope of this literature review.



Starting with Burns' (1978) concept of transformational leadership, Bass (1985) elicited responses from 70 senior executives who reported having been exposed to transformational leaders. The descriptions were converted into behavioural statements, whereby judges coded the statements into categories of transformational and transactional leader behaviours. Factor analysis was then conducted, leading to three factors of transformational leadership (charisma-inspirational, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration) and three factors of transactional leadership (contingent reward, management-by-exception, and laissez-faire). After further refinement, the latest version of the MLQ (Form5X) measures 9 components (idealized influence attributed, idealized influence behavioural, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward, management-by-exception active, management by exception passive, and laissez-faire), and contains 45 questions (Antonakis et al., 2003; Avolio and Bass, 2004; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

The concern of high inter-correlations among a number of the transformational leadership components (Bycio et al., 1995) was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Antonakis et al. (2003) counter this criticism by reinforcing Bass' (1998) argument that transformational factors should be highly inter-correlated as such factors have been grouped under the same class of leadership behaviour and are expected to be mutually reinforcing. Due to the lack of empirical distinctiveness, an increasing proportion of empirical studies (e.g. Cole et al., 2009; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Ling et al., 2008) collapse (e.g. average of each item) the transformational leadership factors into one measure (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). The fact that numerous authors of empirical studies collapse the constructs undermines the value of distinct behaviours, and decreases the explanatory and practical relevance. Collapsing the four components of transformational leadership into a unitary construct therefore provides an inconsistency with theory, and justification for doing so is inconsistent with the theory.

In a comprehensive analysis of published studies that used the MLQ, Antonakis et al. (2003) tested the factor structure of the MLQ. Their results demonstrate that the latest nine-factor MLQ (Form 5X) is a "valid and reliable instrument" which best

represents the underlying theory of the full range of leadership model (Antonakis et al., 2003). Similarly, in response to criticisms, Muenjohn and Armstrong (2008) tested the overall fit of the nine-factor model in capturing the factor constructs of the full range of leadership model. The authors similarly conclude that the nine-factor model is the best theoretical construct representing theory, “and although some leadership factors were highly correlated with each other, such as among the five factors of transformational leadership, these factors still distinctly measure their own leadership constructs” (Muenjohn and Armstrong, 2008, p 10). Despite this long standing criticism, correlations between constructs therefore does not seem to be a contributing factor in undermining transformational leadership, as earlier authors would suggest. My contention is that the diversity between some behaviours within and between factors is a larger issue (Yukl, 1999). I made this point earlier with respect to conceptual ambiguity, and I reinforce this criticism in the following with respect to measurement problems. It therefore seems logical that a qualitative approach, which recognizes the rich context in which behaviours are intertwined with each other, and when they are not, would provide a useful alternative to quantitative attempts at isolating constructs.

Given the diversity of behaviours within the transformational leadership model, it is not clear how different behaviours influence differently across contexts (Antonakis et al., 2003). To illustrate,

“behaviors “A” and “B” may both be frequently required in context “X” and would positively covary; however, in context Y behavior “B” may not be necessary or may even be counterproductive, with effective leaders demonstrating behaviors “B” less frequently. Thus, in context “Y”, behaviors “A” and “B” may not be as strongly correlated or may even be negatively correlated” (Antonakis et al., 2003, p 269).

Antonakis et al. (2003) provide this argument with respect to the impossibility of universality of the multidimensional model. However, I present their argument here to demonstrate the problems that arise from having such diverse behaviours in the same

model, and attempting to measure their (collective) impact on desirable outcomes. Having diverse behaviours such as building vision (idealized influence) and coaching (individualized consideration) in the same model, or vision and building trust (idealized influence) in the same construct will certainly lead to erroneous measurement. Consistently, the MLQ is also unable to clearly demonstrate how such diverse behaviours work together or whether/how they substitute for one another (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Diversity of behaviours within and among constructs provides an example of how a lack of a proper conceptual framework has led to measurement problems.

Despite conceptual problems, compounded by measurement problems, empirical research on transformational leadership has moved ahead at full steam. The MLQ still drives large amounts of research (Hunt and Dodge, 2001), with recent empirical studies adopting the MLQ with little recognition for such criticisms (e.g. Cole et al., 2009; Epitropaki and Martin, 2013; Keller, 2006; Nohe et al., 2013). Despite such problems, the vast body of literature has helped to reinvigorate leadership research. Similarly, we cannot ignore the select contributions that the field of transformational leadership has provided over the past 30 years (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013) – e.g. I contend that select behaviours are valid within select contexts. For this reason, empirical examinations of transformational leadership are presented (with caution) in the following section.

## 2.3 Empirical studies

### 2.3.1 *Empirical support?*

An abundance of empirical studies have been conducted to determine a transformational leader's influence on a vast and varied range of subjective and objective desirable outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels. Some more popular bandwagons have been individual creativity and organizational innovation (e.g. Gong et al., 2009; Jaskyte, 2004; Jaussi and Dionne, 2003; Kahai et al., 2003), follower

commitment (e.g. Avolio et al, 2004; Castro et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2013; Muchiri et al., 2012;), job satisfaction (e.g. Braun et al., 2013; DeGroot et al., 2000; Gilstrap and Collins, 2012; Judge and Piccolo, 2004), and organizational citizenship behaviour (e.g. Boerner et al., 2007; Muchiri et al., 2012; Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006; Purvanova et al., 2006).

Instead of providing a repetitive examination of individual studies that employ survey after survey, I illustrate empirical ‘support’ by presenting meta-analyses only. The ten meta-analytical studies of transformational and/or charismatic leadership demonstrate “a laundry list of outcomes” (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), and the claimed universality of transformational leadership.

### *2.3.2 Meta-analytical studies*

There have been ten meta-analytical studies performed between 1996 and 2013 which have had a significant impact on moving the field of transformational leadership forward (e.g. DeGroot et al., 2000; DeRue et al., 2011; Dumdum et al., 2013; Eagly et al., 2003; Fuller et al., 1996; Jackson et al., 2013; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Leong and Fischer, 2011; Lowe et al., 1996; Wang et al., 2011a; Note that Dumdum et al. (2013) is an update to Lowe et al. (1996)). A meta-analysis is a set of techniques combining the results of two or more studies (Leong and Fischer, 2001), in order to estimate a more precise magnitude of the role of transformational leadership in predicting outcomes and its generalizability across studies (Wang et al., 2011a). Each of the meta-analyses are more or less consistent in their general support of transformational leadership theory and its predictive and positive relationship to a vast number of select and diverse desirable outcomes. In this section, I provide an overview of the more influential meta-analyses. In doing so, I present them in chronological order, which provides the reader with a sense of the advances in the literature, and allows for highlighting criticisms of earlier studies. Presenting them in this order is also beneficial since recent meta-analytical studies build on earlier ones.

The meta-analysis by Lowe et al. (1996) has been the most highly cited of the ten meta-analyses, with 2040 citations on Google Scholar (updates and addendums have received an additional 371 citations), followed by Judge and Piccolo (2004; 1500 citations; Google Scholar, July, 2014). The high citations are partly due to the fact that these are the earlier meta-analyses, and citations take time to develop. The study by Lowe et al. (1996) found the mean correlations for the association between leadership style and work unit effectiveness were higher for transformational scales of leadership (.71 for charisma, .61 for individual consideration, and .60 for intellectual stimulation) than for transactional scales (.41 for contingent reward, and .54 for management-by-exception). Most studies in this earlier meta-analysis were subject to same source bias, presumably inflating such relationships (Judge and Piccolo, 2004).

The authors found transformational leadership to be associated with work unit effectiveness for managers in both public and private organizations and at both lower and higher levels of the organization. The authors hypothesized that transformational leadership behaviour would be more frequently observed in private organizations than public organizations, partly due to the fact that managers of private organizations have more discretion to impact their work unit effectiveness. Contrary to their hypothesis, across a number of studies, transformational leadership behaviours were more commonly observed in public than private organizations. The authors suggest that in the bureaucratic nature of public organizations, attributes of intellectual stimulation may be more highly salient to individuals, and therefore be more prominently associated with effectiveness.

The second most highly cited meta-analysis with respect to transformational leadership is the study by Judge and Piccolo (2004). Judge and Piccolo (2004) extended the analysis by Lowe et al. (1996) by including more detailed measurement outcomes, including more studies, testing the augmentation hypothesis, and comparing transformational and charismatic leadership. Based on results from 87 sources, the authors found transformational leadership to have a positive relationship with follower job satisfaction, follower leader satisfaction, follower motivation, leader performance,

group or organizational performance, and perceptions of leader effectiveness. The meta-analysis demonstrated that when transactional leadership was controlled for, transformational leadership was a stronger predictor of the leadership criteria (augments transactional leadership, as illustrated by Bass (1985)). Next, consistent with Lowe et al. (1996), the authors also found that in situations where resources are more constrained (e.g. public sector) transformational leadership worked best. Lastly, the authors conducted a separate meta-analysis for transformational leadership and charismatic leadership in order to compare the two concepts. The authors found the difference between the two was not significant, demonstrating that they are very similar concepts with respect to predicting outcomes (Diaz-Saenz, 2011).

More recently, Wang et al. (2011a) meta-analyse 113 studies of transformational leadership. Their study builds on prior meta-analysis by including a greater number of studies, not limiting the studies to those which used the MLQ, comparing the relationship of transformational leadership with performance across individual, team, and organizational levels of analysis, and estimating the magnitude of the relationship between transformational leadership and task performance, extra effort, and creativity. The results of their study demonstrated a positive relationship between individual follower task performance, extra effort, and creative performance. Transformational leadership was found to have a stronger positive relationship with individual follower extra effort than with individual task performance. The authors explain this result by suggesting that transformational leadership behaviours of self sacrifice, challenging the status quo, and questioning assumptions relate more to “will do” attitudes (extra effort) than to “can do” factors (ability, knowledge, skill). The study also found that transformational leadership was positively related to team level and organizational level performance.

These meta-analytic studies were presented to draw the reader’s attention to the vast amount of empirical literature on transformational leadership, and to introduce the reader to a wide range of outcome variables that have been studied in relation to transformational leadership. The diversity of outcomes and levels of analysis also helps

to highlight the claimed universality of transformational leadership. Such studies tend to ignore the context in which organizational actors find themselves (Ford, 2010), or worse yet, presume that transformational leaders are able to single handedly alter the context (Bligh et al., 2011; Bryman et al., 1996). For example, Avolio and Bass (2004) note that it would be “difficult to imagine a situation” (2004, p 32) where transformational leadership would not be effective. Not surprisingly, leadership development programs then adopt such beliefs, claiming universality while ignoring context, instructing what are depicted as universal best practices (Kellerman, 2012; Tourish, 2014).

## 2.4 Contextual factors of leadership

### 2.4.1 *Contextual factors*

Despite general support from the above meta-analyses (which I contend is in part due to the self-fulfilling nature of confounding behaviours with effects), individual empirical studies continue to find mixed results on the effectiveness of transformational leadership. Mixed evidence suggests that other factors play a role in whether or not (or the magnitude of) transformational leadership has an effect on select outcomes. This is not surprising as no organizational theory holds across all situations (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007).

Bass (1998) recognized that whether transformational leadership “emerges and is successful and effective will depend to some extent on the environment, the organization, the tasks and goals involved, and the distribution of power between the leaders and the followers” (1998, p 61). Earlier authors of transformational leadership also call for more attention toward identifying limiting conditions of transformational leadership (e.g. Bryman et al., 1996; Shamir and Howell, 1999; Yukl, 1999;). After a review of the literature, Wofford et al. (2001) echoed this contention by concluding that most studies “converge on the conclusion that the effectiveness of leadership is situationally determined” (2001, p 196).

Contextual factors are commonly explored and operationalized empirically through moderation or mediation models. A moderator is a variable that “affects the direction and/or strength of the relationship between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable” (Baron and Kenny, 1986, p 1174). A moderator variable is “typically introduced when there is an unexpectedly weak or inconsistent relation between a predictor and a criterion variable (e.g. a relation holds in one setting but not in another, or for one subpopulation but not for another)” (Baron and Kenny, 1986, p 1178).

A mediator is a variable “that accounts for the relationship between the predictor and the criterion” (Baron and Kenny, 1986, p 1196), and represents “properties of the person that transform the predictor or input variables in some way” (1986, p 1178). Commonly examined contextual factors/variables affecting a transformational leader’s influence include environmental uncertainty (Agle et al., 2006; Bacha, 2010; Tosi et al., 2004; Waldman et al., 2004, 2001), organizational life cycle (Peterson et al., 2009), size of organization (Koene et al., 2002; Ling et al., 2008; Vaccaro et al., 2010), and national culture (Bott, in press; Ardichvili, 2001), among others.

Board members meet infrequently, play only a part-time role, have a large span of control, and presumably have little contact with organizational members beyond the ED (executive director). This suggests that the literature on leader-follower distance will be relevant to the board-ED and board-employee/volunteer relationship. Next, board members reside at the highest level of the organization. This suggests that the literature on leadership at higher levels of the hierarchical structure will be relevant to board member research. Each of these literatures are presented in turn before returning to a discussion of how current research is unable to properly account for context.



### 2.4.2 *Leader-follower distance*

Follower distance, as a contextual factor, has been studied as both a neutralizer and an enhancer in the relationship between transformational leadership and follower outcomes (Cole et al., 2009; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Antonakis and Atwater (2002) conceptualized follower distance in terms of three “independent” dimensions, which include physical distance between the leader and the follower, perceived social distance, and perceived task interaction frequency. Physical distance is simply how far or how close followers are located from their leader, and has been operationalized by asking whether or not the leader and follower are employed in the same building (e.g. Howell et al., 2005). Social distance is the degree to which followers perceive differences in status, rank, authority, social standings and power (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002), and is commonly operationalized in empirical studies using hierarchical rank (e.g. Cole et al., 2009). Perceived frequency of leader-follower interaction is defined as the degree to which a leader interacts with his or her follower. Although these three dimensions do overlap (Cole et al., 2009), each individual relationship may exhibit a unique matrix of the three dimensions (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002).

Early theoretical conceptualizations (e.g. Burns, 1978; Weber, 1947) characterized a charismatic-transformational leader as a distant figure (e.g. political, military, or religious leader; Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Shamir, 1995). Management scholars have, however, traditionally operationalized transformational leadership using direct leader-follower dyads (Galvin et al., 2010; Kelley and Kelloway, 2012). If the leader-follower relationship is characterized as a close relationship, it can be presumed that the follower will hold a greater amount of information about the leader’s behaviours (e.g. obtained through observation) and therefore more accurately assess the leader’s behaviours and performance (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Shamir, 1995). Additionally, the transformational leadership component of individualized consideration applies primarily to the relationship between a leader and their direct follower (Shamir, 1995). By definition, “distant leaders do not have direct contact with most of their followers and therefore cannot show followers direct consideration” (Shamir, 1995, p

27). Similarly, managers with a large span of control would not have time to adapt their behaviours to each individual distant follower (Chun et al., 2009).

When the leader-follower relationship is characterized as distant, the follower will have less information about the leader's behaviours and therefore impressions will be made up of assumptions and attributions of their traits (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Chun et al., 2009; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Popper 2013). In such a case, followers' impressions are more susceptible to attribution bias whereby the results of an outcome are assumed to be the result of an individual leader (Mendl et al., 1985; see section below on romance of leadership). Distant followers are not in a position to accurately evaluate organizational outcomes, and resort to attributing outcomes (positive or negative) to the result of an individual leader (Katz and Kahn, 1978; Meidl et al., 1985; Shamir, 1995). Therefore, distant leaders (commonly in prestigious high ranks) are more likely to be idealized (Cole et al., 2009). Given distant followers have less contact with the leader, and less information about the leader, the effects of the leader on followers are likely to be influenced heavily by visionary speeches, symbolic role modeling, and image building efforts (Shamir, 1995). In fact, earlier writings of charisma suggested that psychological distance was an antecedent of charisma (Katz and Kahn, 1978) whereby day-to-day interaction with an immediate supervisor could highlight weaknesses or inconsistencies of the leader (Collinson, 2005; Howell et al., 2005).

To examine earlier theoretical assertions regarding the effect of distance on the relationship between leadership and follower perceptions, Shamir (1995) used content analysis from interviews with Israeli students. The primary findings from this earlier influential paper were that both close and distant leaders have a positive impact on the perceptions of follows. However, the perceptions stem from different behaviours. Distant leaders were characterized by traits of ideological orientation, vision, rhetorical skills, and organizational performance cues. Respondents characterized close charismatic leaders as considerate, supportive, having expertise and competence, setting high standards, being energetic and dynamic, and role modeling task behaviours.

In a study of employees from a high technology manufacturing company in Europe, Cole et al. (2009) found social distance reduced the effects of transformational leadership on some outcomes and enhanced its effects on other outcomes. For example, transformational leaders were more likely to affect the leadership abilities of immediate followers than the abilities of distant followers. This finding suggest that leadership behaviours such as role modeling and building direct relationships have an impact on the follower's desire to mirror the leader's behaviours. Distance, however, positively moderated the relationship between transformational leadership and outcomes of positive emotional climate, and collective efficacy beliefs.

Howell et al. (2005) tested a moderation model of physical distance between financial service managers and employees in Canada. The authors found transformational leadership positively predicted business unit financial performance under close leadership, but not in the distant leadership model. Therefore, physical distance between the leader and the follower negatively moderated the relationship between transformational leadership and business unit performance (measured by a weighted average of three financial targets). Similarly, in a study of military leaders, and direct and indirect followers, Dvir et al. (2002) found transformational leaders had a more positive impact on the development of direct followers than of indirect followers. The findings of this study are consistent with the theoretical contentions (e.g. Shamir, 1995) that individualized consideration and relational aspects of transformational leadership are more effective with close relationships. Without a temporally lagged dependent variable, it is, however, possible that the developmental effects of indirect followers were not captured in this study (Dvir et al., 2002).

Using a sample of participants from professional and management positions, Kelley and Kelloway (2012) developed a mediation model for remote leadership, which demonstrated that transformational leadership was predicted by control, regularly scheduled communication, unplanned communication, and prior knowledge. The authors found that context (physically remote) predicted perceptions of transformational

leadership, and boldly conclude that their study “provides strong evidence for the argument that the remote environment requires a new model of leadership, different from those based on the premise of face-to-face interaction” (2012, p 445).

It is clear from the above empirical examinations and from other studies (e.g. Avolio et al., 2004; Chun et al., 2009) that distance affects how a leader is perceived and thus the subsequent influencing effects. In this section, I have therefore demonstrated that transformational leadership is said to have an impact on both close and distant followers, although “there are fundamental differences between distant charismatic leadership and close charismatic leadership” (Shamir, 1995, p 19). Leaders attempting to influence distant followers should engage in a different set of transformational leadership behaviours than when attempting to influence close followers (Murphy and Ensher, 2008). Understanding the relationship between transformational leadership and followers’ perceptions at different distances is important when examining board members, who have both close and distant followers. Consistently, board members reside at the highest level of the hierarchy. In the next section, I examine the hierarchical level of analysis as a contextual factor of leadership influence.

#### *2.4.3 Hierarchical levels of analysis*

Although earlier conceptualizations of charismatic and transformational leadership revolved around images of charismatic CEOs, top-level executives, political figures, and religious leaders, most empirical research has focused on the lower level supervisor (Agle et al., 2006; Judge and Piccolo, 2004). This disconnect is problematic, as leaders at different hierarchical levels face fundamentally different contexts (Bruch and Walter, 2007). For example, managers at higher levels may face more complexity or ambiguity than lower level managers, whom may be charged with overseeing tasks of a more routine nature (Antonakis et al., 2003; Bruch and Walter, 2007). It has been noted that part of the reason board members and top executives are studied less often than mid-level managers (Osborn et al, 2002; Yukl, 2008) is that of access challenges (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Hambrick, 2007). A number of empirical studies have examined whether there are differences in the frequency of use and the effectiveness of transformational

leadership behaviours across hierarchical levels. Despite the earlier meta-analysis conducted by Lowe et al. (1996) which found lower level leaders to be rated higher than higher level leaders on all transformational leadership constructs, more recent empirical evidence has supported theoretical contentions that transformational leadership behaviours are more frequently used at high levels.

Bruch and Walter (2007) compared leadership behaviours of middle and upper level managers of a Swedish multinational corporation specializing in power and automation technologies. The authors found behaviours of idealized influenced and inspirational motivation occurred more frequently among upper level managers than among middle managers. The authors found no statistical difference in the use of intellectual stimulation or individual consideration between the two hierarchal levels. Furthermore, the authors found the components of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation were more effective at strengthening subordinate job satisfaction when performed by upper level managers than by middle managers. Individualized consideration behaviours had a similar positive effect on job satisfaction of subordinates of upper managers as it did on influencing job satisfaction of subordinates of middle managers.

Edwards and Gill (2012) examined leadership behaviours of five hierarchical levels within numerous manufacturing organizations in the United Kingdom. Employing hierarchical regression analysis, the authors found transformational leadership to be equally effective across the five hierarchical levels of analysis. However, when broken down into the individual constructs, the authors found idealized influence and inspirational motivation to be ineffective at lower levels of the organization. Also consistent with the findings of Bruch and Walter (2007), the authors conclude that individualized consideration was effective at each hierarchal level.

In a study of senior, middle, and first-level managers employed across the United Kingdom, Oshagbemi and Gill (2004) used a series of t-tests to examine leadership behaviours across the three hierarchical levels. The authors found the use of

inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation to be statistically different between the highest and lowest-levels of analysis under examination, whereby the highest-level leaders were rated higher on these leadership constructs. The authors did not find any differences in the usage of idealized influence and individualized consideration among hierarchical levels.

Among the three empirical studies presented in this section, each study found inspirational motivation, two studies identified idealized influence, and one found intellectual stimulation to be more frequently used among higher level than among lower level managers. None of the three studies found individualized consideration to be used more prominently by higher level leaders. With respect to idealized influence, the greater decision making autonomy of high-level managers provides a platform to initiate large-scale changes (Bruch and Walter, 2007; Shamir and Howell, 1999), allowing them to appear charismatic. Creating a vision is also commonly associated with upper levels, whereas the visions of middle or lower level leaders would remain limited in scope (Bruch and Walter, 2007). Behaviours of individualized consideration do not require high authority, and can therefore be expected to be used by (and be effective when used by) leaders of all levels (Bruch and Walter, 2007). This provides for clues as what types of behaviours board members, being at the highest-level, are likely to display.

#### *2.4.4 Summary*

Although the emphasis on universality of transformational leadership was originally quite strong (Yukl, 1999), and some authors have claimed that empirical work has been slow to address contextual factors (Cole et al., 2009; Wofford et al., 2001), there has been substantial effort in identifying and empirically (mostly quantitatively) examining such influences. Leader-follower distance and level of hierarchy were presented as having relevance to the current study. The growing volume of empirical studies on situational/contextual factors has directly challenged the universal claims of transformational leadership. This section has demonstrated how contextual factors of

leader-follower distance and hierarchical levels of analysis affect a transformational leader's influence.

However, despite the appearance of progress, I argue that erroneous methods underestimate the importance of current contextual factors. Quantitative/questionnaire based research has been unable to properly address contextual factors, as quantitative research is less sensitive to context (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010). Additionally, I argue below that current studies, which use the MLQ in their mediation or moderation models, are unable to explicitly articulate causal links due to the multidimensionality of transformational leadership (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). “For a multidimensional mediation model to make theoretical sense, it must include theory that explains the role of *each individual element* of charismatic-transformational leadership and the mediation processes by which each affects outcomes” (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013, p 16; emphasis in original). A similar argument holds for moderation models. This contention ties back to my earlier criticism of transformational leadership, whereby diverse behaviours are in the same model and same construct.

It is not likely that conceptually all behaviours in the model (or even within a construct) are mediated/moderated by the same variables to the same outcome. If there is no conceptual argument to justify this, then the model should not be tested (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) therefore make the argument that the constructs of transformational leadership should individually be examined (when there is a conceptual argument for the relationship) in a mediation/moderation model. I further claim that the diversity *within* constructs (e.g. supportive and developmental behaviours within individualized consideration, trust and vision within idealized influence) will most often preclude a conceptual argument to test such a model. Therefore, the search for situational variables “may be more successful if directed at specific types of transformational behaviours” (Yukl, 1999, p 291), as not every behaviour (even within constructs) will be conceptually relevant in every situation (Antonakis et al., 2003; Yukl, 1999). A more reflexive qualitative approach would

better reveal that organizational actors are intertwined within the context in which they perform (Ford, 2010).

It is quite perplexing then when a review of the last 15 years of research reveals a (non-exhaustive) list of 52 different mediators predicting 38 outcomes and 58 moderators having relationships with 37 outcome variables (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Specifically, the implicit (or unrecognized) claim made by most authors is that such relationships hold for *all* constructs (and behaviours) of transformational leadership (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Research should therefore examine (e.g. narrative) how individual behaviours are used within the diverse situational settings faced by organizational actors (Yukl, 1999), unconstrained by the multidimensionality of transformational leadership theory (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Such a diverse, multidimensional, and ambiguous model also poses problems for practitioners. How could someone, wanting to improve their leadership potential, pay attention to this many variables?

So far I have provided an overview of transformational leadership, suggesting that conceptual and measurement problems have not been properly addressed. Next, I demonstrated that current (positivist) research has been unable to properly examine the context in which organizational actors perform. Conceptual and measurement problems have spilt over into contextual research whereby authors empirically examining contextual factors have assumed all constructs/behaviours are or are not relevant. Another limiting factor of a transformational leader's influence, which has received extensive theoretical attention, is that of the other organizational actors, namely the follower. Kellerman (2013, 2012) suggests that the leadership process should be depicted as a triangle with individual sides representing the leader, the context, and the follower, whereby neither side plays a greater role in the leadership process than the other sides. For this reason, in the following sections I first criticize transformational leadership for traditionally claiming a unidirectional influence, from the leader to the follower. I then follow this by acknowledging theoretical (and scant empirical) work which recognizes the role of the follower in the leadership process.



## 2.5 Unidirectional to distributed

### 2.5.1 *Unidirectional presupposition*

Positivist deductive researchers of transformational leadership, and other leader-centric theories, not only continue to enter the field with the presupposition of unidirectional influence, focusing solely on the role of the leader, but also further reinforce agency presuppositions. A number of authors (e.g. Carsten et al., 2010; Uhl-Bien and Pillai, 2007) criticize the current status of transformational leadership theory, which suggests “extraordinary leaders exercise a unidirectional influence on more-or-less willing followers, who are presumably little more than empty vessels awaiting a transfusion of insight from their betters” (Tourish, 2008, p 523). Under this stream of literature, leaders are presumed to act on, rather than alongside, followers (Tourish, 2014). Yukl (1999) similarly notes that when “a correlation is found between transformational leadership and subordinate commitment or performance, the results are interpreted as showing that the leader influenced subordinates to perform better” (1999, p 292), with little effort toward exploring reciprocal influence or shared leadership (Yukl, 1999).

The very definition of transformational leadership proposed by seminal scholars implies a unidirectional influence. For example, definitional characteristics of transformational leadership involve “inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals”, “stimulate followers’ efforts to be innovative and creative”, “motivate and inspire those around them”, and “providing the follower with support, mentoring, and coaching” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p 5-7) - each suggesting that influence flows from the leader to “those around them”, or to the infamous follower as the powerless ‘other’. Transformational leadership, and other leader-centric theories, therefore stresses the abilities of the leader, legitimizing asymmetric power relations between the leader and follower (Tourish, 2014). Traditional theories thereby “endorse the associated concentration of decision making in the hands of managerial elites” (Tourish, 2014, p 80).

Leader-centric theories similarly suggest “powerful voices of organizational leaders seek to persuade the rest of the workforce to conform to organizational norms and behaviours” (Ford, 2010, p 50 referring to Alvesson and Willmott, 2002 and Knights and Willmott, 1992). Such theories implicitly advocate that it is unproblematic that select individuals, who reside at the higher hierarchical levels, have the right to influence followers (Sutherland et al., 2013). Advocates of transformational leadership not only suggest that all organizational actors have a common interest, or that interests automatically coalesce (Collinson, 2011; Collinson and Tourish, in press), but by accepting that elite groups should make key decisions implicitly assumes that the goals, values, and interests proposed by transformational leaders represent a deeper common interest (Tourish, 2013b). The fact that employees’ interests will be synonymous with the interests of the organization “– let alone emotionally bond with it – seems inconceivable” (Fleming, 2013, p 492-493). Not only do such leadership theories remain ignorant of the perils of asymmetric power relationships, but they also bypass a greater conversation about whether leadership, at least when characterized in this manner, is ethical (Olivier, 2011).

Business schools further perpetuate this infatuation by promoting leader-centric models, suggesting that leadership means making the hard decisions, rising to challenging tasks, and by promising that future students will have great influence (Collinson and Tourish, in press), and become transformational leaders themselves (Tourish et al., 2010). Such professionally focused pedagogical programs in turn reinforce the heroic image, failing to suggest that leaders should listen to and learn from others (Collinson and Tourish, in press), with little effort to adjust the curricula to embrace the collective (Kellerman, 2012). Such curricula becomes mutually constructive as it is alluring to both those who want power and to those who already hold it but want more, while further legitimizing dominant power relations and hierarchical structures (Collinson and Tourish, in press). Following this contention, professional teachings of leadership obviously neglect the opportunity to recognize

dissent, fail to acknowledge the dialectics of leadership (e.g. unintended consequences), and are accepting of asymmetric power relationships.

As business systems became large, complex, multilevel, and difficult to understand, researchers and the media had a focus solely on the leader (Baker, 2007; see also later discussion on the halo effect). Leader-centric theories, such as transformational leadership, were then attractive in explaining complex phenomenon in a simple way. A number of authors (e.g. Baker, 2007; Kellerman, 2013, 2012; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) have recognized that the incongruence between organizational reality and leadership theories (and teaching) is (in part) due to the fact that research has not evolved with changes in society. Traditional leader-centric models emerged to explain a very different set of circumstances, with deeper bureaucratic philosophies, than faced in current knowledge based organizations (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Not surprisingly, leadership theorists are increasingly challenged to explain modern divisions of labor through the lenses of traditional theories (Gronn, 2002).

Consistently, there has been a shift in the balance of power between the elite and the masses, whereby the powerless have come to feel more entitled and freer to challenge once seemingly more powerful forces (Kellerman, 2013). In addition, we are in an era of increased engagement with social media, which has leveled the playing field, ultimately adding an element of empowerment (Kellerman, 2013). This, however, brings along with it an academically underexplored influence in the balance of powers not only politically and socially, but potentially within an organizational context.

Despite the recognition of dialectics of asymmetric power, unrealistic assumptions of unidirectional influence, and the societal shift in the balance of powers, leadership theorists (specifically empirical examinations) continue to focus on leader-centric approaches – specifically transformational leadership. Top-down influences reinforce follower images as research agendas with this fixation place the leader at the center of the relationship (Howell and Shamir, 2005), with follower identity, values, personality, experience, and attitudes commonly examined as a moderator or mediator (at best) of

the leaders' influence (Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Subsets of post-heroic scholars have focused on the role of the follower (e.g. Carsten et al., 2010; Shamir, 2007), suggesting that leadership is socially constructed (at least in part) by the perception of followers (e.g. Meindl et al., 1985), while other subsets of scholars have focused on the collective aspect of leadership models (e.g. Gronn, 2011, 2009, 2002; Pearce and Conger, 2003). Each of these streams of literature are discussed in the following sections.

### *2.5.2 The promise of followership?*

Consistent with leader-centric theories, followers have traditionally been characterized as passive recipients of the leader's vision and objectives (Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Burns (1978) succinctly noted that one of the "most serious failures in the study of leadership has been the bifurcation between the literature on leadership and the literature on followership" (1978, p 3). Although Burns (1978) acknowledged that leadership is a process of mutual influences, both Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) continued to focus almost exclusively on the role of the leader in the leadership process, ultimately ignoring the role of the follower (Howell and Shamir, 2005). In fact, Burns (1978) inadvertently turned the attention of the leadership industry away from examining close supervisor relationships toward focusing on those who reside at the top (Spector, 2014) – epitomizing the leader as a mystical figure. Current leadership theories have continued down this path, focusing on the traits and behaviours of leaders, and underestimating the role of the follower in the leader-follower relationship.

However, the dynamics of followership is an important concept as it has justifiably been noted that followers may play just as much of a role in constructing leaders as leaders do in constructing follower behaviour (Kellerman, 2007; Tourish, 2008). These contentions are increasingly becoming important as followers are moving toward having greater skill, and see themselves as free agents with less dependence on their organizations or leaders (Kellerman, 2013, 2012, 2007). Although they may lack formal authority, in the modern world followers do not lack power or influence (Kellerman,

2007). Although this is a common contention, empirical examinations of what exactly the role of followers is in the leadership process have been slower to develop (Carsten et al., 2010).

In contrast to leadership, followership literature has received very little empirical attention (Baker, 2007; Carsten et al., 2010; Crossman and Crossman, 2011). Most empirical examinations claiming to take on a follower-centric approach classify followers on their level of engagement (e.g. Kellerman, 2007). Carsten et al. (2010) depict two types of followers, suggesting “followers may construct and enact followership in a more traditional “subordinate” sense, demonstrated by behaviours such as reduced responsibility-taking, conformity, and reluctant to speak up, while others may construct a more “dynamic” and “courageous” role of followership in which they see themselves more as partners in the relationship or even co-leaders” (Carsten et al., 2010, p 545, referring to previous studies). In reviewing the literature on followership, Baker (2007) found the following themes: “(a) that followers and leaders are roles, not people with inherent characteristics; (b) that followers are active, not passive; (c) that followers and leaders share a common purpose; and (d) that followers and leaders must be studied in the context of their relationship” (2007, p 58). Despite the theoretical advancement (and scant empirical work) on followership, this body of literature still says very little about the actual role of followers in the leadership process.

A number of authors have attempted to examine how follower prototyping of the leader plays a role in the leadership process (Bott, in press). The authors working with this set of literature suggest that follower backgrounds, culture, individual values, attitudes, need for achievement, etc., shape how followers react to leader influences. For example, Ehrhart and Klein (2001) suggest that followers will have different preferences for and attraction to a charismatic leader’s vision, and play a different role in the charismatic process, based on their achievement-orientation, perception of shared values, similarity of attributes, need for achievement, and level of risk taking. The authors then set out to answer the following questions: “What kinds of followers are most likely to form charismatic relationship with there leaders?” and “[What] are the

attributes or predispositions that distinguish the loyal and committed followers of charismatic leaders?” (2001, p 154). My contention is that such questions do little to advance our understanding of the role of the follower in the leadership process, as the authors are inadvertently placing the follower in relation to the leader, further dichotomize leader-follower roles, while ultimately reinforcing leader agency (e.g. focusing on the leader’s attributes, or attributes as perceived by the other). There has also been empirical work on the romance of leadership model, which has attempted to further shift the focus away from the leader to the follower, and is often claimed to be a follower-centric model (Crossman and Crossmam, 2011; Oc and Bashshur, 2013).

### 2.5.3 *Romance of leadership*

Critics of leadership models emphasize the overstated efficacy of leadership, which suggests “that leaders have the ability to control and influence the fates of organizations in their charge, regardless of external forces or situational conditions” (Bligh et al., 2011, p 1062). Although this contention is not unique to transformational leadership, a number of theoretical claims and empirical findings suggest this over attribution is more prominent with transformational leadership than with other leadership theories, since transformational leadership stimulates the emotions of followers (Bligh et al., 2011; Meindl, 1990; Schyns et al., 2007). Burns (1978) noted, “because it is easier to look for heroes and scapegoats than to probe for complex and obscure causal forces, some assume that the lives of the “greats” carry more clues to the understanding of society, history, and current events than the lives of the great mass of people, of the subleaders and the followers” (1978, p 52). This concept has been referred to as “biased assimilation” (Lord et al., 1979), “the romance of leadership” (Meindl et al., 1985), and “the halo effect” (Rosenzweig, 2007; Thorndike, 1920).

The romance of leadership concept suggests that in times of extreme positive or negative company performance, observers attribute a great deal of responsibility to the leader, ignoring other possible and concurrent internal and external influences which may have played a large role in determining such results (Meindl et al., 1985; Schyns et

al., 2007). The romance of leadership phenomenon can therefore be a double-edged sword for leaders, “with the potential to dichotomize leaders into heroes or villains” (Bligh et al., 2011, p 1064), based on little more than over attributions (Khurana, 2002; Morris et al., 2005; Tourish et al., 2010). Gibson and Schroeder (2003) note that the blame toward individual leaders is more pronounced with increased hierarchy. Over attribution is also more likely to occur for distant leaders, as individuals (e.g. followers, media, investors) distant from the leader lack information about the leader’s personal behaviours and lack information about organizational events and circumstances (Shamir, 1995; also see section on leader-follower distance).

In a series of archival and experimental studies, Meindl et al. (1985) examined the effects of performance outcome levels on the strength of leadership attributions. They noted that the social construction of organizational realities has elevated the concept of leadership, which emphasizes leadership to a “brilliance that exceeds the limits of scientific enquiry” (Mendl et al., 1985, p 78). The term romance of leadership refers to the notion that both observers and participants in organizations have developed a highly romanticized and heroic view of leaders, what they do, and how they are able to impact the lives of those around them. Furthermore, the authors note the “imagery and mythology typically associated with the concept [of leadership] is evidence of the mystery and near mysticism with which it has been imbued” (Meindl et al., 1985, p 78).

Earlier work by Thorndike (1920) also suggests that this heroic view of the leader can be compounding (and self-fulfilling), whereby those who are perceived to hold a desirable trait (or behave in a certain way, such as charismatic) are also rated higher by their followers on other attributes. In a study of employees in large industrial companies, the author found the estimates of the same individual in a number of traits (such as intelligence, technical skills, reliability, etc.) were highly correlated (Thorndike, 1920). From this, Thorndike (1920) concluded that individuals were unable to analyse attributes independent of each other.

Rozenzweig's (2007) halo effect framework follows a similar argument as Lord et al. (1979) and Meindl et al. (1985), and is rooted in the work of Thorndike (1920). In the book titled *The Halo Effect*, Rozenzweig (2007) followed a number of high profile companies through cycles of high and low performances. He found that when a company experienced success over a number of years, individuals (e.g. the media, board of directors, analysts) attributed the success to a particular individual (or a particular strategy). When the results of this same company declined in later years, the same individual leader was criticized as the cause of the decline. However, many times there was no change in how the individual led, meaning we should be receptive to other, more comprehensive theories (e.g. other influences). Instead, individuals sought the comfort of a simplified plausible explanation (the delusion of a single explanation) to a complex paradigm, whereby the success or failure of a company was attributed to an individual, ignoring the complex environment in which organizations operate (Rozenzweig, 2007). Positivist deductive research (e.g. the MLQ) on leadership over the last 30 years, which focuses solely on the leader, has been closed to exploring such alternatives.

Arnulf et al. (2012) explored the implications of the halo effect through the analysis of manager firings in the Norwegian football league. In this study, the authors plot a comparison of negative performance between teams that dismissed their manager and teams that did not dismiss their manager (control group) after a similar negative trend, in an attempt to demonstrate what would have taken place, in terms of overall team results, if the leader had not been fired. This study found that improvements in performance were similar, or even better, when the leader was not fired after a series of negative team performance. The implications of such findings are that there is an over tendency to dismiss managers due to an over attribution of the sequence of events to be the result of an individual leader's performance. Although the decision to dismiss a leader should be based on an objective evaluation of the performance of the leader, knowledge of an individual leader's performance is often imperfect, leading to boards dismissing managers based on possibly irrelevant cues, such as randomly distributed previous outcomes or purely external factors (Arnulf et al., 2012).



In this section, I have demonstrated that the study of transformational leadership has been criticized for overemphasizing the role of the leader. Such overemphasis occurs when “our attitudes on important social issues reflect only our preconceptions, vague impression, and untested assumption” (Lord et al., 1979, p 2098), and can be harmful when the pedagogy of leadership by business schools make false promises to students (Tourish et al., 2010), and decisions by boards of directors are made based on misconceptions (Arnulf et al., 2012; Rosenzweig, 2007), often leading to disruptive successions (Arnulf et al., 2012; Grint, 2005; Meindl et al., 1985). However, such over attribution does not undermine the possibility that leaders can impact organizations, and thus the importance of the study of leadership. It does, however, challenge the magnitude of such effects (Rosenzweig, 2007), drawing our attention toward ontological shifts (Jones, 2014; Kelly, 2013) that are open to exploring other factors (e.g. context) and other actors.

As a contribution to the followership literature, the work by Meindl et al. (1985) is still not follower-centric as it simply examines followers’ constructions of leaders (O’C and Bashshur, 2013); The leader never really left center stage. More specifically, we still know very little about the role of the follower in the leadership process (Carsten et al., 2010). Even if the followership literature had succeeded in developing and testing follower-centric models, swinging the pendulum from leader agency to follower agency is likely not the answer (Gronn, 2002). Nevertheless, such studies have provided an important contribution in problematizing over attribution and starting to interrogate the strongly held assumption of unidirectional influence in leadership theories. Problematizing leadership in this way, suggests the need for alternative ontologies (Jones, 2014; Kelly, 2013), leading to alternative methodological explorations of the leadership process.

A great deal of the literature on followers appears to be in relation to leadership models, with definitions of followership commonly constructed in relation to leadership (Crossman and Crossman, 2011), thereby not fully grasping the power of followership or the need to conceptualize the influences of followers. Followership still dichotomizes

the roles of leader and follower, thereby continuing to reaffirm leader agency (Tourish, 2014). With the balance of power between elites and the ‘others’ shifting (Kellerman, 2013), followership still leaves many questions unasked. Social and organizational movements have led to a shift in theoretical focus from leader-centric models, to followership models, to something more akin to collaboration. For these reasons, empirical work on followership moved on before it really even began, with scholarly attention recently moving toward more collaborative models. Such models emphasize the shared roles within the leadership process, suggest there should be no fixed roles of leader and follower, and often reject the distinction between leaders and followers (Shamir, 2007).

#### *2.5.4 Distributed leadership*

More progressive views of followership have attempted to view followers as partners or collaborators who play an active role in defining and achieving organizational outcomes. Such literature overlaps with a more recent stream of literature that broadly falls under the headings of disturbed, dispersed, team, post-heroic, or collective leadership (Collinson and Collinson, 2009; Crossman and Crossman, 2011; Pearce and Conger, 2003). This body of literature has roots going back to the 1940s and 1950s, but was, however, marginalized in the 1980s with the dominance of leader-centric theories (Contractor et al., 2012; Gronn, 2011). Ironically, academics have reengaged with these concepts in an attempt to counter balance the shortcomings of (e.g. erroneous assumptions), and dissatisfaction with, leader-centric/heroic theories (Bolden et al., 2009; Crevani et al., 2010; Gronn, 2009).

This post-heroic grouping of theories has therefore been offered as an alternative to top-down heroic concepts (Kramer and Crespy, 2011), and has sought to move away from exclusive leader agency. Most authors recognize that distributed forms of leadership are not meant to replace leader agency (Jones, 2014), or to deny the key role played by formal leaders (Bolden et al., 2009), but to complement agency with a recognition that leadership is an emergent property of a collective (Grint, 2010b; Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

As there is a plethora of empirical literature (see Mathieu et al., 2008) on self managed teams and work team performance and effectiveness (Bergman et al., 2012), this is not the focus of this section (or thesis). There have however been few empirical studies analysing (shared) leadership power relations between organizational actors across hierarchical levels (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Sutherland et al., 2013). Models of distributed leadership have been met with more skepticism among scholars than the benefits of work teams (Crevani et al., 2010). This section focuses more on distributed leadership whereby influence, power, and leadership occur across organizational hierarchical boundaries. While Pearce (2004) identifies shared leadership as a “simultaneous, ongoing, mutual influence process” (2004, p 48), Gronn (2002) asserts distributed leadership means

aggregated leadership of an organization is dispersed among some, many, or maybe all of the members. This additive understanding does not privilege the work of particular individuals or categories of persons, nor is there a presumption about which individual’s behaviors carries more weight with colleagues (2002, p 429).

Embedded in the definition provided by Gronn (2002) is a reduction in agency (e.g. does not place agency solely on the leader or the follower), is thereby less susceptible to being romanticized, and allows for the researcher to explore and remain open to influences from alternative actors. In addition, an actor can embrace a leadership function, as the task and situation may call for, then step back once the situation permits, allowing others to step in and lead (Contractor et al., 2012; Pearce and Conger, 2003). Given the complex, processual nature of shared leadership, it is clear that this body of literature has ignited a shift in leadership studies toward qualitative, and often soft interpretivist, approaches to research.

With increased workplace complexity, an advantage of distributed forms of leadership over leader-centric models is that distributed leadership allows for expertise

to be drawn from multiple actors. For example, in an examination of Australian higher education institutes, Jones (2014) found that distributed leadership enables “the expertise of more people to be acknowledged and influence change” (2014, p 139). Pearce (2004) similarly lays out a framework whereby he contends shared leadership will be more relevant when the work is characterized as requiring interdependence, creativity and complexity. Drawing on the diverse expertise of multiple actors (Gronn, 2002; Kramer and Crespy, 2011), between and across hierarchical levels, complements the capabilities, competencies, and expertise of the designated individual, ultimately overcoming weaknesses of the designated leader (Jones, 2014).

Although distributed forms of leadership have gained in popularity over the last decade, such theories are not without downside or criticism. In an interview based study of universities in the United Kingdom, Bolden et al. (2009) found consequences of distributed leadership to include reduced role clarity and slow decision making. In an analysis of an Australian university, Jones (2014) found that distributed leadership does not necessarily lead to more democratic decision making. Challenges to adopting forms of distributed leadership are explored in the next section.

Research on distributed leadership is still confined to describing rather than being subjected to rigorous critical analysis of its applicability and effectiveness (Jones, 2014). Although it has been suggested that research on distributed leadership is still in the stage of “concept introduction/elaboration” (Gronn, 2002), there has been a growing body of empirical evidence. To demonstrate, I draw the reader’s attention to a recent meta-analysis on shared leadership and team effectiveness, which brought together 42 independent samples of shared leadership. In the meta-analysis by Wang et al. (2014), the authors found shared leadership to positively predict team effectiveness. However, the authors conclude that shared leadership is more strongly related to attitudinal and behavioural outcomes than to both subjective and objective performance outcomes. The authors further found the relationship between shared leadership and desirable team based outcomes is stronger when the work is more knowledge based and interdependent.

### 2.5.5 *A hybrid model of leadership*

Despite the growing theoretical literature on distributed leadership, individualist approaches to leadership “continue to figure prominently in accounts that purport to be distributed” (Gronn, 2009, p 383). A number of empirical examinations have found repetition of the use and preference for both styles, suggesting both individualist and collective forms of leadership are not on opposite ends of a continuum. Thus, the newly fashioned allure of distributed leadership as opposing heroic perspectives (e.g. collective versus individual, democratic versus autocratic) tends to not be purified in empirical research.

Pearce and Sims (2002) analysed the effectiveness of shared leadership in 71 change management teams from a large automotive manufacturing firm in the United States. The authors found distributed leadership to have a stronger predictive relationship to team effectiveness than the predictive abilities of transformational leadership. Interestingly, the authors found shared leadership and transformational leadership to be closely related, concluding that transformational leadership is predictive of shared transformational leadership. This suggests that if a leader displays transformational leadership, others in the organization will mimic such behaviours, which leads to multiple actors exhibiting transformational behaviours and taking on leadership roles at various points in time.

In an observation ethnographic study of the making of a community theatre production, Kramer and Crespy (2011) found aspects of collaboration combined with events of more directive behaviours. At times collaboration was in tension with leader dominance, and at other times (e.g. vision setting) collaboration and individualism complemented each other. The authors concluded that collaboration “is more of a continuum than an all-or-nothing factor”, whereby “skilled leaders can choose the level of collaboration they want and then communicate to achieve that level of collaboration” (2011, p 1036).

In an examination of Australian higher education institutes, Jones (2014) found that although distributed leadership was present, the success of distributed leadership was dependent on the endorsement and continual championing from formally appointed leadership. The author also found that despite the large number of organizational actors bringing expertise and influencing change, the decision making process remained concentrated in formal power structures of the university.

In a qualitative analysis of further education institutions in the United Kingdom, Collinson and Collinson (2009) found participants preferred leadership practices that combined distributed leadership styles with directive top-down leadership styles. The authors conclude by suggesting the need to blend heroic and post-heroic leadership models – once seemingly contradictory styles. The findings of Pearce and Sims (2002), Kramer and Crespy (2011), Jones (2014), Collinson and Collinson (2009) and others (e.g. Bolden et al., 2009; Klein et al., 2006), suggest that distributed leadership and forms of vertical leadership, such as transformational leadership, should not be considered mutually exclusive (Pearce and Sims, 2002).

Even within organizations that claim to be practicing a distributed model, leaders continue to exercise a disproportionate amount of influence compared to other organizational actors (Gronn, 2011; Shamir, 2007). One likely reason is that it is difficult for individuals to relinquish control (Kramer and Crespy, 2011), especially when individually a leader may be held responsible for a collective outcome (Clarke, 2006). Times of crisis also call for individuals or small elite groups to make decisions on behalf of the collective (Tourish, 2013b). In addition, distributed leadership requires endorsement and continual championing whereby individuals lower down the hierarchy may look to strong leaders to stimulate a cooperative environment (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Jones, 2014). From this perspective, hierarchical structures are not in contradiction to distributed leadership, but a precursor to (Barnes et al., 2013). However, moving toward a fully distributed form of leadership is paradoxically encumbered by current systems, work practices, and hierarchical structures (Carsten et al., 2010; Fletcher, 2004).

The findings presented in this section open up future contextual research opportunities that seek to examine the situations in which the two styles complement each other as well as when tensions are created between the seemingly paradoxical relationship. In addition, “leadership apologists have not adequately clarified the role and contribution of individuals as continuing sources of organizational influences within a distributed framework” (Gronn, 2011, p 383).

#### 2.5.6 *Summary*

In this section I discussed the criticism of transformational leadership whereby the study of transformational leadership has presumed a unidirectional influence, with little effort on exploring reciprocal influence or shared leadership. The field of leadership studies is dominated by a positivist perspective (Bryman, 2011a; Collinson and Grint, 2005), which tends to draw heavily on behaviour description questionnaires (Bryman, 2004; Yukl 2012), such as the MLQ. This fixation results in current leadership methodologies having “a tendency to replicate existing paradigms rather than discover new possibilities” (Shaw, 2010, p 89). Such methodologies not only continue to reinforce, but further accentuate the focus on the leader.

Behavioural-based questionnaires (e.g. the MLQ) are designed based on the premise of a top-down influence from a ‘leader’ to a ‘follower’. Such research methods have been unable to question this underlying assumption, and fundamentally reinforce 30 years of researcher presupposition. More recent critics have contended that such a dichotomization (Collinson, 2014) of the leader-follower roles undermines the complexity of the relationship (Tourish, 2014) between hierarchical actors. Until researchers employ a variety of methods, and open up to alternative ontological positions (the way we think the world is; Fleetwood, 2005) to the study of leadership, exclusively finding a top-down influence will be found by design.

More recent literature on followership and distributed leadership has shone some preliminary light onto leadership studies. However, empirical literature on followership

still places the follower in relation to the leader. Even if it had made the breakthrough that theorists suggest, a shift from leader agency to follower agency is unlikely to be the answer (Gronn, 2002). Forms of distributed leadership then promised to counter balance the shortcomings of, and dissatisfaction with, leader-centric/heroic theories (Crevani et al., 2010; Gronn, 2009). However, empirical evidence of purely distributed leadership has been slow to develop, and comes with a new set of criticisms (e.g. reduced clarity in roles, slow decision making). Most importantly though, purely distributed leadership is unlikely to be found within existing hierarchical structures (hierarchies will always be with us in some form; Leavitt, 2005), opening up questions which can only be answered through inductive, contextually sensitive, research frameworks.

A critique of any theory would not be complete without a comparison to alternative theories. Comparing transformational leadership to alternative leadership theories further highlights the commonly held assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses of transformational leadership theory. I provide this assessment in the next section.

## 2.6 Alternative leadership theories

In this section, I present two alternative leadership theories, provide empirical evidence of their relationship among desirable outcomes, provide a critique of each theory, and compare and contrast each theory to transformational leadership. I start by introducing leader-member exchange, one of the most frequently studied leadership theories over the past two decades (Anand et al., 2011). Although leader-member exchange is said to focus on the relationship between the leader and the follower, it has more in common with transformational leadership than is evident at first glance. Next, I demonstrate the relationship between authentic leadership and transformational leadership, ultimately concluding that transformational leaders are, by definition, authentic – which questions the uniqueness of authentic leadership.



### 2.6.1 *Leader-member exchange*

Leader-member exchange is one of the most frequently studied leadership theories over the past two decades (Anand et al., 2011). Leader-member exchange focuses on the relationship between the leader and the follower (Gerstner and Day, 1997; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Ilies et al., 2007), and is said to be among the first theories in leadership studies to formally acknowledge the role of the follower in the leadership process (Howell and Shamir, 2005; Schyns and Day, 2010). In the leader-member exchange framework, followers are not regarded as passive role recipients, since followers may either reject, embrace, or renegotiate roles prescribe to them by the leader (Wang et al., 2005). Despite this contention of claimed progress, leader-member exchange theory has said little about the role of the follower (Collinson, 2011).

Leader-member exchange relationships are said to progress through three stages – stranger, acquaintance, and maturity (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Low quality leader-member exchange relationships are built on formally agreed economic or tangible exchanges, whereby high quality relationships are built on social exchange and are characterized by feelings of mutual obligation and reciprocity (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Graen and Uhl-Bein (1995) maintain that leader-member exchange can be either transactional or transformational, depending on the stage of the relationship. In the stranger stage, the relationship is built on role finding, and reciprocity is conducted by short-term tangible/economic exchanges. At this stage, some features of contingent reward characterize the relationship (Howell and Shamir, 2005).

Once the relationship has matured to a stage of high quality social exchanges and is founded on mutual respect, obligation, loyalty, commitment, support and trust, leader-member exchange is more oriented toward transformational leadership (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Gerstner and Day, 1997). At the maturity stage, the relationship is built on role implementation, reciprocity is in-kind, the time span of reciprocity is indefinite, and the incremental influence is “almost unlimited” (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). In this stage, the “shift in focus moves the theory beyond traditional thinking about “superiors” and

“subordinates” to an examination of leadership as a partnership among dyadic members” (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995, p 229).

Dulebohn et al. (2012) recently meta-analysed the antecedents of leader-member exchange. Of the antecedents under examination (e.g. leader behaviours and perceptions, follower characteristics, interpersonal relationship characteristics, and contextual variables), the authors found that transactional and transformational leadership scores most strongly predicted the quality of the leader-member exchange relationship, which suggests that the relationship contains both transformational and transactional leadership (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Specifically, the strong association between contingent reward and transformational leadership with leader-member exchange further supports earlier contentions that leader-member exchange relationships are both transactional and transformational. This does, however, suggest that the nature of the relationship is characterized by leadership behaviours, challenging the contention that leader-member exchange relationships are based as much on the follower as the leader. More modestly, it may suggest that while leaders, in exerting more control, are dominant in determining the quality of the leader-member exchange relationships, followers’ influence in the process is less dominant (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

Given this overlap, it is not surprising that leader-member exchange and transformational leadership are commonly found to influence the same outcome variables. The meta-analytic review by Gerstner and Day (1997) examined the relationship between leader-member exchange theory and a number of outcomes at the individual level. The authors found leader-member exchange to be strongly positively related with member job performance, satisfaction with the leader, overall satisfaction, commitment, member competence, and reduced role conflict and turnover intentions. Ten years later, Ilies et al. (2007) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between leader-member exchange and task performance and organizational citizenship behaviour. The results provided support for both of these relationships. This is an important finding, as it suggests that high quality leader-member exchange relationships have the ability not only to predict task performance, but also discretionary behaviours.

Another distinguishing characteristic of leader-member exchange, compared to leader-centric theories (e.g. transformational leadership), is that under leader-member exchange theory the leader develops different levels of relationships with individual followers (Ilies et al., 2007), whereby the relationship can be characterized as unique one-to-one reciprocal social exchanges (Wang et al., 2005). In their meta-analytic study, Ilies et al. (2007) found leader-member exchange was more strongly related to individually targeted outcomes than to organizational citizenship behaviours. This is not surprising, since transformational leaders persuade followers to set aside personal interests for the good of the collective, while leader-member exchange theory is focused on individual outcomes such as personal growth and individual career development (Anand et al., 2011; Epitropaki and Martin, 2013). Although this may occur with individualized consideration and idealized influence, transformational leaders are not regularly characterized as building unique relationships with individual followers. Not surprisingly, the select few studies that have examined the relationship between the individual components of transformational leadership and leader-member exchange have found individualized consideration and idealized influence to be the only two transformational leadership constructs that predict leader-member exchange (Deluga, 1992; Wang et al., 2005).

Numerous authors have included leader-member exchange and transformational leadership in the same empirical model. Lee (2005) found leader-member exchange mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment in a sample of research and development professionals in Singapore. Using a sample of leader-follower dyads from multiple organizations in China, Wang et al. (2005) found leader-member exchange mediated the relationship between transformational leadership behaviours and follower task performance and organizational citizenship behaviour. Using a sample from diverse job types, Piccolo and Colquitt (2006) found transformational leadership was stronger in predicting organizational citizenship behaviour when followers perceived to have high quality leader-member exchange relationships with their supervisors. Therefore, “it is through

developing stronger dyadic social bonds that transformational leaders impact follower performance” (Wang et al., 2005, p 430). More precisely, the findings suggest that when transformational leaders nurture high-quality leader-member exchange relationships, followers experience heightened meaning and are more receptive to role expanding offers, leading to increased extra role behaviours.

Limitations and criticisms of leader-member exchange theory include a focus on the unique individual relationship, highly correlated and overlapping constructs, a failure to incorporate longitudinal method designs, a lack of research considering environmental and social context, and incongruence between theory and measurement instruments (Anand et al., 2011). Additionally, a lack of conceptual clarity has led to inconsistent measurement tools, adding complications in comparing studies (Sheer, 2014).

As with transformational leadership, the dimensions of leader-member exchange are found to be so highly correlated that empirical studies often combine the constructs into one single measure of leader-member exchange (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Gerstner and Day (1997) suggest a high correlation among constructs results in redundancy whereby examining the constructs individually adds little unique information. The authors further content that more empirical work is needed to determine whether or not leader-member exchange should be measured as a multidimensional model or whether it is appropriate to empirically examine a one-dimensional scale.

Another limitation is that leader-member exchange focuses on the individual relationship, with only a handful of empirical studies examining the effects beyond the individual level of analysis (Anand et al., 2011). In the meta-analysis by Ilies et al. (2007), the authors found leader-member exchange was more strongly related to individually targeted outcomes than organizational citizenship behaviours. This provides further support that leader-member exchange theory is built on individual relationship, and indicates “that reciprocation is more likely to occur in the interpersonal as opposed to organizational realm” (Ilies et al., 2007, p 273). With limited empirical studies at the team or organizational level, it becomes difficult to confirm the effects of

leader-member exchange at other levels of analysis. Leader-member exchange also stipulates that a unique dyadic relationship occurs between the leader and each of their followers (Dulebohn et al., 2012), whereas transformational leadership is often measured by averaging follower ratings. Although most authors contend this to be an advancement of leader-member exchange over that of other leadership theories, an inconsistency in treatment of followers in the same group can lead to feelings of unfairness (Anand et al., 2011), whereby in-groups and out-groups are formed (Sheer, 2014).

Leader-member exchange has been established as a popular and influential leadership theory over the past two decades. The theory (potentially) contrasts leader-centric theories (e.g. transformational leadership) by concentrating on the dyadic leader-follower relationship, and by claiming that leaders do not develop the same relationship between each follower, ultimately rejecting the practice of averaging the perceptions of each follower (Anand et al., 2011; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Schyns and Day, 2010). Conceptually, this theory is said to be distinct from transactional and transformational leadership theories, which focus on the leaders' behaviours. However, it has been found that leader-member exchange relationships are characterized by traits of both transactional and transformational leadership. In addition, the presence of high quality leader-member exchange relationships has been found to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and both task and discretionary outcomes. Future research should focus on which theory is a stronger predictor of numerous outcome variables under certain environmental circumstances (Anand et al., 2011).

### *2.6.2 Authentic leadership*

Although authenticity has been studied for centuries, with roots in Greek philosophy (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) and Shakespeare (Ford and Harding, 2011; Lawler and Ashman, 2012), it is only recently that authenticity has gained attention in the leadership literature (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Lawler and Ashman, 2012). The increasing popularity of authentic leadership in the literature (Lawler and Ashman, 2012) is

illustrated by the fact that between 2005 and 2007, special editions on authenticity have appeared in the *Journal of Management Studies*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, and the *European Management Journal* (Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Lawler and Ashman, 2012). Numerous authors attribute the increased attention toward authentic leadership to be the result of increased concerns about the ethical conduct of business and community leaders, increased competitive and environmental challenges, and increased attention to corporate social responsibility (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2013; Gardner et al., 2011; Lawler and Ashman, 2012; Woolley et al., 2011).

Looking through the lens of Greek philosophy, authenticity is rooted in the term ‘know thyself’ or ‘true to oneself’ (Gardner et al., 2011; Novicevic et al., 2006). Hence, a common definition of authentic leadership encompasses being self-aware, and being true to oneself (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011; Harvey et al., 2006; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Shaw, 2010). However, there has been a shift in the leadership literature from focusing solely on ‘true to oneself’ to something more akin to being true to the essence of leadership (Jones and Grint, 2013), and broadly including leader attributes and behaviours of confidence, positive, optimistic, resilient, moral, ethical, and future-oriented (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Woolley et al., 2011), positively influencing self-awareness and self-regulated behaviours (Ilies et al., 2005).

Most recently, authors have suggested that a significant defining factor of authentic leadership is that it encompasses an inherent ethical and moral component (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Woolley et al., 2011). Following this stream of literature, Lawler and Ashman (2012) identify three themes in recent authentic leadership literature to be (i) authentic leadership is typically associated with trustworthiness and honesty, and a wider concern for personal character, (ii) there is a tendency to view authenticity as opposite to narcissism, and that (iii) “authentic leadership has come to be understood to relate strongly to transformational leadership” (2012, p 332).

Authentic leadership is commonly operationalized (e.g. Clapp-Smith et al., 2009) using a scale created by Walumbwa et al. (2008). Using confirmatory factor analysis on five samples from China, Kenya, and the United States, Walumbwa et al. (2008) created the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire, which comprises of four constructs – self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing. Although the body of empirical support is still in its infancy (Gardner et al., 2011), authentic leadership has been linked to desirable outcomes such as trust in the leader, follower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, and follower authenticity (see Gardner et al. (2011) and Woolley et al. (2011) for a review of the empirical literature). For example, Cerne et al. (2013) examined the relationship between team leaders from a Slovenian manufacturing firm and team members' individual creativity and team innovation. Using hierarchical linear regression modeling, the authors found that perceived authentic leadership ratings of the team members had a direct positive relationship between team members' individual creativity and team innovation.

Although authentic leadership can be viewed as the root concept for other positive leadership theories, including transformational leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Lawler and Ashman, 2012; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Shaw, 2010), some authors still contend the distinction between authentic leadership and transformational leadership is not clear (Gardner et al., 2011). Using the definition of transformational leadership developed by both Burns (1978) and Bass (1985), Avolio and Gardner (2005) contend that transformational leaders by definition are authentic. In response to criticisms of the dark side of transformational leadership, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) authored a conceptual paper, which main argument is that “to be truly transformational, leadership must be grounded in moral foundations” (1999, p 191).

Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) noted that Bass (1985) “originally argued that transformational leaders could wear the black hats of villains or the white hats of heroes depending on their values. This is mistaken; only those who wear white hats are seen as truly transformational. Those in black hats are now seen as pseudo-transformational” (1999, p 187). Transformational leaders are said to be morally uplifting (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Burns, 1978), and have been described as being optimistic (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Bass, 1998). Similarly, Bass and Riggio (2006) distinguish between personalized and socialized transformational leaders, contending socialized transformational leaders are authentic, in that they transcend their own self-interests to benefit their group or its individual members, or in a matter of moral principles.

Authentic leadership theory has received criticism from a conceptual as well as an empirical stance. Conceptual criticisms include the dichotomization of right and wrong is an oversimplification, a failure to prescribe what values are important, authentic leadership is susceptible to the halo effect, assuming a unidirectional top-down influence, and reaching the true self is not possible (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2013; Ford and Harding, 2011; Lawler and Ashman 2012). Lawler and Ashman (2012) suggest that scholars of authentic leadership are overly preoccupied with an immutable moral and ethical framework, as both value bases and moral and ethical frameworks are not permanent and may change based on time or context. Similarly, author undertones of moral righteousness portray the leader as a saint or a flawless entity with no imperfections.

Writings of authentic leadership theory have also been criticized for failing to acknowledge that authenticity is a process of becoming, which implies that a human may never fully reach authenticity in the way portrayed by scholars of authentic leadership (Ford and Harding, 2011; Lawler and Ashman, 2012). As humans are full of contradictions (Ford and Harding, 2011), a true self may never fully exist (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2013). Therefore, the self may be better understood as a multiple, situational, and processual being (Alvesson and Svensingsson, 2013), rather than the dichotomized classification currently portrayed in authentic leadership theory.



Empirical studies of authentic leadership theory have also received criticism for an overreliance of surveys, lack of longitudinal designs, and for frequently being subject to same source bias (Gardner et al., 2011). In addition, how can authentic leadership (using the definition of being true to oneself) be measured by either followers or self-ratings when the conceptual framework is based on a hidden truth (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2013)? With respect to follower perceptions, it is not apparent how followers can observe whether a leader is ‘true to oneself’ (e.g. whether actions are consistent with hidden values). The leader may be privately concerned with her or his own self-interests, but publicly act and appear as if they were authentic (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999). With respect to self-ratings, leader ratings are reliant on leaders highlighting inconsistencies between their inner values and their actions.

The definition of authentic leadership has evolved from a focus on ‘true to oneself’ to something more akin to ethical and moral leadership. Following this delineation, transformational leaders are, by definition, authentic – a contention made earlier in the literature by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999). However, authentic leaders may not display leadership attributes such as charisma. From this perspective, it has been argued that authentic leadership “ignores the work done over the last 20 years or so on the significant bodies of leadership and organizations more generally” (Shaw, 2010, p 90). This section has also highlighted numerous conceptual and empirical criticisms of authentic leadership. A primary criticism is that humans, being inconsistent, flawed, and evolving, will never reach authenticity, as portrayed by scholars of authentic leadership. However, the recent attention to authentic leadership is not without benefit, as it has opened up a dialogue “of the value systems within which we operate – the philosophy of leadership as it were” (Lawler and Ashman, 2012, p 340).

### *2.6.3 Summary*

In this section, I presented two alternative leadership theories, provided empirical evidence of their relationship among desirable outcomes, provided a brief critique of each theory, and compared and contrasted each theory to transformational leadership.

Leader-member exchange is one of the most frequently studied leadership theories over the past two decades (Anand et al., 2011), and focuses on the relationship between the leader and an individual follower. Despite the claim that leader-member exchange formally acknowledges the role of the follower, empirical evidence suggests that the nature of the relationship is characterized by the behaviours of the leader. Similarly, although conceptually this theory is claimed to be distinct from transformational leadership, empirical evidence has found that a high quality leader-member exchange relationship is characterized by traits of transformational leadership.

Authentic leadership has been viewed as the root concept for other positive leadership theories, including transformational leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Ladkin and Taylor, 2010; Lawler and Ashman, 2012; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Shaw, 2010). In this section, I have demonstrated that transformational leaders are, by definition, authentic. However, authentic leaders may not display all transformational leadership behaviours.

## 2.7 Summary

I started this chapter by providing a conceptual overview of transformational leadership, followed by empirical ‘support’ for the model. It is repeatedly discovered that transformational leadership has been the dominant leadership theory in management and psychology for the past 30 years (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013, Braun et al., 2013). While laying out this conceptual framework, I demonstrated that the theory of transformational leadership is plagued with conceptual problems (e.g. diversity of behaviours, lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria, including behaviours and effects, etc.), which has then led to challenges in measurement, ultimately suggesting that current empirical literature needs to be approached with great caution. A particular stance, which resulted from this review, is that such diverse leadership behaviours should be examined unconstrained from the ambiguity and multidimensionality of transformational leadership theory (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013).

The meta-analytical studies presented drew the reader's attention to the vast amount of empirical literature, highlighting the diversity of outcomes and levels of analysis whereby transformational leadership is claimed to be effective. In the next section, I focused on contextual factors of leadership. In this section, I presented two examples (leader-follower distance, and hierarchical levels of analysis) of contextual research that are particularly important to board member research, and (potentially) provide clues to answering the research questions of this thesis.

Despite the promising clues these contextual bodies provide for the current research, I then argued that current (positivist) approaches have not done justice to the sensitivity of context in which organizational actors find themselves (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010). Current approaches have been unable to explicitly articulate causal links due to the multidimensionality (among other conceptual and measurement problems) of transformational leadership. The implicit assumption made by empirical authors is that such a relationship holds for all constructs of transformational leadership (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). It is unlikely that conceptually all behaviours in the model (or even within a particular construct) are mediated/moderated by the same variables, in the same direction, leading to the same outcomes. Continued use of the MLQ will be unable to explore the intricacies of individual behaviours relevant (and irrelevant) within situations faced in the knowledge era. Research should therefore examine how individual behaviours are used within the diverse situations faced by organizational actors (Yukl, 1999).

Kellerman (2012) suggests that research should consider providing equal weight to the leader, the context and the follower. Positivist deductive researchers of transformational leadership continue to enter the field with the presupposition of unidirectional influence. The MLQ asks specifically about the leader – not surprisingly, results continue to shed light exclusively on the leader agency (again, by design!). With minimal answers found in the literature on followership, I then presented the evolution of research focus back onto distributed leadership models. However, despite the growing theoretical literature on distributed leadership, empirical findings continue to

suggest (some sort of) a role of leader agency (e.g. disproportionate top-down influence) within distributed models. This suggests that future contextual research should be open to exploring the situations in which leader agency (e.g. transformational leadership behaviours) interacts with forms of distributed leadership.

## **Chapter three: Methodology and methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I start by identifying the limitations of a positivist approach in an examination of the leadership process. This leads to a discussion of why an interpretivist approach is more suitable in addressing the research question of the current study. I then demonstrate how an interpretivist paradigm, while employing an inductive theory building approach, is able to problematize leadership, recognizing that leadership is a co-constructed social process, more complex than advocates of positivist approaches typically suggest. Throughout this chapter I demonstrate why such an approach is able to challenge a number of the current erroneous assumptions presented in the preceding chapters. While taking an interpretivist stance, this study used a descriptive qualitative analysis approach whereby the CIT (critical incident technique; Flanagan, 1954) was adopted. The CIT interviews were used to focus the participant onto a limited area (Bradley, 1992), allowing for an in-depth understanding of board member behaviours within circumstances encountered (e.g. significant situations).

Semi-structured CIT interviews were used to collect behavioural data from 53 participants - BCs (board chairs), BDs (board directors), and EDs (executive directors) - from 18 diverse nonprofit organizations in Alberta, Canada. In addition, organizational documents relating to board member roles and behaviours were collected. One board meeting was observed, and multiple tours (guided and unguided) of organizational facilities were conducted. Although interview and document themes were coded inductively, the results were then compared to existing leadership theory, primarily transformational leadership theory, for theoretical agreement of the exploratory findings.

In this research, coding was data-driven whereby codes were developed through multiple readings of the empirical material (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This is in contrast to theory-driven coding, in which case the theoretical relationship between data and theory is forefront during the coding process (Kenealy, 2012). The CIT interviews

are the primary data source. However, through a series of inductive critical incident and other interview questions, Likert questions, and organizational documents, I was able to compare how respondents felt board members should behave (e.g. desirable behaviours) with how they are currently perceived to behave. In doing so, an approach referred to as the knowing-doing gap (Birkinshaw, 2013; Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000, 1999) was adopted. This approach allowed me to identify inconsistencies between desirable and currently displayed board behaviours, but just as importantly to identify reasons (e.g. situations or contexts) for not displaying desired behaviours.

I start this chapter by describing the choice of paradigm positioning, which is driven by the research question. I then discuss how the exploratory nature of this research calls for an inductive approach, which I operationalize/address with the use of the CIT. The collection and use of organizational documents as a supplementary data source is also discussed.

## 3.2 Methodology

### 3.2.1 *Paradigms*

A positivist perspective has been the dominant approach in the natural sciences (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), and is traditionally associated with quantitative methods. Likewise, leadership studies have traditionally drawn on a positivist approach (Collinson and Grint, 2005). In the following sections, I demonstrate the limitations of such a positioning for the field of leadership. I further discuss alternative positions, such as realism and critical realism. In doing so, it is clear that such positions are not mutually exclusive or self-contained (Sayer, 1992), and that this study does not fit neatly within any one particular paradigm. I conclude that despite the current study having elements of critical realism, it is more closely aligned to a moderate interpretive position.

It has long been contended that the chosen approach should be dictated by the research question and not by either convenience or the researcher's expertise (Howe and Eisenhart, 1990; Pratschke, 2003). Similarly, some authors have argued that taking a

definitive ontological and epistemological position *ex anti* is important as it helps to define the role of the investigator in the discovery process and the perceptions of understanding, which leads to the level of formality in defining the nature of methods used for the empirical investigation (Laughlin, 1995; Pratt, 2009). As no research is impartial (Tourish, 2013a), it is better to be clear about potential biases before presenting empirical detail (Laughlin, 1995). For this reason, I present the benefits of an interpretivist approach for the current research, before choosing and presenting the subsequent choice of a theory building, inductive approach, executed primarily through the employment of open critical incident interviews.

### *3.2.2 Alternative paradigms*

Positivists maintain that hypotheses can be verified or falsified. Researchers with a positivist position contend that there is “a reality out there to be studied, captured, and understood” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p 11). From this perspective, the researcher searches for a set of universal (causal) laws to explain the reality of what is being observed (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Collis and Hussey, 2009). Of importance to researchers subscribing to this positioning are logical reasoning, precision, objectivity, and rigor, in an attempt to minimize subjectivity and intuitive interpretation (Collis and Hussey, 2009). A positivist perspective has been the dominant paradigm in the physical sciences, and was later adopted by early social science researchers.

Alternatively, anti-positivists claim that social sciences cannot be studied by positivism, as social realities stress the importance of inter-subjective experiences of individuals in the creation of the social world whereby individuals create, modify, and interpret the environment in which they find themselves (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Interpretivism emerged in response to criticisms that positivist approaches are unable to properly address phenomenon in the social sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Collis and Hussey, 2009). In the social sciences, it seems erroneous to presume that organizational actors can be separated from the social context, reality is objective and singular, research is unbiased, and that it is possible to capture complex organizational phenomenon in a single measurement (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Collis and Hussey,

2009). Positivist research has therefore been criticized for having strict methodological rules that are independent of the context of the particular research focus (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

In this sense, realism has often been proposed as a (slightly relaxed) alternative to hard positivist positions. Realism is often categorized as either empirical/naïve realism or critical realism (Bryman, 2012). The presuppositions of a realist are relatively more conducive to qualitative research. In this sense, the interviewer and respondent are encouraged to engage in a fluid dialogue to generate observations and experiences relevant to the overarching research agenda (Smith and Elger, 2014). However, realists share with positivists a belief that the social sciences can still be studied through the same methodological approaches used in the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012; Laughlin, 1995). Furthermore, realists also claim that the external world exists “out there” external to our knowledge of it (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Sayer, 1992). For this reason, realism and positivism are ontologically similar (della Porta and Keating, 2008; Fleetwood, 2005). In this respect, realists claim that participants are “born into” the external world, which has an existence of its own (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Such a position does not allow for the discovery of a world that is socially constructed or influenced by multiple organizational actors, both of which I have repeated throughout this thesis as being important for the examination of leadership.

Critical realism has been argued to be a middle range alternative. Middle range alternatives have been gaining grounds as an alternative to either the positivist or interpretivist ends of the spectrum. Middle range thinking recognizes that “generalizations about reality are possible, even though not guaranteed to exist, yet [maintain] that these will always be “skeletal” requiring empirical detail to make them meaningful” (Laughlin, 1995, p 81). Critical realists similarly believe an entity (e.g. material or social reality) can exist, although not guaranteed to exist, independent of the participant’s or researcher’s knowledge of it (Fleetwood, 2005).



Critical realists claim that the “world is composed not only of events, states of affairs, experiences, impressions, and discourses, but also of underlying structures, powers, and tendencies that exist” and that scientific explanation entails “providing an account of those structures, powers and tendencies that have contributed to, or facilitate, some already identified phenomenon of interest” (Patomaki and Wight, 2000, p 223). Hence, critical realists are able to recognize that social actions take place within the context of pre-existing social structures, whereby the actors make decisions within the circumstances directly encountered, but also that such circumstances and history would not exist without such actors (Smith and Elger, 2014). Therefore, from a critical realist perspective, “in contradistinction to a purely positivist perspective, the socially constructed nature of our knowledge about the world is acknowledged” (Tourish, 2013a, p 9). In addition, satisfying the presuppositions of positivists, knowledge is not totally arbitrary and certain claims about realities are said to provide better accounts of knowledge than others (Patomaki and Wight, 2000).

Critical realism is therefore promising for leadership studies as it recognizes the context in which organizational actors perform. In the current study, it is important to be cognizant that these actors work within multiple structures (e.g. political, regulatory, funding constraints, governance policies). In recognizing the significance of meaning construction, critical realists share some common ground with interpretivists (Smith and Elger, 2004).

Realist and critical realist perspectives are theory-driven and insufficiently acknowledge the possibility of rival narratives or critical evaluation of the empirical material (Smith and Elger, 2014). In realist and critical realist interviews the researcher therefore remains the expert about the issues being investigated, with the intention of the research to either falsify or refine theory (Smith and Elger, 2014). Theory-driven interviews do not allow for challenging core assumptions, an aspect I have argued in the earlier chapter as being important to the current research.

### 3.2.3 *The interpretivist approach*

Instead of attempting to measure causal laws, an interpretivist approach is based on the belief that social reality is not objective but highly subjective (Collis and Hussey, 2009). For an interpretist, reality therefore does not exist, but is the interpretation of the social actors (Aram and Salipante, 2003; Morgan, 1980) whereby social reality is highly subjective, not objective (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Interpretivists, unlike positivists, have an appreciation for subjectivity of social life (Aram and Salipante, 2003).

Similar to critical realists, the researcher interacts with the respondent because it is not possible to separate the social world from either the researcher's or the respondent's interpretation of the social world. In this regard, most social science research, with leadership being no exception, requires some level of interpretivism.

An interpretive approach attempts to explore “the complexity of social phenomena with a view to gaining interpretive understanding” (Collis and Hussey, 2009, p 57), and with the positioning that “the social world is no more than the subjective constructions of individual human beings who ... may create and sustain a social world of intersubjectively shared meaning” (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p 261). Interpretivists are then less preoccupied with finding an underlying truth; instead, interpretivists focus on the origins, processes, methods, and meanings in which organizational actors construct, and maintain a particular socially constructed sense of reality (Aram and Salipante, 2003; Gephart, 2004). In an earlier chapter I discussed the concept of the romance of leadership (Meindl et al., 1985), which suggests that leadership is socially constructed in the minds of organizational actors.

When analysing board member behaviours and social context it is important to realize that organizations are made of up feeling and thinking human beings with their own interpretations of the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, any definitive truth would be impossible to find in an organizational setting. Following this argument, universal laws to the study of leadership are unlikely to be obtained or practically

relevant. The leadership process cannot be defined solely on discrete causal influences, but more of a processual influence (Tourish, 2014). In response to this debate, Hunt and Dodge (2001) problematize leadership by asking: “Does leadership have generalizable law-like relationships waiting to be discovered or will the subjective assumptions of the observer drive what is found and interpreted?” (2001, p 440-441).

Viewing leadership as a socially constructed (Meindl et al., 1985), fluid process (Tourish, 2014), influenced by multiple actors (e.g. distributed leadership, followership; Gronn, 2002; Shamir, 2007), intertwined with contextual factors (Ford, 2010), suggests that the complexity of leadership (Collinson, 2014) is best served by an interpretive approach. I similarly subscribe to a more recent critical perspective that argues “there is no essence of leadership divorced from particular social, organizational and temporal contexts” (Tourish, 2014, p 81).

Recognizing that organizations are co-created and co-defined by multiple actors (Tourish, 2013b), this project looks through the lens of interpretivism, taking the stance that leadership and governance involve social actors and to generalize or to claim that a definitive truth can be discovered would be a considerable leap of faith (Laughlin, 1995). Given paradigms are not mutually exclusive, I also recognize that this research has aspects of critical realism.

In the next section, I present how the current study examines organizational actors within a specific context – the board-ED relationship. Given the chosen paradigm, I find it appropriate to start with a discussion of theory building (versus the alternative of gap spotting), which helps to further problematize leadership, and is consistent with challenging a number of presuppositions presented in the earlier chapters. The remainder of the current chapter is then dedicated to presenting the methods used to execute this positioning.

### 3.2.4 *Theory building*

Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) note that there is a “serious shortage of high impact research in management studies” (2013, p 128) due to the prevalence of gap spotting. Gap spotting is the process of conducting research with little attempt to challenge the assumptions of underlying existing theories (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011). It has been argued that filling gaps is due to the publish or perish phenomenon, whereby researchers care more about the publication outlet and short-term career pressures to publish, than the actual research contribution (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Tourish, 2011). Due to numerous governmental, institutional, and professional norms (e.g. publish or perish pressures), management researchers have found safety in research tactics of gap spotting (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013), while socially constructing gaps by arbitrarily re-ordering prior examinations through the use of rhetorical gymnastics (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013). Such research is able to identify gaps in current knowledge while simultaneously applying a rigorous research approach. This type of research however provides only incremental advancements of knowledge and is unlikely to be impactful in moving theory forward in any significant way (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013; Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011; Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011). It can be argued that the literature on both leadership and governance not only shadow this contention, but also exemplify it. In contrast to gap spotting, problematization is the act of identifying and challenging underlying assumptions in theory (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011).

Transformational leadership has been especially susceptible to relying heavily on a narrow paradigm, applying well-known constructs, due to its association with the MLQ. Consistently, a great majority of the research on leadership starts out by simply identifying construct gaps, then moved most recently to identifying moderators and mediators. For example, Avolio et al. (2004) undertook a study analysing the mediating effect of empowerment on transformational leadership and followers’ commitment. Consistent with most quantitative studies of transformational leadership, their study does not challenge the assumptions of transformational leadership (e.g. assumes all

behaviours are relevant, that all behaviours are mediated in the same way, and assumes a unidirectional influence). This example, while demonstrating my contention, was chosen at random from the vast literature on transformational leadership.

Consistent with the above contention that most management (and leadership) research merely achieves filling gaps, deductive theorizing has been the dominant approach. A deductive approach has been defined as going from generals to particulars (Samuels, 2000), whereby the researcher “discovers a problem in the literature - tension, opposition, or contradiction among divergent perspectives and explanations of the same phenomenon – and then sets out to create a solution to that problem” (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011, p 361). Positivist deductive research is unable to challenge underlying assumptions (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013), is less likely to problematize the concept of leadership (Bryman, 2004), reinforces leader agency (Collinson and Tourish, in press; Tourish, 2014), and is insensitive to context (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010).

Alternatively, an inductive methodological approach allows for the challenging of underlying assumptions of current leadership theories, and is consistent with an interpretive paradigm (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Induction has been defined as “going from particulars to generals [and] deriving knowledge from empirical experiences based upon a system of handling sense data” (Samuels, 2000, p 214). As Shepherd and Sutcliffe (2011) note:

Inductive approaches to theorizing typically begin with data about the organizational phenomenon from which concepts and relationships emerge to offer a description and then an explanation of the phenomenon, ultimately constituting a theory of organizing. The theorist infers relationships from the data (2011, p 366).

In order to place theory building into the research design, fieldwork “should be theoretically informed but also varied and rich enough in the sense that it allows for the existence and exploration of breakdowns” (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007, p 1270).

Although most authors suggest this is done through an inductive approach, in reality it is almost impossible to be purely inductive (Fine, 2004; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011). A bottom-up (purely inductive) approach “that requires starting with the data without any consideration of a theory under construction is laudable but impossible to achieve in its purest form” (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011, p 364, referring to Eisenhardt, 1989).

In the current study, I undertake an inductive approach when developing the research question, and when collecting and analysing data. The research question, “How can the leadership behaviours of board members in the nonprofit organizations under analysis be explained?”, comes with minimized *a priori* assumptions. Specifically, it does not assume that the leaders under analysis will display attributes of transformational leadership (may exhibit all, some, or no leadership behaviours), or be explained by any other leadership or governance theory. This approach remains open to findings of multiple influences, such as from other organizational actors, and recognizes that board members are intertwined within a specific context. The emerging themes are then compared to existing theories (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011), for theoretical validation (Maxwell, 1992). Further discussion on an inductive approach and theory building is presented in a later section on data analysis.

### 3.2.5 *A qualitative approach*

It is clear that the field of leadership studies is dominated by a positivist perspective (Bryman, 2011a; Collinson and Grint, 2005) that tends to draw heavily on behaviour description questionnaires (Bryman, 2004; Yukl 2012). Collinson and Grint (2005) note that “studies of leadership have typically drawn on a narrow range of functionalist theories ... using positivist methodologies, and producing quantitative findings” (2005, p 7). This observation of a narrow paradigm is recently echoed by Bryman (2011a) who similarly finds that leadership “research has long been regarded as associated primarily with a quantitative research tradition” (2011a, p 74). In a review of articles published in *The Leadership Quarterly* between 2000 and 2009, Gardner et al. (2010) find only 56 articles using qualitative methods, as opposed to 412 using quantitative methods.

Interestingly (and disturbing), the authors further note that the relative proportion of qualitative studies is on the decline.

The components of the full range of leadership model and their meanings have been identified, explored, and tested in a number of ways, including factor analyses, observations, interviews and descriptions of the ideal leader (Bass, 1998). However, the main focus of research on transformational leadership appears to be in line with Bryman's (2011a, 2011b) observations of the mass collection of quantitative data analyses. Transformational leadership appears not only to fall within this tradition of "narrow" methods, but one could argue that it pushes the extreme. Perhaps this is due to its early roots of collecting mass homogeneous data in a military setting, and subsequent affiliation with the MLQ. I again refer the reader to the ten meta-analytical studies highlighted in an earlier chapter, which certainly illustrates this argument. Having observed this tendency, Hunt and Dodge (2001) note the following:

[The] MLQ questionnaire, for example, is alive and well and still drives large amounts of transformational/charismatic research. Questionnaires ... seem to be with us always. They are just too quick and easy, and no widespread replacement has appeared on the horizon. (2001, p 453)

Bass and Riggio (2006) note that despite "the popularity and widespread use of the MLQ as a measure of transformational leadership, it is important to develop other methods of assessing transformational leadership" (2006, p 229). Behavioural-based questionnaires, with the MLQ being no exception, are designed based on the premise of a top-down influence from a 'leader' to a 'follower'. Such research methods are unable to question this underlying assumption, and fundamentally reinforce researcher presupposition. Leader agency is, therefore, found by design. Earlier authors noted this contention by suggesting that orthodox "studies tend to bestow scientific legitimacy upon a general romantic conception of leadership" (Knights and Willmott, 1992, p 777 referring to Meindl et al., 1985).

By continued employment of the MLQ, researchers are also defining *a priori* the behaviours they intend to examine, ultimately suggesting that all behaviours are relevant (no more, no less). First, this presupposition denies the exploration of alternative behaviours. Such missing behaviours can only be developed through other methods (Bryman et al., 1996; Yukl, 1999). Additionally, quantitative methods are also not able to explore which behaviours are not relevant in certain contexts (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999).

In a recent critical assessment of charismatic and transformational leadership research, van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) suggest:

The present conclusion, therefore, does not merely concern the need to develop new measurement tools to better capture the existing models of charismatic-transformational leadership, but rather the need to not rely on the current models or their related evidence. Extrapolating from this conclusion, there would be little value in future research aiming to add to the body of evidence on the basis of the current measurement tools (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013, p 44).

In the above quote the authors are clear that the problem with measuring transformational leadership is not necessarily in the measurement tools themselves, but in the fact that scholars continue to deductively and quantitatively test a flawed model. Current leadership methods therefore “have a tendency to replicate existing paradigms rather than discover new possibilities” (Shaw, 2010, p 89), and further refinement is unlikely to “illuminate greatly the *process* of leadership as a social and organizational phenomenon” (Knights and Willmott, 1992, p 762, emphasis in original).

As a result of the current state of leadership studies, a number of authors have been vocal about where the literature has been unable to problematize the concept of leadership, and how a greater breadth of understanding in the field can be obtained by expanding the currently narrow usage of methodological frameworks, and employment of different methods. Encouraging more qualitative studies on leadership would provide



“meaningful insights and enhance our understanding of leadership processes” (Gardner et al., 2010, p 943). In the inaugural edition of *Leadership*, the editors Collinson and Grint (2005) similarly contend that “the understanding of leadership is best enhanced by the encouragement of a diversity of theoretical positions and research methods and the exploration of a great variety of research contexts and settings” (2005, p 7). Qualitative methods enable the researcher to develop a deeper sensitivity to the context (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010), while quantitative research conversely tends to decontextualize leadership (Collinson and Tourish, in press).

Qualitative data has the ability to extend even well known theories (Bryman et al., 1996). Bryman et al. (1996) use qualitative analysis (through semi-structured interviews) to extend the “transactional / transformational leadership model (Bass, 1985) to include a slightly wider range of leadership behaviors in order to explore the degree to which the kinds of findings typically generated within a quantitative research methodology chime with those obtained through qualitative research” (1996, p 354). Inspired by others who have used qualitative research to extend contextual aspects of current theories, their study focuses on the contextual setting of a certain type of organization, specifically the British police service. The authors’ qualitative study allows them to identify contextual differences in leadership that are not prevalent in transformational leadership – a theory largely built through quantitative studies. The authors celebrate the discrepancy as follows:

The differences between the qualitative data reported here and the quantitative findings typically found, ... can in large part be viewed in terms of the different conditions of questioning offered by the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. In questionnaires like the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass, 1995), specific types of behaviours are being addressed, whereas in the interviews, the respondent’s own preoccupations come to the fore (Bryman et al., 1996, p 366).

Breakdowns between current findings and existing theories are therefore potentially good news and cause for celebration (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007; Bryman et al., 1996). Researchers in the discipline of leadership are gradually starting to answer this call, as Bryman (2011a) found that among the articles published in *Leadership* between 2005 and 2009, qualitative methods were predominantly used. The “typical” empirical paper in the *Leadership* journal is “based on either a semi-structured interview or a qualitative analysis of documents (and quite often both)” (Bryman, 2011a, p 79). However, Bryman (2011a) notes this journal is the exception and not the norm.

In this section, I have demonstrated that for the quasi-recent past number of years, authors and editors have been calling for a diversification of research methodologies and methods in the field of leadership - a field traditionally dominated by quantitative methods (Bryman, 2011a, 2011b; Collinson and Grint, 2005). Qualitative methods are able to elicit rich data capable of building on (or challenging) even well known theories, and are more sensitive to context. But this cannot happen until scholars in leadership are able to establish a stronger dialogue between the findings of quantitative and qualitative analysis in such a way that their respective contributions have the ability to enhance our overall understanding of leadership (Bryman et al., 1996). Fieldwork should be developed to allow for the existence and exploration of breakdowns between findings and theory (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). Interesting findings are therefore findings that cannot be accounted for by existing theory (Alvesson and Karreman, 2011).

In this thesis project, I concur with the aforementioned critical assessments of the state of leadership (specifically transformational leadership) research, and thereby move forward with an interpretivist paradigm, using an inductive, theory building, qualitative approach. This approach is executed through the employment of open CIT interviews. In the following sections, I introduce the benefits of the CIT interviews for this research, and outline how the fieldwork, analysis, and presentation of the empirical material are consistent with this positioning.

### 3.3 Critical incident technique

#### 3.3.1 *Overview and history of the critical incident technique*

The CIT was formally advanced as an acceptable research framework by Flanagan (1954) in his 1954 seminal paper, titled *The Critical Incident Technique*, published in the *Psychological Bulletin*. Flanagan (1954) gives credit to a series of studies in the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces during World War II as the primary agent for the technique's inception. In this manuscript, Flanagan (1954) highlights a number of then-recent research studies that used variations of the CIT, and set out to provide a standardized set of procedures to ensure the technique's integrity as a credible research framework. Although the flexibility of the CIT has allowed the technique to be used outside of the initial scope, Flanagan (1954) summarized the purpose and application of the technique to be as follows:

The critical incident technique consists of a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. (1954, p 327)

[The] critical incident technique, rather than collecting opinions, hunches, and estimates, obtains a record of specific behaviors from those in the best position to make the necessary observations and evaluations. (1954, p 355)

Many of the original studies were therefore intended to collect a set of observations around an incident, or series of related incidents. Leading up to Flanagan's (1954) manuscript, prior applications of the CIT included (i) measures of typical performance criteria, (ii) measures of proficiency, (iii) training, (iv) selection and classification, (v) job design and purification, (vi) developing operating procedures, (vii) equipment design, (viii) motivation and leadership, and (ix) counseling and psychotherapy (Flanagan, 1954). Using the CIT, after a thorough and thoughtful categorization of how individuals reacted to such incidents is made, the researcher is able to infer

generalizations. A number of these early studies attempted to then identify successful behaviours, giving the researcher the ability to identify desirable traits for candidate selection. For example, one study provided the basis for selecting pilots after identifying incidents that demonstrated insufficient skills of Air Force pilots. Another earlier example included the important changes in the Air Force's selection and training procedures of combat leaders after identifying reasons for failures in missions (Flanagan, 1954).

Prior to the inception of the CIT, the study of attitudes and behaviours (e.g. leadership studies) was limited to the reliance of verbal statements of opinions (Flanagan, 1954). The CIT is a research method that is able to focus the participant onto a limited area of interest (Bradley, 1992; Sharoff, 2008) in order to elicit rich data about that particular area. The technique "is a method of research which encourages the natural tendency of people to tell anecdotes but which increases their value as data by focusing them onto a limited area of interest" (Bradley, 1992, p 102). The CIT therefore allows the researcher to uncover behaviours that may not be identified through other research methods (Keaveney, 1995). It also allows the researcher to further clarify feelings and meanings that may be attached to certain incidents (Keatinge, 2002; Sharoff, 2008). The fact that the technique centers on actual events while discouraging hypothetical situations (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Moss et al., 2003), whether observed or recalled, ensures the corresponding behavioural data relates to actual behaviours. Similarly, by allowing the respondent to choose the incident elicits events that are important to those who lived them (Cunha et al., 2009).

The CIT was traditionally employed as a quantitative methodology with a positivist paradigm (Butterfield et al., 2005; Collis and Hussey, 2009; Kaulio, 2008; Norman et al., 1992), but the flexibility of the technique allows it to be modified and adapted (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Chell and Pittaway (1998) more succinctly note that studies "in the tradition of Flanagan have assumed the tenets of the scientific method and used the CIT as a quantitative method" (1998, p 24). The CIT has, however, been more recently employed with an interpretive paradigm (Chell, 1998), and is commonly used

as an inductive research method (Cunha et al., 2009; Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Norman et al., 1992; Schluter et al., 2007; Sharoff, 2008) for collecting, analysing, and presenting data.

Butterfield et al. (2005) note that in the last 60 years the CIT has “become a widely used qualitative research method and today is recognized as an effective exploratory and investigative tool” (2005, p 475). Its strengths lie not only in its utility as an exploratory tool, but also its role in building theories or models (Butterfield et al., 2005; Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Woolsey, 1986). For example, the CIT allows the researcher to not only understand the extent of situations organizational actors face (e.g. political, regulatory, funding constraints, governance policies – each of which were found to be important social contexts in the current study), but to also gain a further understanding of the thought processes and motivations behind such behaviours.

Although Flanagan (1954) may not have been able to predict the full extent of the diversity of applications and disciplines which the CIT has since been applied, he did have the foresight to suggest its flexibility:

It should be noted that the critical incident technique is very flexible and the principles underlying it have many types of applications (1954, p 355).

The variety of situations in which the collection of critical incidents will prove of value has only been partially explored (1954, p 346).

Since the CIT was first introduced by Flanagan (1954) it has been used in many disciplines, including studies spanning such disciplines as counseling psychology (e.g. Butterfield et al., 2005), healthcare and clinical studies (e.g. Kvarnstrom, 2008; Lewis et al., 2010; Schluter et al., 2007; Sharoff, 2008), service settings (e.g. Gremler, 2004; Keaveney, 1995), marketing (e.g. Gremler, 2004), and entrepreneurship (e.g. Chell and Pittaway, 1998; Cope and Watts, 2000). The CIT was found in 141 studies in marketing literature between 1975 and 2003, 125 of which were published between 1990 and 2003

(Gremier, 2004). Although it has been used in a number of diverse streams within the general management literature, the use of the technique in leadership studies is unfortunately still sparse.

A number of example applications of the CIT in leadership studies include:

Example 1: *Emergent leaders as managers of group emotion* (Pescosolido, 2002)

This article evaluated the role of emergent group leaders who play a critical role in managing group emotions. The fieldwork consisted of directly observing 20 groups (jazz bands and rowing crews) followed by group CIT interviews. The author was able to conclude that the CIT was an effective method in gaining a greater understanding of the characteristics as well as situations that influence the management of group emotions.

Example 2: *The impact of situational vulnerability on the development and erosion of followers' trust in the leader* (Lapidot et al., 2007)

Lapidot et al. (2007) used the CIT to examine the impact of leader behaviours with respect to building and erosion of subordinates' trust in their leader. The authors administered an open-ended questionnaire yielding 988 critical incidents collected from 733 Israel Defense Forces cadets in officer training courses.

Example 3: *Managing from the boundary: The effective leadership of self-managing teams* (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003)

This study analysed how effective leader behaviours unfold when leading self-managed teams. The authors used CIT interviews on a sample of 19 external leaders, 38 team members, and ten managers. This was used in conjunction with focus groups and manager surveys. The author's used the CIT as a tool for "inductive theory building".

They further claim the use of the CIT allowed for “rich descriptive information and to uncover unanticipated clues” (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003, p 438).

Example 4: *Using a competency-based approach to identify the management behaviours required to manage workplace stress in nursing: A critical incident study* (Lewis et al., 2010)

In this study the authors sought to identify the specific management behaviours associated with managing the levels of stress of subordinate nurses. Using a sample of 41 employees, the authors used semi-structured interviews to undertake the CIT. The CIT was used for its abilities to elicit behaviours associated with the management of stress.

Example 5: *Implementing Process Innovations: The Benefits of Combining Delegative-Participative With Consultative-Advisory Leadership* (Krause et al., 2007)

In this study, the authors used the CIT to analyse the effects of delegative-participative and consultative-advisory leadership on the implementation success of process innovation in diverse German organizations. The authors used questionnaires to collect behavioural data from 388 managers.

Each of these examples have demonstrated how the CIT has been employed (although sparsely) in the leadership literature. They were also meant to demonstrate how some of the benefits of the technique (as I have argued earlier) have been operationalized.

In this section, I have demonstrated that the CIT has been used in multiple disciplines as a valuable and flexible research method. Research by Gremler (2004) suggests the technique is becoming not only more frequently used, but also highly accepted. Originally rooted as a positivist research methodology, its flexibility has proven valuable in many qualitative studies. The CIT helps to focus the participant

(Bradley, 1992; Sharoff, 2008), allowing the researcher to capture much richer details than would be obtained even through the traditional semi-structured interview (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Gremler, 2004). The fact that the technique centres on actual events, while discouraging hypothetical situations (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Moss et al., 2003), recognizes the social context (Chell, 1998; Lewis et al., 2010) – a factor I earlier contended to be critical to the current study.

Research developing our knowledge of board members' behaviours (arguably in a leadership capacity) is very limited. Therefore, in this early phase, I used the CIT as an inductive methodological tool to develop an understanding of such behaviours. One major benefit of the CIT for this research is that the researcher does not specify a list of potential incidents or behaviours *a priori* (Gremler, 2004). Using the CIT in this manner, the researcher and the participants are discovering *together* an understanding of the participants' behaviours (Keatinge, 2002). Simply stated, the CIT “encourages participants to tell *their* story” (Sharoff, 2008, p 301, emphasis added), while mitigating for researcher presuppositions.

### 3.3.2 *The critical incident question*

The CIT, along with its benefits to this research study, has been outlined in earlier sections. The definition and inclusion criteria of critical incidents are developed in the following. Having a clear definition of a critical incident, suited for the purpose, is important for clarity in the interview. But what is a critical incident? In a review of research being conducted in a variety of service contexts using the CIT, Gremler (2004) found that 27 percent of the studies clearly specify what behaviours or events constitute a critical incident, ten percent of the studies refer to previous studies for borrowed definitions. In the majority of studies, the authors do not explicitly define what constitutes a critical incident (Gremler, 2004). Flanagan (1954) defined the term as follows:



By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects (1954, p 327).

Since this time, a number of authors have tailored this definition in order to adapt it to the needs of their specific study. Some authors have noted that the term incident often “trivializes the diversity of critical experiences” (Cope and Watts, 2000, p 112). Norman et al. (1992) suggest the term *revelatory incident* over critical incident, claiming that the term critical incident implies both a discrete event (as opposed to allowing for discussion of happenings) as well as a crisis. Although such events are important, they are limiting in potential findings. The authors claim the distinction to be especially important in their research field of the healthcare profession, suggesting the term critical incident can trigger thoughts of crisis events. Similarly, Schluter et al. (2007) suggest the term *significant event* after a number of nurses participating in the study commented that they had not been involved in an incident.

Leadership studies have varied in their definition of a critical incident, which has led to no common definition or terminology of a critical incident, let alone a consensus of a CIT question. Some authors ask the respondent to think about an event with a certain prescribed outcome (e.g. Cunha et al., 2009; Kruase et al., 2007; Lapidot et al., 2007), and then elicit behaviours that led up to that event. Other authors ask the respondent to describe situations whereby effective or ineffective leadership was displayed (e.g. Bryman et al., 1996; Lewis et al., 2010). *Figure 3.1* provides a summary of the type of CIT questions used in previous leadership studies.

Figure 3.1 CIT questions in leadership studies

Reference	Data Collection	CIT Question
Bryman et al. (1996)	Semi-structured interviews	"One of the ways whereby officers' conceptions of effective leadership was examined was to ask them to think of a situation in which effective leadership had been exercised and to indicate why the interviewee felt that it was an illustration of effective leadership." (1996, p 360)
Lapidot et al. (2007)	Questionnaire	"The cadets were first given one page on which they were asked to describe in writing an event that occurred in their team during the course that built or strengthened their trust in their team commander, if such an event occurred." (2007, p 22)
Dasborough (2006)	Semi-structured interviews	"Participants in this study were asked to describe real workplace interactions with their leaders or employees, during or after which they recall having a strong positive emotional reaction (a critical uplift) or a strong negative reaction (a critical hassle)." (2006, p 167)
Krause et al. (2007)	Surveys	"The managers were requested to recall a specific process innovation in their work unit and to describe this innovation in a qualitative and quantitative manner. They were then asked to answer questions about how they as managers were led by their immediate superior during the innovation process and to rate the degree to which the implementation was successful." (2007, p 19)
Lewis et al. (2010)	Interviews	"They were asked to describe two critical incidents, firstly a time when they had been managed effectively at a time of pressure and demand; and secondly a time when they had been managed ineffectively at a time of pressure and demand." (2010, p 309)
Peus et al. (2013)	Focus groups	"Which critical situations are you often confronted with in your role as a supervisor?" (2013, p 780) "What kind of situations do you find to be most relevant to differentiate effective from ineffective leadership?" (2013, p 780)
Moss et al. (2003)	Questionnaire	"[Participants]...were given a survey asking them to recall and describe in writing three incidents of excellent performance and three incidents of poor performance over the past 5 years." (2003, p 502) "Participants were asked to indicate if they had engaged in the described behavior following each incident." (2003, p 502)

Studies using the CIT vary between not specifying whether the critical incident should be positive or negative (e.g. Cunha et al., 2009; Dasborough, 2006; Kaulio, 2008; Krause et al., 2007), and requiring both negative and positive incidents in their examples of critical incidents (e.g. Bryman et al., 1996; Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Lapidot et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2010; Moss et al., 2003; Wolff et al., 2002). When the researcher does not specify the type of incident to be discussed, the respondent is more likely to recall negative incidents (Dasborough, 2006). However, most studies do request both a negative and a positive incident from the respondent in order to reveal a range of challenges and situations commonly experienced (Wolff et al., 2002).

After a thorough review of the literature, the following question was posed in the current study to each respondent type:

Please describe a significant situation that occurred during your term as the [position title] of this organization, which resulted in a POSITIVE outcome. A significant situation is a situation outside of routine events, which triggered the board's attention to discuss or make a decision, which later resulted in a positive outcome. Please think of a situation that you can easily remember.

An identical question was then posed which asked for a negative outcome. This question is not limiting in time, does not limit the discussion to a discrete event, and by asking for a positive and a negative outcome allows for a breadth of situations commonly experienced. The pilot study did not reveal any confusion with the question or terminology used. The question also minimizes any presuppositions by myself, as the interviewer, of how I believe the board is likely to behave. Specifically, this open question allows for identifying specific behavioural themes which may vary across contexts. It does not presume that all transformational leadership behaviours will be relevant in the context of nonprofit board governance or during the specific situations faced by the organizational actors under analysis. This approach is thereby able to examine organizational actors unconstrained from transformational leadership theory, answering calls from critical authors such as van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013).

Staying true to inductive theory building, this question does not ask about leadership behaviours (e.g. the word leadership is not present in the initial question).

As a result of the inductive nature of the critical incident interviews, as designed in the current study, there are a number of themes found in the empirical material that can be considered surprises in the data when compared to the model proposed by transformational leadership theorists. For example, excess emotion in the decision making process led to less desirable outcomes. I was able to derive this theme from a number of the critical incidents identified by respondents. In one instance, multiple respondents from the same organization spoke about how emotion based decisions left the organization vulnerable during amalgamation discussions with a sister organization. Setting emotions aside when making critical decisions is not a component of transformational leadership theory. Had I entered the field with the intent of examining a predetermined list of behaviours, as prescribed by transformational leadership, I would not have known to look for this behaviour. However, by centering the respondents onto an incident that they felt was important to the organization, it became apparent that managing emotions in the decision making process deserves more attention in the literature.

This is in contrast to the questions posed in the example CIT questions presented in *Figure 3.1*. Terms and phrases such as “effective leadership had been exercised”, “built or strengthened their trust in their team commander”, “a time when they had been managed effectively”, for example, each come with their own presuppositions. Each of the phrases assumes a unidirectional influence whereby the leader influences the follower. Findings in the current study (e.g. bottom-up mentoring and collegial relationships between the board and the ED) would not have been possible if either of the seven questions presented in *Figure 3.1* had been posed in the current study.

Critical incident research approaches that ask respondents to “indicate if they had engaged in the described behaviors following each incident” (Moss et al., 2003, p 502) specify the behaviours *a priori*, not allowing for the exploration of additional behaviours

or alternative influences. Given the inductive (and exploratory) nature of the current study, a broad question was initially posed. This does, however, come as a trade off of breadth over depth. Similarly, the unstructured approach I have taken in this study does pose a risk that the interviews may not shed any light on the research question (Cope and Watts, 2000).

The CIT question was initially read verbatim to each participant as subtle changes in wording have been found to produce different responses from participants (Flanagan, 1954; Sharoff, 2008). In the early stages of the interviews, three participants revealed significant situations that were either (i) operational in nature, with minimal involvement of the board, which did not provide much discussion of board member behaviours (or the leadership process at the board-level) or (ii) for the negative example the respondent spoke about a situation whereby an external negative situation came to the board to discuss or make a decision on, but did not necessarily have a negative post decision outcome. Given the situations themselves are not the unit of analysis, there is little implications to the research. However, I was not able to elicit very rich behavioural data from these situations. For this reason, “to discuss or make a decision, which later resulted in a positive outcome” was added to encourage situations that have substantial board involvement. The objective of this research is, after all, to shine some light on the leadership process at the board-level.

The CIT relies on the individual participant’s recollection (when not using direct observation) of past events. This has been criticized as an inherent flaw to the approach, leading to scrutiny of its reliability (Chell, 1998; Gremler, 2004). However, the majority of authors that use the CIT simply acknowledge this limitation, without taking mitigating steps to stimulate recollection. The length of time since the event occurred as well as how large of an impression it made at the time are factors that both play a role in the level of recollection (Flanagan, 1954). Flanagan (1954) noted:

The critical incident technique is frequently used to collect data on observations previously made which are reported from memory. This is usually satisfactory

when the incidents reported are fairly recent and the observers were motivated to make detailed observations and evaluations at the time of the incident (1954, p 339).

A number of authors have recommended telling the participant in advance to think about critical incidents to discuss. Schluter et al. (2007) found that when this step was missed, many participants arrived at the interview and had difficulty in recalling events to discuss. In addition to the obvious problem of not having a successful collection of incidents with in-depth responses, they also noted that valuable interview time was spent thinking about events to discuss (Schluter et al., 2007). In an effort to mitigate for this potential problem in the current study, the section of the interview guide requiring participants to answer open ended questions, recalling events from memory (Q1.1 and Q1.4 of the interview guide, as presented in *Appendix III*), was sent by email approximately one week in advance - a process suggested in a number of prior studies (e.g. Bradley, 1992; Lewis et al., 2010; Schluter et al., 2007). Despite this effort, three participants (of 53 participants) arrived at the interview without having read and having thought about the questions in advance. In two instances, the participant's recollection of events, descriptions of the sequence of events, and descriptions of the behaviours or individual organizational actors were quite vague. In the third instance, the participant was able to provide detailed descriptions of two critical incidents that occurred in recent memory. It did, however, require clarification from myself, and a minimal amount of interview time was used up to think about the question. Note that the other sections were not sent in advance, as simultaneously having the closed questions in front of the participant could induce order bias, ultimately affecting responses to the other interview questions.

Another tactic used to overcome the limitation of recalling past events is to stipulate that the critical incidents are to have occurred within the past one year (e.g. Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Kvarnstrom, 2008, Wolff et al., 2002) or past six months (e.g. Pescosolido, 2002). Conversely, Flanagan (1954) noted that "in some situations adequate coverage cannot be obtained if only very recent incidents are included" (1954,

p 340). I take the latter stance in the current study. Given boards meet infrequently and their role is strategic in nature, it was thought that limiting critical incidents to the past one year would create severe limitations to the findings. This was confirmed during the interviews as many of the situations respondents chose to speak about took place over multiple years, and were discussed over multiple board meetings. This is specifically important in a leadership study since leadership takes time to observe and have an affect (Shamir, 2011; Waldman et al., 2004).

In order to conduct inductive research, it is important that the chosen incidents are not predetermined by, or driven by, the researcher. Rather, themes are driven by the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Not only is it difficult to specify all possible components *a priori*, doing so would limit the breadth and scope of findings. This is one of the reasons many authors claim the CIT is an inductive method (Gremler, 2004). One of the main benefits of the CIT is that it “provides a rich source of data by allowing respondents to determine which incidents are the most relevant to *them* for the phenomenon being investigated” (Gremler, 2004, p 67, emphasis added).

There are differing perspectives of how to order this type of question. A number of authors suggest presenting the positive question first in order to relax the interviewer, ultimately helping to elicit richer data. However, consistently asking respondents to answer questions in the same sequence risks order bias (Kohles et al., 2012). Given the fact that the CIT question resided in the first section of the interview guide, alternating between having the positive and negative CIT question come first did not result with the interview ending with a CIT question eliciting a negative incident. I was therefore able to alternate negative and positive responses, reducing the risk of order bias.

In this section, I have demonstrated the importance of defining the CIT question. Without careful consideration in crafting the question the researcher can create limitations, potentially missing out on a breadth of findings. In this study, I crafted the CIT question with due attention, while keeping in mind the exploratory and inductive nature of the research question. Although the unstructured nature of the CIT question

poses a risk that the interviews do not shed light on the research question (Cope and Watts, 2000), initial fears thereof were not confirmed during the pilot interviews or during any stage of the interview process. In the next section, I continue to discuss the research approach by outlining the selection of participating organizations and the selection of respondents within these organizations.

### 3.4 Sample selection

#### 3.4.1 *The organizations*

Given the exploratory nature of this research, a heterogeneous sample of organizations was selected. Consistent with most qualitative research, organizations were purposefully selected (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pratt, 2009). Studying board member behaviours from diverse organizations increases the representativeness (Alvesson and Achcraft, 2012) and generalizability (Brown and Guo, 2010; Maxwell 1992), thereby producing results that have relevance to a broad range of nonprofit boards (Miller, 2002). In this study, I interviewed board members and EDs from nonprofit organizations residing in Alberta, Canada. The organizations conduct business in diverse areas of the nonprofit sector and range widely in age and amount of annual revenue (see next chapter for organizational descriptive statistics).

The inclusion criterion was to target organizations that have a distinct separation in the role between staff and volunteers from that of the board. Since this is a research project on board members (a specific leadership context), the intention was to interview participants acting in a board capacity. This criteria was to eliminate organizations where board members dually work as staff or volunteers and the board position is simply a paper-based role (what we would call mom and pop shops in the for-profit world). Without this inclusion criteria, the contextual nature of the study, whereby the methodological paradigm recognizes that social actions take place within the context of pre-existing social structures and dynamic situations (Ford, 2010; Smith and Elger, 2014) would be overlooked. Simply put, this study seeks to understand the leadership



process at the board-level in the nonprofit organizations under analysis, taking into consideration the circumstances directly encountered within a governance structure.

#### *3.4.2 Board members and executive directors*

The motivation toward studying board members in a behavioural and leadership perspective stems from calls in both the governance and leadership literature. The leadership literature is currently in a state of flux, whereby a number of authors are challenging earlier contentions that leadership theories (primarily transformational leadership theory) can be universally applied. A number of authors (e.g. Bryman et al., 1996; De Hoogh et al. 2005; Peus et al., 2013; Shamir and Howell 1999; Yukl 1999) have thus argued that transformational leadership has left an opening in the literature for looking at contextual characteristics.

From a governance perspective, boards in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors have been criticized as being passive (Van den Berghe and Levrau, 2004), asleep at the wheel (Sonnenfeld, 2002), providing an impotent ceremonial and legal function (Drucker, 1974), being rubber stampers (Drucker et al., 1990; Millstein and MacAvoy, 1998; Reid and Turbide 2012), and for being pawns of their CEO (Lorsch and MacIver, 1989). Board members have also been criticized for generally becoming disengaged and disconnected from their organizations (Chait et al., 2005). Governance research has traditionally emphasized formal board structures (Van den Berghe and Levrau, 2004). A number of recent corporate failures have pointed to a lack of board leadership, which has led a number of authors to contend that living up to formal standards is not enough (Van den Burghe and Levrau, 2004).

During a review of the literature, research on governance and leadership appear to be two distinct topics, with only sparse or inferred overlap. A number of authors (e.g. Chait et al., 2005; Erakovic and Jackson, 2012; Erakovic et al., 2011) make a similar observation and further suggest that there is much to be gained by integrating research efforts within the two fields. These authors suggest the board should take on a greater function, ultimately displaying greater leadership (Chait et al., 2005; Erakovic et al.,

2011; McCambridge, 2004). Erakovic et al. (2011) note “there is much to be gained by integrating and cross-fertilizing research efforts within the corporate governance and leadership fields” (2011, p 2). Chait et al. (2005) make a similar observation in the nonprofit sector, noting that “governance and leadership have not been linked before, almost as if each concept has a magnetic field that repels the other” (Chait et al., 2005, p xvii). Motivation for this research and the selection of board members for this study is further highlighted in earlier chapters. It has been presented here again very briefly to remind the reader of the selection of board members for this research.

When studying leadership attributes it is common to elicit responses from different levels of the hierarchy in organizations. Leadership studies have ranged from subordinates’ ratings and comments about their leader to leaders describing their own behaviours. The MLQ, for example, has a survey for the leader and for the follower (Avolio and Bass, 2004). Qualitative studies exploring or analysing board member behaviours and board-ED relationships commonly elicit information from multiple actors, including EDs, BCs, and BDs. Examples of such studies are presented in *Figure 3.2*. In the current study, I followed previous studies (e.g. Hoye, 2006; Hoye and Cuskelley, 2003) and aimed to interview the ED, BC, and one other BD from each of the participating organizations. Not only does this elicit perspectives from both the board member (arguably in a leadership position) and the ED (who formally reports to the board), but “interviewing multiple directors serving on the same board generates different perspectives and produces a more subtle view on the strong and weak points of board practices” (Van den Berghe and Levrau, 2004, p 467). The end sample included 18 EDs, 17 BCs, and 18 BDs (53 respondents) from the 18 participating organizations.

Figure 3.2 Sample selection of comparable board studies

Reference	Interview Sample	Description of Research
Green and Griesinger (1996)	16 organizations 16 executive directors 16 board chairs at least one board member from each of the 16 organizations n = not reported	In this paper the authors analyze the tasks and responsibilities (e.g. policy formation, strategic planning) of nonprofit board members and examine the relationship between board member performance and organizational effectiveness.
Hoye (2006)	6 organizations 6 CEOs 3 board chairs 3 board members n = 12	This study explores the relationship between board chairs and paid executives within voluntary sports organizations. The study looks through the lens of leader-member exchange theory.
Erakovic et al. (2011)	1 organization All directors and senior executive managers n=17	Arguing for a "cross-fertilization" between leadership and governance, the authors highlight team leadership on the board, the chair's leadership of the board, and strategic leadership by the board.
Miller (2002)	12 organizations 58 board members n = 58	This study examines how individual nonprofit board members define their relationship with the CEO with respect to monitoring behaviors.
Hoye and Cuskelly (2003)	7 organizations 7 executive directors 7 chairs 7 board members n = 21	The authors of this paper explore elements of board leadership, trust, control of information, and responsibility for board performance, and how these four factors contribute to board performance.
Van den Berghe and Levrau (2004)	30 organizations chairs board members n = 60	This study compares academic literature with corporate governance rating systems in order to identify what constitutes a "good board of directors".

### 3.4.3 Participant inclusion

In leadership studies, as well as studies utilizing the CIT, it is common to exclude respondents with less than one year's exposure to the phenomenon being studied. For example, in a study of board-ED relationships, Hoye and Cuskelly (2003) excluded board members who had served on their board for less than one year. Similarly, in a CIT study to identify and describe difficulties perceived by health professionals in inter-professional teamwork, Kvarnstrom (2008) excluded team members who had less than one year's experience as a team member. This is especially important to leadership studies, since it takes time to observe the effects of a transformational leader (Dvir et al., 2002; Shamir, 2011; Waldman et al., 2004). For these reasons, in the current study I required board members to have a minimum of one-year tenure with the organization. In one instance this did not occur. During this interview the BD respondent was unable to provide clarity or background information to his chosen significant situation. This led to having an incomplete understanding of not only the context but also of relevant behaviours. The organization subsequently provided access to another BD who fit the inclusion criteria. The transcript of the former participant was not included in the analysis. The initial letter sent to the organizations noted that one-year tenure on the board was a requirement of participation (see *Appendix I*).

The same exclusion requirement was not placed on the ED. Only one ED had tenure in his position of less than one year, but had been with the organization for 25 years, and had significant exposure to the board prior to his promotion to the ED position. In another organization the outgoing ED was interviewed since the incoming ED was relatively new to the position and to the organization. The interview guide recorded socio-demographic variables of gender, age, length of tenure on the current board (or as ED), current position (e.g. BC, executive committee, non executive board member, ED or CEO) and number of board positions previously held.

#### *3.4.4 Access challenges with elites*

Researchers commonly find gaining access to “elites” or the “upper echelons” to be a challenging process (Agle et al., 2006; Pettigrew, 1992). It has been noted that part of the reason board members and top executives are studied less often than mid-level managers (Osborn et al, 2002; Yukl, 2008) is that of access challenges (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Hambrick, 2007). Pettigrew (1992) notes methodological “difficulties in gaining access for behavioral or interview based studies, or poor response rates from questionnaire based studies, have also contributed to the patchy and often inconclusive findings on boards” (1992, p 167). Access becomes particularly challenging when requiring access to more than one member of the elite team (Higgs, 2006), and in the case of accessing boards (Daily et al., 2003; Pye and Pettigrew, 2005). Furthermore, earlier writing by Zald (1969) suggests “boards of directors are hard to study. Often they conduct their business in secret; their members are busy people” (1969, p 110).

During the sample selection and access process I conversed with two umbrella organizations and attended a practitioner focused board leadership conference. Conference participation allowed for discussion with board members and EDs of numerous target organizations. One of the umbrella organizations provides ongoing support to its members through information, collaboration, and other resources. The second organization similarly provides resources and support to its membership base, but additionally acts as an intermediary for funding. Discussions with these organizations helped to identify a breadth of organizations that fit the inclusion criteria of this study.

Although both organizations offered to broker access to their member organizations through an email, I felt it would be more timely and effective to move forward without this brokerage (e.g. they would not provide contact information of who they approached, which was not conducive to following up with contacted organizations). Brokerage occurs when existing contacts (e.g. friends or colleagues) assist with the access process (Saunders, 2012). Secondly, one organization’s membership base was concentrated

specifically on human services (e.g. shelters, food banks). Relying on their membership base for the participation in this study could have also created association bias (Hodge and Piccolo, 2005). I earlier contended that a diverse sample, purposefully selected, is more appropriate for the current study. In the end, access in the current study was gained to organizations through a combination of cold calling (n=10), using my personal contacts as a broker (n=3), snowballing (n=4), and access through networking at the aforementioned conference (n=1).

Consistent with previous studies, initial contact was made through the ED (e.g. De Hoogh et al., 2005; Ling et al., 2008; Miller, 2002), except when communication was brokered directly to a board member. It was assumed that EDs, being full-time employees of the organizations, and a central conduit for board coordination, would provide a quicker response. Contact information for EDs was also more readily accessible through organization websites than board member details. In each instance, an introductory letter was sent via email to the respective organizational contact. The letter detailed the purpose of the study, the number of participants required from each organization, the time commitment of the participants and the time frame for which their participation was being requested. The letter indicated that participants would receive a summary report of the research findings, and noted the confidential nature of the interviews. A copy of the introductory letter is presented in *Appendix I*.

#### 3.4.5 *Sample size*

When using the CIT, sample size is based on number of incidents, not number of participants (Sharoff, 2008). Flanagan (1954) noted that there is no simple answer to the question of sample size. However, general guidance provided by Flanagan (1954) has been cited by many authors (Butterfield et al, 2005). Flanagan (1954) noted the following:

If the activity or job being defined is relatively simple, it may be satisfactory to collect only 50 or 100 incidents. On the other hand, some types of complex

activity appear to require several thousand incidents for an adequate statement of requirements (1954, p 343).

He further went on to explain that the investigator needs to be cognizant of saturation, whereby once the addition of further participants reveals few new critical incident *behaviours*, adequate coverage has been achieved. Many authors do not refer to this criterion when explaining their sample size, and some (e.g. Callan, 1998) explicitly admit not meeting Flanagan's (1954) guidelines for sample size.

Since there has been a shift toward using the CIT for its qualitative benefits, there appears to be less of a focus on sample size. Sharoff (2008) further observes, "as with most qualitative studies, sample size is usually small" (2008, p 306). In a review of studies that undertake interviews, De Hoogh et al. (2005) note "small sample sizes are due to the amount of work involved in gaining access and conducting, transcribing, and coding the interviews, which is considerable" (2005, p 34). It is common for the sample size in qualitative interviews to be around 15, plus or minus ten (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). *Figure 3.3* provides examples of sample sizes from qualitative leadership studies using the CIT. Sample sizes in this table range from 32 to 89 incidents.

When conducting qualitative researcher there is no magic number of interviews that should be conducted (Pratt, 2009). As with most qualitative research, I did not start with a predetermined sample size (Kenealy, 2012). Interviewing and coding occurred until saturation was reached. Saturation occurs when additional interviews or coding no longer provide new behaviours. In a study exploring social constructions of followership, Carsten et al. (2010) assert to reach saturation after 25 interviews, then continue to interview six additional people in order to ensure they "obtained a desired range of responses". In a study exploring elements of board leadership, trust, control of information, and responsibility for board performance, and how these four factors contribute to board performance, Hoye and Cuskelly (2003) assert reaching saturation with 21 interviews. Given the complexity of leadership behaviours as well as the complex environment board members operate within (e.g. political, regulatory, funding

constraints, governance policies), in the current study I interviewed 53 participants, obtaining 106 critical incidents.

Figure 3.3 Sample size of qualitative leadership CIT studies

Reference	Interview Sample	Description of Research
Ellinger and Bostrom (2002)	4 organizations 12 managers 56 incidents	This study explores the ways managers from four organizations perceive themselves to facilitate the learning of their employees.
Cunha et al. (2009)	"Variety of organizations" 89 professionals 89 incidents	This study collects incidents based on a positive or negative professional experience of the participant in order to explore the role of leader-subordinate interactions in the construction of organizational positivity.
Dasborough (2006)	4 organizations 10 leaders 9 employee focus groups # of incidents not reported	Based on the assumption that leaders are sources of employee emotions, the authors set out to provide an understanding of employee emotional responses to leadership behaviours.
Peus et al. (2013)	Multiple organizations, participants were from a leadership development program 98 leaders in focus groups 32 incidents	The authors use critical incident interviews with leaders, which serves as a measure development and pilot test in developing and validating the situation based measurement instrument of the full range of leadership theory.
Lewis et al. (2010)	5 organizations 40 employees 80 incidents	The purpose of this study is to identify specific management behaviours associated with effective management of stress when supervising nurses in UK health facilities.
Kvarnstrom (2008)	1 organization 18 professionals from 4 teams 40 incidents	In this study the author qualitatively examines difficulties perceived by health professionals working in interprofessional teams.
Kaulio (2008)	"Multi-site approach" 48 respondents 48 incidents	This study examines critical incidents faced by project leaders in their daily work. The study identifies technical difficulties, dyadic leadership and group dynamic to be among the numerous issues faced.



### 3.5 Data collection

#### 3.5.1 *Data collection methods*

The flexibility of the CIT allows for numerous data collection methods. Flanagan (1954) identified four ways of obtaining recalled data: (i) interviews, (ii) group interviews, (iii) questionnaires, and (iv) record forms. Direct observation was recommended by Flanagan (1954) as the preferred method. He was, however, pragmatic in recognizing the numerous challenges associated with this approach. Data collection methods of recent studies employing the CIT have varied among direct observation (e.g. Pescosolido, 2002), self-completion questionnaires (e.g. Kaulio, 2008; Krause et al., 2007; Lapidot et al., 2007), and semi-structured interviews. However, in-person semi-structured interviews (e.g. Cope and Watts, 2000; Dasborough, 2006; Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002; Kvarnstrom, 2008; Lewis et al., 2010; Wolff et al., 2002) appears to be the most common data collection technique. Regardless of the data collection method chosen, it is important to keep in mind that “the key challenge in collecting CIT data is to get respondents to provide sufficient detail about the phenomenon of interest” (Gremler, 2004, p 80).

#### 3.5.2 *Alternative approach - observation*

Flanagan (1954) cited observation to be the ideal data collection method. A primary advantage of observation is that the behaviours of individuals can be observed directly (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Observation has thus been claimed to better reflect the true nature of reality (Foddy, 1993), in comparison to what respondents say they do (e.g. compared to surveys or interviews). When individuals are asked to recall events from memory, through either a questionnaire or an interview, they may be able to remember the events quite well, but a recollection of how decisions evolved may not be complete (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Another primary benefit of direct observation is that the researcher is better able to put the behaviour into context, given he/she is present at the time (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Pescosolido (2002) used direct observation in a

qualitative CIT study analysing group emotional management. The fieldwork consisted of directly observing 20 groups (jazz bands and rowing crews) followed by group CIT interviews. Group observations included between two and four hours of observing a complete practice or performance of the jazz bands, or a practice session of the rowing crews.

The weaknesses of using direct observation include increased time and resources. It can take a significant amount of time to do either individual or group observations. In addition, the interviewer may observe individuals or groups for a significant time period without observing an event that would be characterized as a critical incident. Bryman and colleagues (Bryman and Bell, 2011, Bryman et al., 1996) note this to be particularly applicable to leadership, where issues relevant to leadership may not be prevalent on a regular basis. Similarly, reducing the scope of incidents to those observed within a short time period could significantly pose limitations on the findings. In the current study, many significant situations discussed by the respondents were developed and reacted to over many months (and in many instances, years), further enforcing observation as a significant limitation to this particular research (essentially unsuitable as a singular data collection method).

The concern noted by Flanagan (1954) was the need for objectivity of the observer. Inter-observer consistency relates to whether or not multiple observers “of the same behaviour can agree in terms of their coding of that behaviour” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p 279). Similarly, intra-observer consistency, the degree to which the same observer consistently classifies behaviours over time, is not fixed (Bryman and Bell, 2011), and further highlights that with observation the observer’s biases and interpretation are always present. Another commonly cited weakness of using direct observation is that participants are likely to alter their behaviour when they know they are being observed (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Waddington, 2004). This is known as the observer’s paradox, which has also been found to affect the interview process (Cukor-Avila, 2000).

During the current study, I observed one board meeting of a participating organization. This organization was the youngest organization in the sample. The ED and BC both acknowledged (and encouraged) access. I introduced myself to all meeting attendees at the start of the meeting, and had informal discussions with a number of meeting attendees after the meeting.

### *3.5.3 Alternative approach - self completion questionnaire*

Traditional questionnaires have been used to conduct fieldwork in studies using the CIT (e.g. Kaulio, 2008; Krause et al., 2007; Lapidot et al., 2007). Advantages of the questionnaire include its ease and cost of administering. Mass data can be collected through the use of a questionnaire, as opposed to an in-person interview, which takes time and resources. Participants filling out the questionnaire can also remain anonymous to the researcher (Krause et al, 2007). In addition, questionnaires can allow the participant time to reflect on their answers (Schluter et al., 2007).

The use of a questionnaire for data collection under the CIT has been criticized on a number of fronts. The main criticism is that the investigator is not able to collect a comparable depth of data. Respondents may not take the time to provide complete answers (Schluter et al., 2007), and the answers can also be misunderstood during analysis (Edvardsson and Roos, 2001). In an in-person interview, the interviewer is able to ask for clarification, a practice that is intended to reduce misinterpretation of the data. Probing for further detail is also common practice with in-person interviews - a characteristic that is absent from the questionnaire. For this reason it has been held that in-person interviews are able to produce “a richness and depth of data that could not be achieved in a controlled experiment or by pencil and paper recording” (Callan, 1998, p 96).

Due to the fact that behaviours are not being directly observed, but rather inferred, self-reports may not be entirely accurate (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This contention is not exclusive to questionnaires, and can be claimed for other forms of self-reporting (e.g. interviews) as well. In earlier sections, I have been critical of questionnaires such

as the MLQ for conducting research in the field of leadership, contending that questionnaires decontextualize the leadership process and assume unidirectional influence while eliminating the possibility of finding alternative influences. Furthermore, the selection of behaviour items for questionnaires comes with preconceptions of what the researcher believes to be of importance (Yukl, 2012). This is problematic for the current research, which I purport to be an inductive theory building process, and seek to gain an understanding of board member behaviour in a space I contend to be exploratory.

#### *3.5.4 Semi-structured interviews*

In the current study, I employed the CIT through the use of semi-structured interviews. In a review of the literature in counseling psychology that use the CIT, Butterfield et al. (2005) found that “virtually all of them” used retrospective reporting. The authors suggest this shift from direct observation to retroactive self-reporting to be one of the more prominent evolutions of the CIT since its inception (Butterfield et al., 2005). This is also clearly the case with the leadership studies presented earlier. Although a proponent of direct observation, Flanagan (1954) specified retrospective reporting to be an accurate method:

The critical incident technique is frequently used to collect data on observations previously made which are reported from memory. This is usually satisfactory when the incidents reported are fairly recent and the observers were motivated to make detailed observations and evaluations at the time the incident occurred (1954, p 340).

Direct observations are to be preferred, but the efficiency, immediacy, and minimum demands on cooperating personnel which are achieved by using recalled incident data frequently make their use the more practical procedure (1954, p 340).

In general, interview techniques range on a spectrum between highly structured closed questions to free-flowing informal (open) discussions. Closed interview questions are promoted by positivists, as they allow for comparisons among participants, and use standard questions to remove interviewer bias (Smith and Elger, 2014). Like questionnaires, closed interview questions risk constraining responses, limiting findings to potentially mimicking researcher presuppositions. Conversely, during a semi-structured interview the interviewer has a list of questions, which are to be followed, but the “interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p 467). The flexibility of the semi-structured interview fits well with the critical incident approach, as the interviewer is able to further probe the interviewee, ask for clarification, or to further explore or elaborate on specific areas – a practice that was used extensively in the current project. Leaving some structure in the interview allows for comparability not only between participants, but also between studies.

Interviews using the CIT generally comprise of semi-structured interview questions. “Such an open-ended approach is essential for the critical incident technique because data has to be categorized inductively, without reference to pre-existing theories” (Bradley, 1992, p 98). However, because “it is a two-way conversation, interviewing is always unavoidably interactional” (Silverman, 2008, p143). Due to this unavoidable interaction with the interviewee, “it is virtually impossible to free any interaction from those factors that could be construed as contamination” (Silverman, 2008, p 155). Although controlling for such factors is not the focus of interpretivist research, recognizing the level of interviewer engagement is still important. Regardless of philosophical stance, during the open questions, as much as is practically possible, the interviewer does not want to lead the respondent in any way. This is to mitigate against what is commonly referred to as bias or contamination (Silverman, 2008). In an attempt to find a balance between being able to provide clarity and dialogue without invoking unnecessary response bias, the use of generic probes can be of benefit (Chell, 2004; Schluter et al., 2007). A list of probes used in leadership CIT studies is presented in *Figure 3.4*. Note that each author is conscious of keeping the probes generic in order to not bias responses.

Similarly, the probes used in the current study include:

- What happened next?
- Who was involved?
- What did the board do?
- What was the outcome?
- How did that make you feel?
- How would you describe his/her behaviour in handling this situation?
- How would you describe your behaviour in handling this situation?
- Who was driving this decision?
- What could have made the action more effective?

The probes used in the current study were therefore designed to minimize structure in the interview process and “to ensure that the discussion was driven by what the respondent felt was important, in order to stay as close as possible to their lived experiences” (Cope and Watts, 2000, p 112). It would be limiting to stick strictly to such probes, and naïve to believe that I did. In the current study, I was flexible in asking for clarification, or exploring unexpected tangents.

Figure 3.4 Probes used in leadership CIT interviews

Reference	Probes used for CIT question
Dasborough (2006)	What led up to the event? Who said what to whom? Who did what? How did that make you feel? What happened afterwards?
Druskat and Wheeler (2003) Wolff et al. (2002) Pescosolido (2002)	What led up to the event? Who did and said what to whom? What happened next? What were you thinking or feeling at that moment? What was the outcome?

During an interview the interviewer is able to develop a rapport of trust with the participant, who will then be more willing to openly discuss sensitive information than they would in a questionnaire (Bradley, 1992; Chell, 2004). This becomes particularly important when eliciting information from people in higher-ranking positions. This was confirmed very early in the interview process when multiple participants spoke about situations of a confidential nature. Upper management and the board of directors can have knowledge of information that is sensitive or confidential in nature (e.g. removal of an ED was one significant situation discussed in the current study). In nonprofit organizations, items such as adherence to a mission, or funding allocations, can also be politically sensitive. The critical incident approach being conducted as more of a conversation, and a face-to-face approach, is therefore important in this setting – aspects which allow the researcher to better explain the confidentiality of the results, putting the participants more at ease.

The length and quantity of interviews required of the CIT make it a resource intensive method of data collection. The CIT interview can often include additional expenses for travel and opportunity cost of travel time. This became further evident in the current project as interviews averaged 56 minutes in length (ranging between 28 and 102 minutes). Furthermore, transcribing and coding can be very time consuming (Chell and Pittaway, 1998; see later section on transcribing).

### *3.5.5 Difficulty of the interview*

The CIT interview can be challenging to conduct and requires a trained and skilled interviewer (Chell and Pittaway, 1998; Schluter et al., 2007). The interviewer must be able to manage an interview in order to achieve clarity and understanding (Chell and Pittaway, 1998), without compromising or biasing the responses. This concern was controlled for (or at least mitigated) in this study in a number of ways. First, I conducted all of the interviews, and have prior interview experience, such as conducting semi-structured interviews with individuals at an executive level as the respondents. The pilot interviews also provided a training environment. During the pilot study an effort was made to be self-aware; an aspect that is essential in order to differentiate the

interviewer's perspective from the perspective of the interviewee (Schluter et al., 2007). Pilot transcripts were sent to my supervisory team for feedback on how the interviews were conducted. Pilot interviews also provided grounds to test probe questions, and their potential for influencing the participants' responses. Having knowledge of nonprofit organizations, board governance, and leadership, allowed for exploration and comprehension of the wider context of the situations and behaviours.

So far it has been argued that an understanding of the profession benefits the interviewing process, as the interviewer is able to comprehend the responses, and is able to grasp the wider context of the events and behaviours. Prior knowledge, or previous experience of the profession and subject matter, has also been debated to have adverse consequences. In a study conducted with a nursing workforce, Schluter et al. (2007) found that if the respondent believes the interviewer has prior experience, they may avoid commenting on what they perceive as obvious (Schluter et al., 2007). Similarly, the investigator may not feel the need to ask such questions, missing out on rich information from the respondent's viewpoint. If this issue is observed by the experienced interviewer, Schluter et al. (2007) suggest that the interviewer reinforces the following to the respondent: "despite the answers being obvious to the participants themselves, it may not be to others and it [is] important for the interviewer not to assume the answers from their own experience" (Schluter et al., 2007, p 113). The interviewer can thus exhibit a deliberate naiveté whereby he/she has an awareness of his/her own presuppositions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) – a technique I found myself deploying frequently.

#### *3.5.6 Tape recording the interview*

It is beneficial to tape record interviews, and it has become a routine practice during CIT interviews (e.g. Bradley, 1992; Cunha, 2009; Ellinger and Bostrom, 2002; Kvarnstrom, 2008; Lewis et al., 2010; Wolff et al., 2002). The interviewer should be alert and following the participant's dialogue and not distracted by the note taking process (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This is particularly important for exploratory research due to the need to probe, while adding and discarding questions



(Hayes and Mattimoe, 2004). Recording also helps to ensure descriptive validity (Butterfield et al., 2005; Maxwell, 1992), a term used by Maxwell (1992), referring to the factual accuracy of what the researcher reports having seen or heard. The recording also provides a backup in case the notes are not complete, and helps to fill in the gaps that are missed by limitation of memory.

Recording the interview can come at a cost of potential discomfort of the participant, who may become self-conscious, potentially affecting the responses (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Hayes and Mattimoe, 2004; Saunders et al., 1997). This criticism was rarely detectable in the current study. In all instances, I asked the participant at the beginning of the interview if he/she minded the interview being recorded, and emphasized the option of not recording. In each instance, the respondent had little to no hesitation. I experienced one technical difficulty with the audio recorder during the interviews. Luckily, this occurred after the CIT questions had been administered. I then took notes for the remainder of the interview.

### *3.5.7 Pilot testing*

The main reason for piloting in this specific study was to test questions for comprehension, ensure there were no questions that respondents felt uncomfortable answering, to ensure there were no questions respondents had difficulty answering due to limitation in recollection or easy access to information, ensure the instructions were clear, and that the length of the interview was appropriate. In addition, the process also provided an opportunity to enhance interview skills and confidence. Pilot interviews also help to ensure that the questions and interview technique used are able to properly elicit the required information (Schluter et al., 2007). In a study of health care workers, using semi-structured interviews for the CIT, Lewis et al. (2010) piloted the interview guide with two participants. They noted having made minor improvements to the interview guide after the pilot interviews were conducted.

In the current study, the interview guide was discussed among the supervisory team, who are considered to have knowledge of both the subject matter as well as the data collection technique. After receiving and discussing comments from the research team, and multiple revisions of the interview guide, the interview guide was piloted in individual interviews with four participants. The participants included two EDs, one BC, and one BD who were perceived to be representative of the sample population (e.g. came from diverse nonprofit organizations, and varied in age, gender, and tenure). The four participants represented three different nonprofit organizations. After the pilot interviews, sub questions were altered in *Section I - Significant Situation (CIT)*, and questions in *Section III - Board Responsibilities and Actions – Closed Questions* were clarified.

### 3.5.8 Document collection

Organizational documents were also requested from the participating organizations. The request for documents was made through the ED. The initial request was made when booking the interview to give people in the organization time to prepare the documents. When the CIT questions were emailed to the ED approximately one week before his/her scheduled interview, the email also requested the documents. The specific request was:

I would like to collect copies of any documents you may have that relate to the board's role. E.g. if you have a director's job description in the orientation manual, or similar items, I would like a copy. If there is a director's orientation manual I would also like a copy of the table of contents.

A section was also inserted in the interview guide (*Section VI - Documentation*) that served as a reminder to collect and discuss documents, as well as a place to record the types of documents received during the interview. It was anticipated that the majority of organizations would hold documentation in some form or another, although smaller or less structured organizations may not have formal job descriptions. No documents were created for the purpose of this research.

The intention of collecting documentation on the role of the board was primarily to develop a further understanding of the nature of the role of the board. Documents were not used in isolation as they have been argued to not be “transparent representations of organizational routines, decision-making processes or professional diagnoses” (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004, p 58). “We cannot, for instance, learn through written records alone how an organization actually operates day by day” (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004, p 58). For this reason, documents were used in combination with the interviews (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Organizational documents are likely to be authentic and meaningful, but “may not be an accurate representation of how different organizational actors perceive the situations in which they are involved” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p 550). Throughout *Chapter four*, I present instances where board documents support respondents’ perception of reality, as well as instances where documentation prescribes actions which are different than how respondents perceive actual events to have occurred. Why documents differ from reality, for what purpose they were written, by whom, and with what objective they were written, are beyond the scope of the current thesis.

Documents collected during this study do not include only the specific documents requested; In many instances, I was provided with full orientation manuals, which frequently included bylaws, board meeting minutes, strategic plans, budgets, organizational history, and board and organizational policies. These materials provided valuable background information on the organization (Bryman and Bell, 2011), board decisions, and other contextual factors.

In a couple of instances, interviews with EDs triggered discussion and collection of further documents, not previously requested. For example, one ED spoke about the board creating a charter as follows:

One positive thing has been they developed a charter, which is kind of a guiding document that outlines what we believe and sort of the values that we hold. And that we would use for board members but we would also bring it into projects

that we have. So if we have people on steering committees for projects, we would present this charter as well, just to put things up front about we will ensure that meetings are timely and that agendas are structured and we will get information to people and that if there are issues that come up during the meeting we will aim for consensus decisions. Just sort of outline. Put everything up front in that we value people's contributions. And that we all listen. And that we respect each others' opinions. That sort of thing. Just putting that all down. It has helped in a couple of projects and I think that was a really good board decision to do that. And it was one of our board members that crafted it. It was a very thoughtful document. (ED13)

This is provided as an example of requesting and receiving documents during the interview process that were not requested in advance (It was not known to exist, so could not have been requested in advance.). This comment created further discussion of the board, why the charter was developed, and how it has been used. Other examples of documents received but not originally requested include advertising brochures. Analysis of documents is embedded throughout *Chapter four*. Documents analysis was undertaken similarly to the analysis of the interview transcripts. The documents were read multiple times, whereby excerpts relating to the research questions were coded into themes.

### *3.5.9 Timeline of the fieldwork*

The timeline and ordering of the fieldwork in this study is detailed as follows:

*Ethics Approval:* Ethics approval was submitted to the University and approved in April 2013. The ethical considerations for this project are outlined in a later section.

*Pilot Testing:* The pilot testing was conducted in April and May 2013.

*Initial Contact:* Organizations were initially contacted by email the third week of March 2013, which included the following: a brief introduction, a description of the intended research, an explanation of why they have been chosen to participate, mention of the confidential nature of the data collected, and mention of the time requirement to participate. This letter is included as *Appendix I*. Initial contact was a rolling process, which was dependent on prior access responses and an ongoing perception of saturation.

*Second Contact:* Approximately a week after the introductory letter was emailed to potential participants, those who had not yet responded to the letter were given a phone call (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Miller, 2002). The phone call was intended to be a follow up to the letter and to book an appointment to be interviewed, when applicable.

*Interviews:* In-person interviews were then conducted at a location of the participants' choice, which included their place of employment, their residence, or a venue related to the respective participating organization. In order to ensure confidentiality, participant comfort, and quality of the audio recording, no interviews were conducted in open public facilities such as coffee shops. Interviews were conducted between May 2013 and August 2013.

## 3.6 Data analysis

### 3.6.1 *Transcribing*

Since transcribing “is in itself an initial analytic process” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p 180), I completed the transcription process personally, believing this to be especially important for interpretivist research. With interpretivist research it is important to approach transcription as an interpretive act rather than a mechanical one (Bird, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006). This process allows the researcher to develop an initial understanding of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Interviews were transcribed

verbatim. However, notes were made during the process (e.g. laughter, non verbal gestures) to mitigate the loss of meaning and interpretation. Transcribing was conducted in parallel to the interview process, with an effort to transcribe interviews shortly after the interview was conducted.

One advantage of outsourcing transcription is to save the researcher time; some authors claim that one hour of audio can take an experienced typist between five and ten hours to transcribe, leading to 20 to 25 single spaced pages of text (Hayes and Mattimoe, 2004; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The trade offs of outsourcing this task are that of cost and potentially that of quality. Transcribing yourself ensures the quality of the transcripts. If you do not transcribe the recording yourself, it is important that the transcriber has a reasonable understanding of the content to reduce inaccuracies (Hayes and Mattimoe, 2004).

### *3.6.2 Inductive data analysis*

Coding involves attaching key words or phrases to text segments, allowing empirical material to be broken down, examined, compared, and categorized into themes. In this research, staying true to an inductive approach, coding was data-driven, whereby codes were developed through multiple readings of the empirical material (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This is in contrast to theory-driven coding, in which case the theoretical relationship between data and theory is forefront during the coding process (Kenealy, 2012).

In order to challenge conventional pre-understandings a flexible theoretical framework is required (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). This includes, for example, multiple readings of the empirical material collected in the fieldwork (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). In addition to this, a reflexive approach to empirical material where the researcher remains not only self aware of his/her predispositions but also open to alternative paradigms is necessary in order to fully engage in a critical dialogue with theory (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007). Although being truly non-theoretical may not

ever be fully achievable as advocates of grounded theory have implied (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007).

It has been argued that a purely inductive approach is not possible in practice (Eisenhardt, 1989; Fine, 2004; Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011). It can also be argued that it is not desirable; Even with an inductive approach, one must have knowledge of the literature so that constructs and relationships important in explaining the phenomenon are not overlooked (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011). Despite my earlier criticisms of current leadership theories, specifically the dominant theory of transformational leadership, it is important to recognize the contributions these theories have had in organizational research (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), while inductively exploring for new ones. Additionally, preconceptions can assist a theorist “in analyzing data in part because they decrease the possibility that he or she will be overwhelmed by the volume of the data” (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011, p 364).

Shepherd and Sutcliffe (2011) outline what they term inductive top-down theorizing (other authors have provided similar hybrid approaches – e.g. Samuels’ (2000) discussion on abduction). In this model, the researcher develops a comprehensive understanding of the literature, but approaches the data with an ‘openness’, “refraining from attending too closely to specific literature, theories, constructs, methods, and so on, and also remains open to alternative routes of interpretation and analysis” (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011, p 368).

Described in its simplest terms, data collected using the CIT is coded into themes based on some commonality. Themes are identified naturally through reviewing the data, but the researcher must also keep in mind the intended uses of the data (Flanagan, 1954). The number of categories (and perhaps subcategories) chosen is a trade off between specificity and generality; When too broad of themes are chosen, there may be a loss of comprehensiveness and specificity. However, when too many themes are used it may become difficult to reliably categorize incidents (Bradley, 1992), to reach saturation, or identify generalizations from the data. Coding is arguably the stage of the

CIT that attracts the most controversy, as it is both subjective as well as difficult (Sharoff, 2008). Flanagan (1954) clearly stated that there is no minimal criterion or set rules that can be structurally applied in all cases, and that the coding of data is unfortunately as subjective as it is objective.

Using the CIT in a small business setting, Chell and Pittaway (1998) use multiple types of categories, each with their own set of interpretations. Their primary categorization which emerged from the data was that of functional type: categories of functional type included marketing, finance, operations, human resources, business development, and miscellaneous. They further categorized the data into critical incidents by business growth: expanding, rejuvenating, plateauing, and declining. Lastly, the authors grouped the data into categories including proactive incidents, reactive incidents, tangible incidents, positive incidents, and negative incidents. In a study of project leadership in multi-project settings, Kaulio (2008) categorized the data into 13 themes. The most frequent themes included technical difficulties, dyadic leadership, group dynamics, and consultant relations. However, following prior CIT studies, the incidents are not the unit of analysis (Keaveney, 1995; Sharoff, 2008) in the current study. Rather, behaviours were coded into themes.

An example from the current project will help to illustrate how the critical incidents were coded. A story a respondent told about negotiating the compensation increase for the ED, for example, provided a conduit to eliciting multiple desirable and undesirable leadership behaviours of board members. This one critical incident, chosen by the participant as having a positive outcome, brought to the fore positive behaviours of taking time to hire, being future oriented, visionary, trusting staff, and mission oriented. The incident also highlighted the fact that the board was receptive to alternative influences, thus demonstrating shared leadership – a point I later make as being a surprise when looking through the lens of vertical leadership theories.

When combined with the other critical incidents (106 collected in total), the inductively driven codes formed behavioural themes. Given the inductive properties of



the critical incident technique, as employed in the current study, a number of these themes are ‘surprises’ when compared to the leadership literature, while a number of themes are consistent with prescriptions of transformational leadership.

In order to help facilitate the coding of large amounts of complex and intertwined empirical material, Schluter et al. (2007) found a select few studies that chose themes before starting the sorting process. Similarly, Norman et al. (1992) identified a few studies, which applied a theoretical framework during their coding. This *a priori* scheme has been strongly advised against by a number of authors, as it negates the benefits brought forth from inductive research. Norman et al. (1992) contend such a preconceived agenda sets limits on the exploratory potential. The authors further argue the formulation “of the categories [should be] done inductively by sorting the incidents into clusters that seem to fit together” (Norman et al., 1992, p 594) – an approach I take in the current study.

Once the themes have been well formed they can then be compared to the existing literature to see if there is support for the themes (Butterfield et al., 2005). This chronological sequence of events does not compromise the inductive categorization. This process, called theoretical agreement (Maxwell, 1992), allows the researcher to scrutinize the themes against a theoretical framework within relevant scholarly literature (Butterfield et al., 2005). Concluding a lack of support or contradiction of the themes in comparison to the literature does not necessarily indicate the themes are unsound, as the exploratory nature of this methodology may mean the study has helped to develop territory that has not been well understood by researchers in the past (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007; Butterfield et al., 2005). The reader will find examples of this throughout *Chapter four*. Finding contextual extensions to the already well-known theory of transformational leadership is possible only through inductive exploratory research (Bryman et al., 1996).

During data analysis I adopted the above convention whereby interviews are coded inductively, but not with an ignorance of current theory. The process of coding follows thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p 6), whereby a theme captures “something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p 10, emphasis in original). This process is also consistent with an interpretivist view whereby interpretivists “use a number of research methods to obtain different perceptions of the phenomena and in your analysis you will be seeking to understand what is happening in a situation and looking for patterns which may be repeated in other similar situations” (Collis and Hussey, 2009, p 60).

During this process I started with a large number of detailed themes, and later merged, split, and relabeled themes until I was satisfied with the remaining themes. NVivo was used to assist with the coding process. However, I was careful not to lose context in the coding process (e.g. making notes, ensuring surrounding text was included in the codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006), and re-reading transcripts and documents during the write up process).

In the current project, I followed an inductive analysis approach, while being cognizant of current leadership theory. Interview transcripts and document were read approximately three times in an active way, searching for meanings and patterns (Braun and Clarke, 2006), before initial themes were developed, and approximately six or seven times during the coding process. Although I sought to explore new themes, I was, however, not ignorant of existing theories. Part way through the coding process, I allocated approximately 120 hours to reacquaint myself with the relevant literature to ensure current theory was not being overlooked.

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical responsibilities of a researcher when collecting and storing data in management and leadership studies include voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality. Each of these components were considered in this project and explained below. The principle of voluntary participation suggests that participants' participation should not be compulsory. This fact was clearly presented to participants at numerous points of contact. The introductory letter in *Appendix I* clearly stated participation "is voluntary and at any point you may withdrawal your participation", and in addition to a similar statement being written on the fact sheet (*Appendix II*), this was mentioned to the participant at the interview.

Informed consent relates to informing the participant about the overarching purpose of the research project, as well as any possible risks or benefits to the participant or their organization as a result of participating (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). With respect to informed consent, information about the project was also provided at both stages of contact, and a signature of the participant was kept on file. The information presented was of a broad nature (Cole et al., 2011; De Hoogh et al., 2005; Levay 2010), referring to behavioural characteristic of the board of directors - a process commonly recommended to avoid leading the participant to specific answers (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Providing more detailed information can bias the respondent's responses. There was then a debriefing at the end of the interview where more details were provided and the participant was encouraged to ask further questions about the study.

Anonymity refers to non-identification of the individuals' identity. When conducting interview-based research, anonymity is not possible. However, identities can be protected from those not directly connected to the research project through the principle of confidentiality. Confidentiality refers to the action whereby access to the names and responses is limited to those directly involved with the research (de Vaus, 2002), and that any information identifying the participant will not be disclosed (Kvale

and Brinkmann, 2009). Board members are privy to confidential information in a number of facets, such as human resources and funding. Issues relating to the identified critical incidents often have personnel, political, financial, competitive, or other reasons for the importance of confidentiality as well as anonymity. Individuals were assured at the interview that their personal name and the name of their organization would be kept confidential. This was also written on the fact sheet (see *Appendix II*).

### 3.8 Interview guide

The interview guide was designed with a combination of open and closed questions. The intention was to properly elicit the respondents' view, fully understand the situations identified by the respondent, and to develop an in-depth understanding of the associated behaviours. The guide started with open questions to encourage a broad range of information as well as in-depth information. The guide then moved to more detailed (closed) questions – a practice suggested by Eisenhardt (1989) and used by other studies researching board-ED relationships (e.g. Hoyer, 2006). This is important since “answers to prior specific questions often seem to influence answers to later, more general questions” (Foddy, 1993, p 7). Closed questions have been criticized for locking respondents into “arbitrarily limited alternatives” (Foddy, 1993, p 127). By starting with open questions and moving to closed questions, an effort was therefore made to control for order bias. The following describes the purpose of the main sections of the interview guide. The full interview guide is presented in *Appendix III*.

#### 3.8.1 Section I - Significant situation (CIT)

The intention of this section was to collect an in-depth understanding of the board members' behaviours in relation to the significant situations reported, while being open to findings of alternative influences and situational/contextual factors. This section had to be worded with great consideration for a number of reasons, which were outlined earlier in this chapter. The intention was to elicit the *respondents'* view, fully understand the situations identified by the respondent, as well as develop an in-depth

understanding of the associated behaviours. This section was therefore presented early in the interview guide, as there was a possibility of order bias. In addition, questions Q1.1 and Q1.4 were sent to participants in advance, for reasons outlined earlier in this chapter.

### 3.8.2 *Section II - Board responsibilities and actions - open questions*

*Section II* of the interview guide similarly contains open questions. The intention of this section is similar to *Section I* - to elicit rich information about the practices of board members. This section posed three questions:

Q2.1 Please describe the role of a board member / director as you feel it should be practiced in order to ensure the success of your organization.

Q2.2 Please describe the role of a board member / director on your board as currently practiced in your organization.

Q2.3: What, if anything, holds you or your board back from practicing what you described as the ideal role of the director in the above question?

The distinction between the first two questions was motivated to address the potential of the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000, 1999). Pfeffer and Sutton (2000, 1999) follow a survey structure which asks managers what they think are best practices, then proceed to ask the same set of questions in regard to what they actually do. The authors note “big differences” between what managers believe produces success and what they report currently practicing. Following Pfeffer and Sutton (2000, 1999), *Section II* and *Section III* ask specifically about the role of a director *as currently practiced*, and *as you feel should be practiced*. In order to get a more detailed understanding of the intricacies of why certain roles and behaviours are not practiced, question Q2.3 was added as an extension to Pfeffer and Sutton (1999).

It has been noted that the topic of leadership has been on the agenda of researchers for more than a 100 years (van Knippenberg, 2011). Judge and Piccolo (2004) note that a “search for keywords in materials published from 1990 to 2003 in the PsycINFO database revealed that there have been more studies on transformational or charismatic leadership than on all other popular theories of leadership” (Judge and Piccolo, 2004, p756). Most recently, this is evidenced by the fact that a search for the term transformational leadership produced over 137,000 hits on Google Scholar and over 6,400 on Amazon.co.uk (Google Scholar, accessed July, 2014; Amazon, accessed July, 2014).

Despite the popularity of the topic in both research and practitioner focused literature, a number of corporate scandals (including Enron, Worldcom, Tyco International, Peregrine Systems, and Adelphia, just to name a few) involving top-level executives shed light on the fact that there is still a leadership crisis (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005). In the nonprofit sector, reports of high executive compensation, gifts to board members of high monetary value, and controversy over whether or not donors’ funds are being effectively spent are common ground (Herzlinger, 1994). In both sectors we have thus seen an expanded role (or at least a call for an expanded roll) of board members in recent years. By adopting the knowing-doing gap approach, I am able to identify what areas of leadership in the literature are not known to practitioners. If prescribed practices are known but not being followed, the question of why is then addressed. Consistencies and inconsistencies between prescribed behaviours (and roles) and perceived actual behaviours are presented throughout the next chapter. This approach also helped to identify different perceptions between respondent types.

### *3.8.3 Section III - Board responsibilities and actions - closed questions*

In this section, I follow a similar process as in *Section II* in that I adopt the knowing-doing gap approach of data collection. I crafted closed questions based on current leadership theory. The first five questions represent each of the four components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Embedded in the analysis chapter are a number of examples whereby I provide an explanation for a discrepancy between respondents' perception of the extent respondents feel a behaviour (or role) *should* be practiced and is *currently* practiced. Although the Likert scale used represents a form of closed questioning, respondents were encouraged to discuss their ratings. When a respondent provided a rating on the outer ends of the Likert scale, or provided a discrepancy in their ratings between the should and the current, I probed for further discussion. Following previous studies, this section used a 5-point Likert scale. For example, Inglis et al. (1999) used a 5-point Likert scale when eliciting information from board members on the importance (should) and fulfillment (current) of board roles and responsibilities. Peus et al. (2013) used a 5-point Likert scale to research perceived effectiveness of leadership behaviours.

In the introduction (*Chapter one*) I contended that agency theory (Fama and Jensen, 1983; Jensen and Meckling, 1976) and resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) have been the predominant economic theories for explaining nonprofit governance (Brown, 2005; Brown and Guo, 2010; Hillman and Dalziel, 2003; Stone and Ostrower, 2007). Questions *v* through *ix* were posed to elicit information with respect to popular governance literature. I was able obtain a complete data set for future publications with respect to governance theories. Although the data was coded with these theories in mind, the themes that emerged with respect to governance are not presented in this thesis.

### 3.9 Summary

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that leadership studies have traditionally been conducted with a positivist paradigm, using behaviour descriptive questionnaires. In the social sciences, it seems erroneous to presume that organizational actors can be separated from the social context, reality is objective and singular, research is unbiased, and that it is possible to capture complex organizational phenomenon in a single measurement (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Collis and Hussey, 2009). Viewing leadership as a socially constructed (Meindl et al., 1985), fluid process (Tourish, 2014), influenced

by multiple actors (e.g. distributed leadership, followership; Gronn, 2002; Shamir, 2007), intertwined with contextual factors (Ford, 2010), suggests that the complexity of leadership (Collinson, 2014) is best served by an interpretive approach. Following this argument, universal laws to the study of leadership are unlikely to be obtained or practically relevant.

Based on a positivist view, research in the field of leadership has been dominated by behaviour description questionnaires (Bryman, 2004; Yukl 2012). This is particularly prevalent with transformational leadership, which is commonly married to the MLQ. Such behavioural questionnaires continue to reinforce researcher presuppositions, and are unable to examine leader behaviours while being sensitive to influences of context and other organizational actors. Instead, by employing questionnaire after questionnaire, researchers have been unable to move the leadership literature ahead by any magnitude, essentially replicating existing knowledge (Shaw, 2010). It is therefore not surprising that for the past 20 years a number of authors and editors have been calling for a diversification of research methodologies and methods in the field of leadership (e.g. Bryman, 2011b; Bryman et al. 1996; Collinson and Grint, 2005).

In the current study, I employed open critical incident interviews while adopting an interpretivist paradigm. The CIT (Flanagan, 1954) was used to focus the participant onto a limited area (Bradley, 1992), allowing for an in-depth understanding of board member behaviours within circumstances encountered (e.g. significant situations). Adding the CIT to your research methods helps to focus the participant (Bradley, 1992; Sharoff, 2008), allowing the researcher to capture much richer details than would be obtained even through traditional semi-structured interviews (Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Gremler, 2004). The fact that the technique centres on actual events while discouraging hypothetical situations (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Moss et al., 2003) recognizes the social context (Chell, 1998; Lewis et al., 2010).



Research developing our knowledge of board members' behaviours (arguably in a leadership capacity) is very limited. Therefore, in this early phase, I used the CIT as an inductive tool to develop an understanding of such behaviours. The CIT's strengths lie not only in its utility as an exploratory tool, but also its role in building theories or models (Butterfield et al., 2005; Druskat and Wheeler, 2003; Woolsey, 1986). For example, the CIT allows the researcher to not only understand the extent of situational leadership, but to also gain a further understanding of the thought processes, attributed meanings, and motivations behind such behaviours. In this research, staying true to an inductive approach, coding was data-driven, whereby codes were developed through multiple readings of the empirical material (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). This is in contrast to theory-driven coding, in which case the theoretical relationship between data and theory is forefront during the coding process (Kenealy, 2012).

## Chapter four: Analysis of the empirical material

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the empirical material in relation to the research questions. The empirical material was coded and presented across all material collected for the research project, including across all interview questions and sections and organizational documents (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I present the analysis of this section arranged in the same fashion as the coding was conducted, with behaviours as the unit of analysis. It is important to note again that the stories themselves are not the unit of analysis. Although the stories and partial stories are presented throughout this chapter, they are told in relation to unit of analysis, which assists in placing the leadership behaviours into context.

The analysis draws most significantly on the stories collected through the use of the CIT (critical incident technique) in *Section I* of the interview guide. Responses in this section provide rich data in terms of detailed accounts of events, detailed behaviours of multiple actors as individuals and as a collective, and background context of the internal and external environment. While presenting board member behaviours, I remain sensitive to i) the situations in which the behaviours occurred, ii) how the board context contributed to the leadership process, and to iii) influences of other organizational actors. Examples of findings that demonstrate the importance of each of these factors are embedded throughout this chapter.

Where appropriate, repetition of responses from the critical incidents is then supported with data from open questions on board responsibilities and behaviours (*Section II*), and periodically from discussions during the interview questions on board responsibilities and behaviours (*Section III*), as well as data collected through organizational documents (*Section VI*). Responses from *Sections II* and *Section III* of the interview guide are able to further identify gaps and reasons for the gaps between

board members' ideal behaviours and how respondents felt board members (and boards) currently behave – what Pfeffer and Sutton (2000; 1999) have characterized as the “knowing-doing gap”.

As noted in the previous chapter, the empirical material was analysed inductively with no themes identified *a priori*. Once the themes were formed, they were then compared to existing leadership literature to see if there was support for the codes (Butterfield et al., 2005) – a process commonly termed theoretical agreement (Maxwell, 1992). Following this sequence of analysis, it was determined that the most logical structure for presenting the analysis and emerging themes is through the use of five subsections broadly labeled as *inspirational motivation*, *idealized influence*, *autonomy*, *individualized consideration* and *distributed leadership*. Since numerous themes in the empirical material fall within the concepts of inspirational motivation, idealized influence and individualized consideration, these broad headings helped to organize the presentation of findings. The findings presented in the sections of autonomy and distributed leadership were repetitive in the empirical material, but include themes that do not fit neatly under a heading of vertical leadership theories.

In each section, theoretical agreement in a number of instances is affirmed in terms of the behaviours of board members in the participating nonprofit organizations being explained by transformational leadership theory. Where behaviours and leadership processes deviate from transformational leadership theory, the themes and respective examples are presented. In this chapter, I first start by providing an overview of the resulting sample, which includes descriptive statistics of participating organizations and individual participants. This is then followed by the primary analysis.

## 4.2 Organizational and individual descriptive statistics

### 4.2.1 Introduction

In this section, I present the demographic descriptive statistics of the participating organizations and of the participants. Demographic questions on participating organizations were asked of the EDs only, as it was assumed that EDs, being full-time employees of the organization, would have a more informed knowledge of the specific areas under analysis (e.g. age of the organization, gross revenues, major activities), and/or have documentation more readily accessible, than part-time board members would. Individual demographic questions were collected from each respondent during the interview. In this section, I provide a brief overview of these statistics, starting with an overview of the organizations under analysis. The demographic questions for the organizations under analysis can be found in *Section V* of the interview guide in *Appendix III*. Next, I present demographic descriptive statistics of the individual participants. The demographic questions for individual respondents can be found in *Section IV* of the interview guide in *Appendix III*.

### 4.2.2 Organizational descriptive statistics

Given the exploratory nature of this research, a heterogeneous sample of organizations was desired. Consistent with most qualitative research, organizations were therefore purposefully selected (Eisenhart, 1989; Pratt, 2009). Studying board member behaviours from diverse organizations increases the representativeness (Alvesson and Achcraft, 2012) and generalizability (Brown and Guo, 2010; Maxwell 1992), and therefore produces results that have relevance to a broad range of nonprofit boards (Miller, 2002). Of the 18 organization under analysis, the majority of organizations fall under three overarching categories of primary activities, which include providing social services (44%, 8), seniors' support and/or seniors' housing (22%, 4), and providing food and/or shelter (11%, 2). The largest category, social services, is comprised of organizations that support low income, homelessness, and provide support for, and advocate in support of, other social challenges. The remaining organizations include

library services, arts and culture, and support for disabilities. Further details of participating organizations can be found in *Table 4.1*.

Table 4.1 Organizational descriptive statistics

	Mean	Maximum	Minimum	Sum
OrgAge_Q5_3	1973	2011	1907	
GrossRev_Q5_2	9,801,954	43,000,000	350,000	
Food_Shelter_Q5_1	11%			2
Senior_Serv_Q5_1	22%			4
Soc_Serv_Q5_1	44%			8
Other_MajActivity_Q5_1	22%			4

Executive directors were asked to state the amount of annual gross revenue, including all sources of funding. The initial interview guide included categories of revenue. However, during the pilot and initial interviews, participants appeared open to disclosing, and also knowledgeable about, the amount of gross revenue received by their respective organization. Therefore, revenue was elicited directly, without categories. Gross revenue of participating organizations averaged 9,801,954 Canadian dollars, and ranged from 350,000 to 43,000,000. Supporting the intention of sampling diverse organizations, the organizations can be distributed almost equally into categories of under 1,000,000, between 1,000,001 and 5,000,000, between 5,000,001 and 10,000,000, and over 10,000,000.

The oldest organization in this study was established in 1907 (106 years old), while the newest organization was established in 2011 (two years old). On average, participating organizations were 40 years old (established in 1973) at the time of data collection. The number of organizations which first existed in each era is as follows: two established before the 1960's, three in the 1960's, four in the 1970's, five in the 1980's, one in the 1990's, two in the 2000's, and one since 2010.

In this section, I have provided an overview of the demographic statistics of the participating organizations. From this, it is evident that the organizations range in

primary activity, level of gross revenue, and age of organization, ultimately providing a diverse sample. In the next section, I provide an overview of the individual participants.

#### *4.2.3 Individual participant descriptive statistics*

In this study I interviewed 53 respondents from the 18 organizations. The intention was to interview three individuals with differing roles within each of the 18 participating organizations. Upon approaching each organization, the participation of the ED, BC, and a BD at large was requested. This access was granted and fully executed in each organization except for the following exceptions:

- In two instances, the BC was unavailable. In one of these instances two vice-chairs were interviewed. These participants were both coded as BDs. In the other instance one non-executive BD was interviewed.
- In one instance, two co-chairs made up the two board-level interviews, and both were coded as BCs.

The final participant composition included 18 EDs, 17 BCs, and 18 BDs from 18 organizations.

Respondents' age was elicited and categorized on the interview guide in categories of a) 18-30, b) 31-40, c) 41-50, d) 51-60, e) 61 or over, and d) rather not say. The age of respondents is skewed toward the higher age categories with 34% (18) of respondent's aged 61 or over, when compared to the general population of Alberta. Statistics Canada (2011) reports 14.8% of the Canadian population to be 65 years or older. The majority of BCs (53%, 9) are 61 years of age or older, while 33% (9) of BD were 61 years of age or older. The number of respondents in each age category can be found in *Table 4.2*.

Table 4.2 Age category by respondent type

		Age_16-30_Q4_2	Age_31-40_Q4_2	Age_41-50_Q4_2	Age_51-60_Q4_2	Age_61or>_Q4_2
BC	% of total	6%	12%	6%	24%	53%
	Sum	1	2	1	4	9
BD	% of total	6%	22%	17%	22%	33%
	Sum	1	4	3	4	6
ED	% of total	0%	6%	33%	44%	17%
	Sum	0	1	6	8	3
Total	% of total	4%	13%	19%	30%	34%
	Sum	2	7	10	16	18

Gender was elicited and categorized on the interview guide by asking each respondent to classify his or her gender into categories of a) male, b) female, and c) rather not say. Sixty four percent (34) of the 53 participants were male, with the remaining 35% (19) self-selecting the female category. This can further be broken down by role as follows: Sixty five percent (11) of BCs, 72% (13) of BDs and 56% (10) of EDs were male. The number of respondents in BC and BD positions is heavily skewed to a male gender when compared to the overall population of Alberta. Of the working population in Alberta (15 to 64 years of age) 52% are male, whereas 45% of seniors (65 years or older) are male. The gender of EDs in this sample is closely representative of the gender of the Alberta working population (56% of EDs are male compared to 52% of the Alberta population; Author's own analysis based of Statistics Canada (2011)). A more comprehensive overview of gender categorized by role is presented in *Table 4.3*.

Table 4.3 Gender by respondent type

		Male	Female
BC	% of total	65%	35%
	Sum	11	6
BD	% of total	72%	28%
	Sum	13	5
ED	% of total	56%	44%
	Sum	10	8
Total	% of total	64%	36%
	Sum	34	19

Tenure was elicited and categorized on the interview guide by asking each respondent how long he or she has sat on this board or how long he or she has been the ED. If the board member has had previous sittings on the board, they were asked to include this tenure in their response. Executive directors had the longest average tenure (8.11 years) of each of the three roles under analysis, followed by BCs (7.44 years) and BDs (6.14 years). The maximum tenure for a BC was 43 years. Removing this outlier, the next highest tenure for a BC was 12 years. Removing an outlier of 38 year from the ED category, the next highest tenure was 14 years. A detailed overview of tenure by role is presented in *Table 4.4*.

Table 4.4 Tenure by respondent type

	Mean	Maximum	Minimum
BC	7.44	43	2
BD	6.14	15	1
ED	8.11	38	0.5
Total	7.23	43	0.5

The number of nonprofit, for-profit, and other boards that the participants have sat on in the past was elicited and categorized on the interview guide by the inclusion of the categories of a) nonprofit boards, b) for-profit boards, and c) other. Board chairs averaged the most frequent nonprofit board sittings (7.41), followed by BDs (4.22) and



EDs (5.22). Sitting on for-profit or other boards was found to be very infrequent. Further details of board sittings can be found in *Table 4.5*.

Table 4.5 Board sittings by respondent type

		NumPrevNFP_Q4_3a	NumPrevFProfit_Q4_3b	NumPrevOtherQ4_3c
BC	Mean	7.41	0.06	0.59
	Maximum	25	1	5
	Minimum	1	0	0
BD	Mean	4.22	0.06	0.33
	Maximum	25	1	3
	Minimum	1	0	0
ED	Mean	5.22	0.11	0.06
	Maximum	20	2	1
	Minimum	0	0	0
Total	Mean	5.59	0.08	0.32
	Maximum	25	2	5
	Minimum	0	0	0

#### 4.2.4 Summary

In this section I presented the demographic descriptive statistics of the participating organizations and of the individual participants, which were elicited in the interview guide under *Section IV* and *Section V*. The participating nonprofit organizations ranged in major activity, level of gross annual revenue, and age. Given the exploratory nature of this research, this diversity of organizations within the nonprofit sector was by design. With respect to individual participants, the sample was comprised of more older and male participants when compared to the general regional population. This next section provides a detailed analysis of respondent responses.

## 4.3 Inspirational Motivation

### 4.3.1 *Introduction*

Transformational leaders displaying characteristics of inspirational motivation get followers involved in envisioning attractive future states, articulate a compelling vision of the future, and demonstrate commitment to organizational goals and a shared vision (Bass and Riggio, 2006). In this section I present the finding that respondents generally felt that board members display behaviours consistent with inspirational motivation, including displaying positivity, enthusiasm, and optimism, are visionary and long-term oriented, and promote a shared vision. Furthermore, I present passion for the organization's cause, identifying with the organization's mission, and making decisions that are in the best interest of the organization and consistent with the organization's mission. Interestingly, the communication of the vision internally is conducted through a formal means of the strategic plan, a process commonly cited in the governance literature as a key role of the board. In the participating organizations, the construction of the strategic plan is commonly a shared process between senior management and board members.

### 4.3.2 *Positive emotion*

Board members in participating organizations are generally positive and enthusiastic about the work of the organization. Board members in the current study perceived their colleagues to possess positive emotion as well as demonstrated positive emotion themselves during the interviews. To illustrate the importance of positivity as a desirable attribute, I first start by presenting a number of examples of significant situations (critical incidents) respondents chose to tell whereby positivity was not displayed (negativity was), which resulted in a negative outcome. I then present examples of positivity, enthusiasm and optimism, as well as numerous comments from respondents asserting positivity and enthusiasm is a desirable behaviour for a board member to display.

In a number of instances board members displayed negativity toward others (e.g. other board members, the ED, or employees) which respondents spoke about as not being a desirable outcome. Negativity commonly occurred concurrently with public criticism. In a number of organizations in this study, senior staff members of the organization periodically attend board meetings and present on their area of responsibility. One BC told of a recent situation where a newly appointed board member “got quite angry and very vocal and loud and very rude to the staff” (BC5) in a meeting. More specifically:

On two occasions the same board member was actually quite rude and it got to the point where staff refused to come to board meetings to present anymore. Because they felt uncomfortable and that they were going to be put under a microscope for stuff that was strictly operational, and they were only providing for information, not for decision making. (BC5)

By negatively challenging and publically criticizing staff, the board member “was a difficult and disruptive influence” (ED5), and the situation “affected the whole board” (BC5). And even “though they agreed with some of what she was saying, they didn’t support her actions” (BC5).

Another BC provided a similar example whereby one board member inappropriately challenged the ED in an open forum. The BC noted:

...and rather than discussing them with the executive director personally, he brings it up at the board. Which causes a lot for friction. And he shouldn’t do that. Really it should be the two of them sorting it out. And it could be the board member going or the executive director going. (BC2)

In both of these example situations, behaviour of negativity and public criticism therefore affected the relationship between the board and staff. Having demonstrated how board member negativity and public criticism directed toward staff or the ED can

damage relationships, I now discuss the opposite – how positivity, enthusiasm, and optimism are viewed as desirable attributes.

A number of stories respondents told as their chosen significant situation included a positive result to an internal or external threat. One organization received notice of the employees' efforts to unionize. The BC of this organization viewed the results of this to be positive overall due to the benefits that unionizing brought to staff as well as clarity in how staffing decisions are to be handled. He noted that it “was never looked at negatively” (BC3).

Another board member spoke about the resignation of three board members in a short period of time, which left the organization in a difficult position. This BD noted:

It doesn't seem like it would be a positive outcome. We weren't expecting it, a positive outcome. When we lost three board members last month it was difficult. We are actually seven on our board. We have a very small board, but we will move on. ... Just because it really kind of made us realize, ok, what do we need? What are our bylaws? What are we supposed to have? And it was a positive outcome because we realized in the end, we had to have sort of something like that happen for us to know how to deal with something like this. (BD3)

These respondents have clearly taken a positive view of what could have been perceived as a negative outcome. Similarly, during a discussion of the current funding environment, the BD of one organization commented that a funding cut made the organization stronger in the end. His comments are as follows:

Probably the constant in our life is, as an organization dependent on government funding, is variations in the kind of resources that are made available to do the job. So we have had two or three of those. Some of them were quite critical. But the reason I feel they have ended up with a positive outcome rather than a

negative one, I mean there is negative process, there is negative short term, but in the end we are a stronger organization for having done it. (BD5)

Board members were also generally optimistic about the future of their organizations. Transformational leaders “tend to be optimists” (Cole et al., 2009, p 1709). Comments from one BC and one ED demonstrating this include:

I don't know how that plays out yet. And we are not there. And that is ok. We will get there. This is a work in progress. We will get there. (BC17)

They showed leadership in terms of taking a leap of faith that we could invest in the community down the road. And they showed leadership in knowing what the outcome could possibly be. (ED10)

At the time the interviews were conducted, a number of organizations were waiting to hear back from funders regarding the results of their funding application. Although the outcome was uncertain, a number of board members were optimistic about the results. A comment from one BC that highlights this is as follows:

So it is in front of the donor and we believe that we are going to be successful in securing that funding and a new program for [N14]. (BC14)

Board members in the participating organizations therefore are generally positive, enthusiastic and optimistic. Board members in the current study also perceived their colleagues to demonstrate such behaviours. Further comments from respondents that support this finding are provided in *Figure 4.1*.

Figure 4.1 Positive emotions

<p>All of these people are enthusiastic [(referring to fellow board members)]. (BC6)</p>
<p>We look at positive as helping a lot of people. And even as the numbers increase we feel that is positive because we are doing more good. People have nowhere to go. (BC8)</p>
<p>I think everything is coming along, is moving in the direction it should be moving. And I think that it's coming. It's evolving the way it should evolve. And eventually it will be a pretty synonymous organization that ticks pretty well. It's coming along now, right now. I am pleased as far as it has gone right now at this particular stage. (BD11)</p>
<p>There are lots of great things that go on in that [facility]. It's amazing work that they do there everyday. Everybody that works around it is proud of it. There is just so much good going on there. (BD14)</p>
<p>We have 45 years here of just absolute success. We have got 14 different gifts around the table. Who really cares if someone misses two board meetings a year? Why aren't we talking about the great things that he provides? So that is what we did at this year's board retreat last month, is we just put up big boards and had everybody tell what is great about individual board members. So we build on that. To be honest with you we forget about the negative stuff. (ED4)</p>

Of the organizational documents collected, reference to positive emotion was only found on two occasions. And in each occurrence the content was not further detailed. The two findings of text regarding positive emotion include:

Performance standards expected for the Board volunteers include speaking positively of [N7]. (N7)

Positive, action-focused approach to leadership. (N10)

Despite evidence that respondents perceive such behaviours to be desirable, organizational documents rarely prescribe such behaviours. By referring to such characteristics in organizational documents, board members would be more aware that this is a desirable leadership behaviour of a board member. Unfortunately board documents are not consistent with what respondents believe to be important, with only two examples of such language in organizational documents found.

It is clear from the above examples that board members are generally positive, enthusiastic, optimistic, and view internal and external threats as an opportunity to move the organization forward. Bono and Ilies (2006) found leaders who are rated higher on charisma by their work colleagues used more positive emotion in both written and spoken communication. The authors were further able to link leaders' emotional expressions and follower mood to ratings of leader effectiveness. More importantly with respect to the current study, they found "that even when the interactions between leaders and followers were brief and casual, leaders' positive emotional expressions influenced follower mood" (Bono and Ilies, 2006, p 330). Cole et al. (2009) found social distance to have "a more beneficial effect on positive emotional climate when the distance between the leader and followers is high" (2009, p 1722).

Positive emotions of a leader can impact followers in a number of facets. For example, being positive can send signals about the individual leader's apparent strength, power and self-confidence (Collinson, 2012). A number of authors have claimed that the positive emotions of a leader are contagious (mood contagion) to followers, and positive moods positively influence motivation and increased levels of effort (Bono and Ilies, 2006; Cole et al., 2009).

#### *4.3.3 Passion, identification with mission*

In presenting passion for, and identification with the mission, I start by drawing on organizational documents and *Section II* of the interview guide. This highlights the benefit of the knowing-doing gap for this research ('should do' versus 'currently do'). The 'knowing' (should) draws out prescriptions of the necessity to be committed to the

values, mission, and beliefs of the organization – organizational documents and each respondent type commonly mentioned passion for and identification with the mission as a necessary attribute of a board member. The ‘doing’ (currently) demonstrates that board members in the organizations under analysis typically do demonstrate such characteristics. With respect to passion for and identification with the mission, board members therefore pick up their prescriptions. This structure of presentation provides a presetting into the evidence from the significant situations, whereby board members make decisions and act in a manner consistent with the organization’s mission. Such mission driven decisions and actions are presented in conjunction with their respective impact on organizational outcomes.

A review of organizational documents collected for this study found that they commonly prescribe that board members should be committed to the values, mission, and beliefs of the organization that they preside over. Excerpts from documents of three organizations demonstrating this include:

Must be interested in libraries, willing to serve, and committed to the beliefs, mission and aims of the library. (N1)

Board members shall be committed to the mission statement, beliefs and values of [N4] ... (N4)

Directors must be committed to the mission, values and philosophy of the Society. (N3)

Consistent with the prescribed role set out in board manuals, each participant type in this study felt it is important for board members to have a passion for the organization’s cause, as they are then able to identify with the organization’s mission. Board members who have a passion for the particular mission of the organization make decisions in line with the mission, and take action to achieve the particular mission. It is clear from the interviews that being able to identify with the organization’s mission is



perceived as being an important board member attribute. Comments from BD respondents who believe board members *should* be able to identify with the mission of the organization include:

A board member should want to help the organization be the best it can be and achieve positive community impact however that is defined through the vision, mission, and plan. That's why you come on, to really help the organization to be the best it can be. (BD10)

To know the charitable organization's Big Hairy Audacious Goals. Their core purpose. Their values. Their elevator pitch. And to be passionate about it. If you can't be passionate about it then they are not with the right charity. (BD15)

And if you believe in something of course that's what makes all the difference. (BD16)

Executive directors also frequently commented that board members *should* be able to identify with the mission of the organization:

They don't have to know everything about the organization, but they have to know it at its heart and be able to relay that. The narrative of the organization has to be their narrative. (ED2)

...they need to be committed to the mission, the vision, the values, and the beliefs of the organization. (ED4)

Like if you are not passionate and committed to the issues that we deal with then that's not the right board member for us. (ED17)

In the current study, board members were certainly passionate about the mission of their respective organization. Board members in the *current* study being able to identify

with their organization's mission and purpose is evident in the following comments from board members:

These people aren't here for the money. They're here for compassion. For instance, there is a gal that's our secretary and she's a nurse practitioner... And she is in it because she feels that seniors is really what she is very interested in, seniors' care and seniors' provisioning. She brings a lot of the stuff from her background. But she's in it because of, not money, not whatever, she just wants to be volunteering and do something caring. I am using that one example, but I think that is the general feeling of pretty much everybody on the board. (BD4)

We feel that even in our mission statement, where we talk about being a care provider in a Christian caring environment. We feel that our, because we are faith based, our values and beliefs have to really be elevated. In our constitution we actually have two pastors normally on our board. That sort of brings the faith-based part of it into it. (BD4)

Executive directors also commonly commented that board members are *currently* able to identify with their organization's mission and purpose:

I mean they are very, very, invested. I've actually met very few library board members that are kind of neutral about what they are doing. Maybe the reason that they are volunteering is because they really care about the library. (ED1)

I think they are coming because it is [N8]. Because this isn't a glamorous board to be on. There are boards people sit on for their careers, and this wouldn't be one of them. We don't do a big thing. Our AGM is closed. We don't invite anyone to it. It is not a big prestige thing. People do it because they are interested in [N8]. It has its own prestige I guess. Given its sort of role in the city. (ED8)

In a number of instances board members or a member of their family have a personal history that further helps them to identify with the organization's mission. The following comments stress this theme:

Of course you have some that maybe have a parent. Like myself, that is how I got interested, because I had a parent involved [(parent was a client of the organization)]. There are several of those. And so from that I think not only are people volunteering but also looking at it as a ministry and take ownership to a certain extent. (BD4)

Because basically we are looking at the future [and the] fact that we have to have housing for some of our residents who can't afford it. In some cases single people. My kids. Mine can now, but previously they can't. When you just get out of school, high school, where are you going to go? You can't afford to live. (BD11)

These findings are not surprising given the fact that self-selection theory suggests that applicants to the board would compare their personal goals to the goals and mission of the organizations they seek to represent, and correspondently seek out an organization which has a mission most in line with there personal objectives. Wittmer (1991) noted that "individuals have different values, orientations, and goals and make organizational choices accordingly" (1991, p 380). Therefore, one would expect nonprofit board members to have a stronger commitment and greater loyalty to the mission of a nonprofit board then their for-profit counterparts (Caers et al., 2006). However, this contradicts the self-interest assumptions underpinning agency theory.

#### *4.3.4 Mission driven*

In the above section I provided evidence that board members in the sample organizations identify with, and are passionate about, the organization's mission. It is therefore not a surprise that I found evidence that board members are mission driven, and make decisions that are perceived to be in the best interest of the organization. In

this section I present examples of significant situations whereby a desirable outcome was commonly attributed to being a result of board members making decisions in line with the organization's mission.

The BD of one organization spoke about a positive significant situation whereby the board made a tactical decision to extend the hours of one facility, with a broader view of achieving the overall mission. The mission of the organization included making "services as easy as possible [to access], to meet citizens on their own turf" (BD1). The board identified extending the hours of operations of their main facility as directly contributing to meeting the mission of the organization. In order to extend the hours, the board convinced the ED that it was the right thing to do, and further presented the opportunity to the municipal governing body in order to receive further funding for this pilot project. This example exemplifies a link between making a decision in line with the mission of the organization and a positive outcome, because the board "could see a direct line from our values and goals to the operational nature of having the [facility] open on Sundays" (BD1).

The ED of another organization provided a story of "how the board has been able to look at the needs of the families and continually examine how the organization, through its mission, can fulfill that" (ED7). After recognizing the challenges their clients faced with high school completion, board members met with elected officials to convince them to support a new funding model and a new program, played an advocacy role, and sat on committees. The end result of this is that the "first full year has just been completed and the results have been amazing" (ED7) - referring to the success of the program in achieving the organization's mission. The ED also commented that having board members who can relate to the clients (e.g. board members who have previously been in the shoes of the clients), created credibility in their advocacy efforts. The board members were "like a dog with a bone. They were not going to let it go" (ED7). In referring to the success of the project the ED noted: "and the thing about the board's support on this is that it truly was embedded in the mission of high school completion"

(ED7). When asked why the respondent identified this situation as a significant situation, the respondent noted:

There is a real kind of fire in their blood. People get very committed to our mission. I know it's a very rich history. It's a social issue that has a lot of deep meaning for people and the impact to children in the next generation. We do have a fair number of board members like [director name] that have walked this path, [(referring to the director having been in a situation similar to the situation of the clients the organization serves)] that are extremely successful in this community. They sit on our board. They bring very high-level leadership and commitment because they have been there done that. So that is part of it too I think. (ED7)

One organization was provided with “a great cash offer” (ED18) to sell one of their primary facilities. The cash injection would have been material to the organization's budget and overall operation. However, after in-depth discussions, the board decided that they could better fulfill the mission by not selling the building. The EDs comments, which highlight the mission driven decision, are as follows:

The other example I was going to tell you about, an unsolicited offer to purchase this building came forward. And it was a great cash offer. And purely on this building alone financially, and you see the age of this place, it's done. And we lose money out of the operations in this building annually. ... So when you took that to the board you had some board members saying, those with a business, a banker, financial lackeys, saying sell the bloody thing. ... And you had those on the other side saying ... mission. How could you put 120 people on the street? Where are they going to go? You turn 300 to 500 away a month in addition to the 120. How could you do that? How could we do that? Not you, how could we do that? So there was this mission versus financial, fiduciary, conversation. And what a great conversation that was. That was a great generative around a real specific issue. (ED18)

This quote highlights some interesting dialogue, and at times polarized discussion, before ultimately making the decision based on the mission. Each of the above three stories respondents chose to tell demonstrates the repetition of findings that board members make decisions in the best interest of achieving the organization’s mission. The above significant situations also provide examples whereby the respondents attribute a desirable organizational outcome to be the result of the board making a mission driven decision. Further select comments from respondents that highlight the fact that board members make decisions based on the values and mission of the organization are presented in *Figure 4.2*.

Figure 4.2 Mission driven decisions

<p>Because it became part of our mandate. We knew we needed it. One of the reasons we needed it for was the fact that where do you get the staff that’s going to look after those, our residents, where they are. ... You can’t expect them to come from [name of city] because it is too far. This is one of the reasons we did build the facility. (BD11)</p>
<p>But the board responded very well to the concern and they understood the risks that were involved. They understood the ethics that were involved, and they were willing to follow our mission, vision, and values, at the risk of some financial losses. (ED6)</p>
<p>... because they helped to build it, they were jazzed about it. They were excited. They got their friends and families to come out and raise 60 grand at an event. It was a completely different level of passion. (ED15)</p>
<p>And she was so passionate about this idea that she was willing to pay for half of it. (ED15)</p>

Board members also make decisions for the benefit of the organization even if it means that the decision is not beneficial to an individual employee, a group of employees, the ED, or individual board members. Evidence, from significant situations, of the board making decisions for the benefit of the organization include the removal of

EDs and the removal of board members. Comments from board members recognizing their duty to the organization over that of an individual ED include:

Why is it a positive outcome? Because I think a couple of things. The board acted decisively in saying the CEO we had in place was not going to work for us over time. We made a hard decision about needing to move on and going to the unknown. (BC16)

It's a tight rope, because you want to do what's best for the board. I mean your duty is to the society. Not so much to the Executive Director, but the two intermingle. (BD12)

In the first quote (BC16) above, the organization dismissed the ED in the best interest of the organization. The result of that decision was that the organization now has a more capable ED, and one the board has built a strong relationship with.

Another board removed a senior staff member from a capital campaign in order to ensure the best results for the organization, ultimately working toward the organization's mission. Once they got about six to eight months into the capital campaign they "realized that this is not the right person for the job" (BD7). Comments from the BC and BD in this organization are as follows:

It was a really tough decision to make, but we had to make it. This capital campaign was so key to the future of the organization that we couldn't jeopardize it based on one person. (BD7)

It's not an easy thing for someone to be told that this is not working out. But it had to be done. Difficult things had to be done. ... It was difficult but it worked out extremely well in terms of where we are now. (BC7)

Both board members interviewed therefore shared the same perspective that the board cannot “jeopardize” achieving the organization’s mission based on one individual. While reflecting on this significant situation, the BD noted that it “was a real negative thing that happened, but had a positive outcome” (BD7). Although the board and the ED worked closely to remedy the situation, “the board was the one that finally said we have to make this change” (BD7).

One organization had to close a social enterprise facility that generated negative returns and was becoming a drain on the organization’s financial reserves. The ED made the following comment about the board’s decision to close the facility, despite its impact on select employees and volunteers:

So the board had to make a very difficult decision and close the store. Which of course meant layoffs of three employees and we had a huge group of volunteers that would help us there. (ED12)

Although the ED used the story of closing the facility as her chosen significant situation that resulted in a negative outcome, she perceived the board’s collective decision to do so as the correct decision.

Respondents from two organizations spoke about the board’s willingness to accept short-term reduced employee morale as an acceptable trade off to meeting the organization’s long-term goals. The BC of one organization that went through a change management process made the following comments:

And you have got to recognize you live with the uncomfortableness in the transition and the transition is going to be uncomfortable, and be ok with that. (BC16)

The second organization was nearing bankruptcy and experiencing severe attrition at the senior management level for the past seven years. Coinciding with the hiring of a



new ED, the strategic plan called for increased accountability throughout all levels of the organization. This change process was a very challenging time for the organization, but each of the three respondents interviewed perceived the current state of the organization to represent a successful outcome. Comments from the BD and ED of this organization, which highlight the board's decision to accept short-term reduced employee morale in order to achieve the end, mission driven, positive result, include:

In a couple of instances because of the realignment of the management structure some people have had to be reassigned or have moved on, or have been let go and moved on. So those are significant situations that generally resulted in a positive outcome. (BD17)

So if you move beyond the effect that's had on individuals within the organization, but looking at where the organization was and where they are now. Looking at that as a situation. And looking at everything that was necessary to get there. That would be the positive outcome that I would identify, recognizing that at a board-level there are still things that need to be done. (BD17)

The ED echoed such comments, noting how the board made a mission driven decision, despite the consequences to select groups:

They were quite reassuring of me that I should not read too much into this. There's good reasons for this [(referring to low results of a staff feedback survey)]. Generally when you break it up into areas you can see that certain areas you are gaining confidence and others are angry. But anger and quality of service don't line up necessarily. And we could show we were producing better outcomes. Our work was getting better, but our morale was just very very low. ... That morale was taxing, but it was very, I think most of us were very confident that we were on the right path and we shouldn't abandon it for the purpose of improving morale in the short-term. That it was better to make difficult, painful choices, than to keep people comfortable. (ED17)

Like all of this stuff has yielded positive results, but there certainly was a lot of negativity. And the board, to its credit, was quite comfortable and aware that when we do this, that's when you can expect that change is painful. And people won't like it, and people won't be happy, but as long as at the end of it all we are in a better place it is worth it. (ED17)

In this section, I have demonstrated that board members have a passion for the organization's cause, and they are then able to identify with the organization's mission. Many board members either have a personal history or family member with a history, which helps them to further identify with the organization's mission. It is evident that board members make decisions that are aimed at achieving the organization's mission. The above examples of significant situations respondents chose to tell were presented whereby mission driven decisions were made regardless of the potential consequences it may have on an individual or individual groups. Transformational leadership advocates have been relatively silent on negative or unintended consequences resulting from prescribed behaviours.

The finding of board members making mission driven decisions is not surprising as other nonprofit studies have found volunteers, employees, and board members select to work in the sector due to value congruence. The self-selection process suggests that applicants to the board would compare their personal goals to the goals and mission of the organizations they seek to represent, and correspondently seek an organization that has a mission most in line with their personal objectives. Therefore, it is not surprising that nonprofit board members have a stronger identification with the mission of a nonprofit board than their for-profit counterparts (Caers et al., 2006). In an American study of business professionals serving on nonprofit boards, 64 percent claimed that their belief in the nonprofit's mission was the predominant reason for serving (Austin, 1998). Conversely, only 26 percent of respondents noted self-interested reasons such as skill enhancement and networking as a reason for their involvement on nonprofit boards.

Inglis and Cleave (2006) undertook a similar study, attempting to develop a framework for identifying motivations for involvement of nonprofit board members. The results of their survey found the top reasons for getting involved to include the opportunity to work toward a good cause, the opportunity to respond to community needs, and the opportunity to make a difference in the quality of life in their community. In a survey of alumni of masters of business administration and masters of public administration courses in the United States, Tschirhart et al. (2009) found that an orientation to “do good” was predictive of nonprofit board service.

The results of the current study, combined with the findings of Inglis and Cleave (2006), Austin (1998), and Tschirhart et al. (2009) suggest that board members serve primarily due to their passion for and ability to identify with the organization’s mission. In other words, board members appear to be setting aside their personal interests in order to serve a greater cause, ultimately in support of the collective. From this perspective, this behaviour is consistent with transformational leadership, at its very core. Bass (1998) noted that truly transformational leaders transcend their own self-interests in support of the greater group. Although transformational leaders are said to set aside personal interests, advocates of transformational leadership have been relatively silent on passion. Similarly, passion is not an item on the MLQ (Author’s own interpretation of the MLQ; Avolio and Bass, 2004). How this finding relates to theory is discussed in-depth in the subsequent chapter.

In addition, such a finding challenges assumptions central to agency theory, when examining a potential conflict of interest of a first external principal agent relationship (Caers et al., 2006), which characterizes board members as agents of external stakeholders. One of the primary underlying assumptions of agency theory is the notion that humans are self-interested (Daily et al., 2003), leading to goal conflict between the principal and the agent (Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). In the current study I presented the repetition of findings whereby both board members and the ED commonly spoke about board members’ passion for the organization, and most importantly, that board members make decisions that are perceived to be in the best interest of achieving the

organization's mission. Such findings contradict the core assumptions of agency theory of conflict of interest and self-interest.

#### *4.3.5 Emotionless decisions*

It is clear from the above examples that each respondent type felt that passion is a positive attribute for board members to have. It helps them relate to the organization's mission, which further leads to making decisions in line with that mission. Despite this contention, it was generally noted that board members should put their emotions aside while making decisions. In this section I present one example significant situation whereby board members put aside emotions to make a decision which was perceived by the ED to be in the best interest of the organization. I then present comments and examples whereby board members made decisions that were influenced by their emotions, which led to outcomes of which were less desirable. I conclude this section with a discussion and explanation of the seemingly paradoxical nature of positivity and passion on the one hand, and emotionless decisions on the other.

The following comment is from an ED commending the organization's board members for putting their emotions aside when making a difficult decision to close a social enterprise facility:

I think the biggest thing about leadership was that they came at it, they realized that they had to put emotions aside. And they had to make a business decision. Because so often within a not-for-profit world we focus on relationship building and trust among clients and staff and board and doing the best for the community. And we recognized the fact that this was an initiative that would provide affordable clothing and household items to the community. But at the same time from a business perspective we had to make a decision that was very tough and wouldn't be popular with a lot of people. Just had to do it. (ED12)

Consistently, respondents provided a number of examples whereby a less desirable outcome occurred as a result of board members not being able to remove their emotions

from a decision. In one organization both board member respondents spoke about a significant situation where the organization put a lot of priorities on hold in anticipation of an amalgamation going through. When the amalgamation was abruptly withdrawn from the other party, the organization had sunk costs of 100,000 dollars and had further stalls on their own organizational priorities. The below comments are from the BC discussing how emotion based decisions left the organization vulnerable during amalgamation discussions with a sister organization:

It's negative in the sense that we, for two and a half years, we were not looking after the business in the way I think a business should have been looked after. We were leading with our hearts, and emotion, and we put our business sense and savvy aside. None of us around that table who were involved at the time would have allowed our business to be put in that kind of a vulnerable situation. But because of the nature of not-for-profit, and again, we weren't thinking as business. We were thinking more as, and I hate to put it this way, but sort of that feel good, this is goona work, we are all in it to serve a family, all in it for the right mission. We left ourselves vulnerable. Honestly it was one of the dumbest business decisions we could have made, to leave ourselves vulnerable for that long. (BC14)

In this example it is clear to see that emotional decisions of "leading with our hearts, and emotions" left the organization vulnerable. The organization "lacked someone to put a stake in the ground [and say] this is just a really bad move" (BC14). This was presented by both board members as resulting in a negative outcome because the organization was left with "two and a half years of really putting our [organization] on pause until this came through" (BC14), and the cancellation of the amalgamation was "just like ripping your feet off" (BD14). The board then had to "regroup" and "take care of our business" (BC14).

Another BC reflected on an occasion where he chaired an emotional board meeting. He was forthright in noting his own emotions got in the way of ensuring the process was properly followed:

I think the process could have been better. I think I would have to say since process is sort of my bread and butter I would have to say that it would have been, I think that maybe I got caught up in the whole thing too. ... Then I think it could have been a different resolution. (BC7)

The next example in this section is a significant situation whereby board members brought emotion into the decision, which left the organization vulnerable to significant consequences. The board had decided to spin off one of their programs and create another organization to administer it. The program was creating too much financial strain on the organization, and the board felt that if the program was placed under its own agency there would be a greater probability of receiving funding for the program. However, when the new organization was using the charitable status of the existing organization to apply for funding, this left the current organization vulnerable to adverse legal and taxation implications. When the ED, new to the position, presented the implications of this to the board, the board was resistant to listen. The board members had a relationship with board members in the newly developed organization and “were trying to appease” (ED3). Some board members “were receptive; the other ones were still emotionally involved” (ED3). When asked if the board was exercising leadership behaviours in this example, the ED responded with:

What generally happens is a group of really good intended people become friends. Something like this emotion happens they want to appease. They aren't thinking leadership and governance. They are thinking how can I help my friends. ... I was like wow very emotional, very personal. (BC3)

The ED used this story as her significant situation that resulted in a negative outcome. While providing an example of how emotion based decisions were commonly

perceived by respondents to be an undesirable characteristic, this example also highlights ‘follower’ dissent and collective leadership.

Despite the repetition of finding of positivity, and that passion for, and identification with the organization’s mission each seen as desirable attributes of board members, respondents commonly discussed emotionless decisions as a necessity of board member behaviour. Perhaps this seemingly paradoxical finding, which has not yet been developed in the leadership literature, can be explained in a number of ways. On the one hand, positivity and passion are viewed as a desirable characteristic, while on the other hand, at the most critical decision points, emotions are best set aside. Secondly, there is likely a point where excessive positivity, enthusiasm, optimism and passion become detrimental. Although it is clear in the current study that such attributes are desirable, in excess they may discourage critical analysis, mislead organizational actors to be delusional that everything is going well, and discourage followers from raising issues (Collinson, 2012). This occurred in N14 when the board was leading with their “hearts” and “emotions”, and putting their “business sense and savvy aside”, ultimately “thinking more as ... sort of that feel good, this is going to work” (BC14). In this example significant situation, excess emotion (optimism) overshadowed critical analysis, leaving the organization “vulnerable” (BC14).

An example significant situation was presented whereby the ED commended the board’s actions for removing emotions when making a difficult decision. Consistently, numerous significant situations were presented whereby board members brought emotions into the decision making process, resulting in less desirable outcomes.

#### *4.3.6 Vision and future (long-term) orientation*

Many board members spoke about their role being to look many years out into the future and to ensure that the board has a clear picture of what the organization will need for resources at that time. In addition to thinking long-term, board members in the current study have a clear vision for the future. Traditionally, this long-term focus coincided

with the conception of a strategic plan. I start this section by presenting the perceptions of two BCs who told stories of the importance of a long-term orientation.

One BC spoke about select current board members recognizing the need to think with a long-term focus. In prior years the board was comprised of a different demographic, with “very little in the way of business people on the board” (BC1). The BC spoke of this demographic as being focused more “on the here and now” (BC1). He further noted:

So it was all very short-term. And not really thinking of the legacy we need to leave as far as enabling the library to continue long-term with the right funding. The right growth plan. Because [as the town] grows we are looking at a 200,000 people growth node in the next 15, 20 years. ... So you can't just pull a growth plan off the shelf and say here you go, here is our [organization's] growth plan. ... Thinking out five, ten years, what's the demographics going to be. (BC1)

You can't just focus on the here and now. You have got to be thinking longer term because the operational group isn't necessarily thinking about that. They come to work every day and make sure that the clients or customers are happy. They make sure that the mechanics of it all work. And they have to do a budget every year. But they aren't thinking 20 years out, because a lot of them won't be employed here 20 years from now. It's a career for them. It is a career within a circle. So somebody has to be thinking that 20, 30, 40 years. You see that with corporations. You also see that with governments and things like that because you have to invest in infrastructure, longer-term type things. So the board needs to think that way. (BC1)

It is clear that the BC of this organization feels long-term orientation is a desirable characteristic of a board member. I also find his distinction between staff's role and the board's role in temporal thinking to be interesting, whereby he clearly delineates the board's role as being long-term oriented. The BC also identified a turning point for



moving toward long-term thinking to be when “the board mix changed a little bit that there started to be an understanding of we actually need to think beyond our small window” (BC1). This respondent used this example of moving toward long-term orientation in thinking as his positive outcome.

The newly elected BC of another organization spoke about staff unionizing. He looked at the outcome of this process as positive because “the employees benefited by becoming more active in there own workplace ... and for us its more clear cut” (BC3). When asked whether the board was exercising leadership behaviours in this example, the BC replied:

I think the board was showing leadership behaviours in terms of thinking long-term for the organization. Long-term goals. We wanted to ensure that the organization would be able to survive. We wanted to ensure that we were looking for things that wouldn't over commit the organization too. Wanted to provide the best opportunity for the employees at the same time ensure that the organization survives in the long run. Set ourselves up for success. (BC3)

Further discussions with this BC revealed that he attributes the success of the negotiating process, at least in part, to be due to the board thinking long-term. These sample significant situations demonstrate that respondents typically associate board member behaviour with long-term orientation and visionary behaviours. Additional visionary comments are presented in *Figure 4.3*.

Figure 4.3 Clear vision

You can define leadership in a lot of ways, but I think for me leadership is defined by having a vision, and a clear vision. And a clear vision that you can communicate to others. And they definitely did that. (ED10)
We need people that are visionary and helping to work on or to steer the organization and to be real leaders in the sector. (ED13)
And we have a strong vision for the future. (BC12)

After reviewing organizational documents, I found repetition in the data referring to long-term orientation and prescribing visionary behaviours. The board members' understanding of their role being future-oriented is consistent with prescriptive definitions in organizational documents:

The primary responsibility of the Board of Directors is to foster the long-term success of [N15]... (N15)

The Board is responsible for long-term planning and direction. (N7)

Organizational documents also commonly referred to creating and maintaining the organization's vision to be the role of the board:

The Board will give primary attention to creating and maintaining a clear vision about its purpose and its immediate future goals. (N17)

The essential and primary role of the Board is to maintain currency of the vision for [N17] ... (N17)

The role of the Board of Directors (always acting as a whole) is to articulate and communicate the vision. (N12)

Although respondents frequently referred to long-term orientation and visionary to be desirable characteristics of board members, this does not always occur within organizations. When discussing the role of a board member in the interview questions in *Section II* of the interview guide, one ED noted an inconsistency (knowing-doing gap) in what he perceives to be the role of the board as should be practiced and as currently practiced. Specifically, he noted that the role of a board member should be heavily weighted toward strategic thinking, strategic planning, and long-term visioning. However, the current board does not currently practice as much of this as he thinks they should. His comments are as follows:

They should be doing strategic planning and long term visioning. This particular board doesn't do too much of that. That is a shortcoming. One of my beliefs is that board members should spend about 20 percent of their time looking back as to what are we doing, sort of the monitoring, looking at the financial statement, looking at the operational reports and what not. Some board members tend to think that is all they should be doing. But in my judgment that is about 20 percent of what they should be doing. The other 80 percent should be looking forward. Where is your organization going to be in 20 years. And how can we position the organization to take advantage of demographic changes, funding changes from the province. All that sort of thing. Visioning and strategic planning is huge, or should be. (ED11)

This particular ED's perception of long-term orientation is in line with the perspective and comments from numerous respondents. However, to his frustration, he feels that the board members of this particular organization do not spend enough time thinking long-term. In summary, although each respondent type commonly noted vision and long-term orientation as a desirable attribute, it appears that some boards do this well (and I provided evidence thereof), while other boards do not.

In addition to thinking long term, board members often noted they need to be proactive in securing the resources needed to fulfill the long-term focus:

Should be visioning. Visioning for the future. Taking steps to secure that vision. Whether you are securing money or land or doing it through some other way. (BC11)

To assess the environment in which we are operating in – both internally and externally. And plan for how we need to respond to that and also project on what that is going to look like in the future and then do some preventative planning. (BC16)

From this it is clear that board member visions are future-oriented, and frequently extend numerous years into the future. This is not surprising as a primary characteristic of a transformational leader's vision is future orientation (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Ilies et al., 2006; Kohles, 2012). As the two behaviours (future-orientation and vision) were difficult to separate in the significant situations presented in this section, the attributes were presented together. Scholars of transformational leadership define leader vision as "the expression of an idealized picture based around organizational values" (Griffin et al., 2010, p 175). Articulating a compelling and inspirational vision is a fundamental component of transformational leadership (Dvir et al., 2004; Sarros et al., 2008; Sosik and Dinger, 2007), and is most commonly associated with the inspirational motivation component (Kark and Dijk, 2007). Although visions are not unique to transformational or charismatic leadership (Sosik and Dinger, 2007), in a study of corporate managers from diverse private sector industries, Sosik and Dinger (2007) found charismatic leadership to be positively associated with inspirational vision themes.

The visionary component of transformational leadership has been criticized for exemplifying the heroic image. This romanticized orientation ignores the role of the follower in the vision setting process, while assuming that leaders are best positioned to

articulate the organization's strategic path (Kohles et al., 2013; Kohles et al., 2012). However, in the next two sections I provide support for a two-way communication process, whereby the ED, and commonly other members of the top management team, are regularly included in the vision setting process. Not surprising then, there was repetition in the data whereby EDs share the vision for the organization.

#### *4.3.7 Shared vision with the ED*

Transformational leaders “get followers involved in envisioning attractive future states; they create clearly communicated expectations that followers want to meet and also demonstrate commitment to goals and the shared vision” (Bass and Riggio 2006, p 6). In order for a transformational leader to be successful, the charismatic behaviours must have an affect on followers. In a study analysing the organizational contextual influences on the emergence and effectiveness of charismatic leadership, Shamir and Howell (1999) use the following definition of the effectiveness of charisma: “the degree of its influence on followers’ self-concepts, values, and motivation.” (1999, p 259). In order to have an influence, followers must identify with the leader and aspire to a shared vision. That is, the vision must be claimed or owned by all of the important actors in the organization (Dvir et al., 2004; Kohles et al., 2012). The following comments demonstrate the importance of having a shared vision:

Very simple analogy. But it is one that works for us. And we also can use that with the staff too. Saying this is the way we are. Everybody has got to be on the same bus going the same direction. [laughter] You can't expect to be going, if you expect to be going to Toronto and we go to Winnipeg, you know ... (ED12)

And everybody, management and board, said look, lets do this right. Lets figure out. Lets go through the right process. Have the right conversations. We're in no hurry. But lets get the right vision for the future. (ED18)

Executive directors in this study, without exception, portrayed a passion for the organization's purpose. Similarly, the EDs interviewed appeared to aspire to the vision put forward by the board. The following comments highlight this contention:

And it was in line with our strategic plan. It was our dream to have adult housing. So we achieved that. I know of people who are living there that they really enjoy living there. It is a really positive experience. I have had some of them write me and call me and tell me how much they love living there. And it is really nice. (ED8)

I would say [ED2] is driving it at the wish at the board and the board is supporting him. ... The board has recognized the significance and we have a person who believes in it as well. (BD2)

Organizational documents occasionally referred to the development of a vision as being a collective effort between the board and management of the organization. The following text is from one organization's board orientation manual:

The Board has the responsibility to participate, with management in development of, and ultimately approve, [N13's] mission, vision, values and goals. [N15]

Furthermore, once the board's vision for the organization has been established, a number of boards found success for fostering a shared vision by supporting the ED in execution:

So the board has to help us move according to what they believe are the issues and what is happening politically and where we fit and how we can all work together for that common purpose and common values that we hold. (ED13)

But I think that we have been on the same page and that there are certainly efforts and mechanisms to ensure that at the board meetings but also between board meetings that the ED and the board members continue to have contact and be involved and to talk through situations. So I don't think there are ever any surprises that come forward without some previous discussion and some consensus of how to move forward. (BD17)

In the current study I have presented evidence of visionary leadership and the board's ability to foster a shared vision with the ED and often times senior staff. Visionary leadership and a boards' ability to foster a shared vision is still characterized as vertical leadership, and assumes that leaders are best positioned to articulate the organization's strategic path (Kohles et al., 2013; Kohles et al., 2012). The literature on leadership often endorses concentrated decision making in the hands of elite individuals or individual groups (Tourish, 2014). Although vertical leadership (agency) with respect to visioning (identifying what is the right future outcome for the organization) was present in the organizations in this study, many respondents spoke about distributed leadership in identifying the organizational vision (via the strategic plan). I present a hybrid of vertical and distributed leadership in the next section.

#### *4.3.8 Strategy*

In this study, it was found that board's formally set the vision of the organization through the strategic planning process. Strategic planning is an often cited role of a board in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors (Brown and Guo, 2010; Iecovich, 2004; Stiles and Taylor, 2001). In a survey of nonprofit executives in the United States, Brown (2005) found strategic contributions of the board to be associated with organizational fiscal performance. Similarly, in a qualitative study of executives of nonprofit organizations, Brown and Guo (2010) found strategy and planning to be the second most frequently cited role of a board member. Organizational documents frequently cite the board's role (vertical leadership) as being either strategic, or as the creators of the strategic plan. The following excerpts demonstrate this:

The Board of Directors is responsible for development of strategic direction including a three-year plan and annual objectives. (N11)

The Board's job is to look forward strategically on behalf of the Society. The result of this strategic plan is a 3-10 year document that considers basic organizational information both once to write the plan and annually to review the plan. (N14)

Below are comments from BCs detailing the board's role (vertical leadership) in the strategic planning process:

In my mind a board should provide high-level strategic direction via a strategic plan and via board policy. (BC17)

So at one point we need to bring everybody together and say this is what we want to do. We want to build a strategic plan encompassing everybody. What are you going to do in the next 5 years? And what is the plan as to how we are going to get there? (BC11)

Executive directors similarly noted the board's role in the strategic planning process:

The current roles of the directors are set out in policy and they are a governance board. So their role is to construct the strategic plan for the organization, to oversee the progress of that strategic plan. (ED6)

The other part of it is that they need to be clear with where the direction of the organization is going with a good strategic plan. And each board member has to be an integral part of that plan. (ED9)



It is clear that one prominent way that the board communicates the board's vision (thus the organization's vision) is through a formal strategic plan. Given the fact "that strategic decisions represent "weak situations" (Mischel, 1977) in that available stimuli are often complex and ambiguous" (Waldman et al., 2004, p 356), this raises the question of how well the board is able to influence followers to buy into or 'take ownership' of a shared vision. Since it has been argued that limited direct contact with followers limits channels of communication (Galvin et al., 2010), the influence of a leader's transformational leadership is potentially diminished. Boards in this study mitigated this phenomenon by including the ED, and in a number of instances, senior staff, in the strategic planning process. A number of organizational documents refer to the strategic planning process to be a collaborative effort (distributed leadership) between the board and management of the organization. The following excerpts represent this:

Though considered an employee of the Board, the Executive Director is expected to work together with the Board by providing background information and/or offering alternatives in the setting of strategic direction ... (N11)

The Board has the responsibility to participate with management in developing and adopting [N16's] strategic planning process... (N16)

The Board will participate with management in the Association's strategic planning process... (N18)

The ED of one organization spoke about his involvement in the strategic planning process. The prior strategic plan of the organization was "not relevant", "outdated", and "hard to report on" (ED18). When discussing the strategic planning process, the ED commonly used collective terminology such as referring to the process as an "engagement between management and board" (ED18). The following quote from the ED demonstrates that this was a collective process:

And everybody, management and the board, said look, lets do this right. Lets figure out. Lets go through the right process. Have the right conversations. We're in no hurry. But lets get the right vision for the future. So we took a year to get it all the way through the process. And so we started with the community and in what we envisioned. And then we said what [N18] do we need in order to address that. And we have got a great plan. (ED18)

Since the ED was involved in the planning process, and views the strategic plan as “our plan”, he believes that the plan has created a shared vision throughout the organization:

And so we kind of aligned [the strategic plan], and again it's changed the conversations at management's table. Changed our meetings and our agendas. Because now we had a plan that was relevant and that we are now saying ok so all management, even below the senior team, and the departments, and the branches are talking and having conversations around that. Even at the board-level it has changed the conversations. Performance reviews need to be aligned to the new strat plan. (ED18)

From the interview with this respondent it was clear that he thought the process had a positive outcome. One of the outcomes from this included not only the ED, but also the staff, buying into the collective vision, since they felt they were part of the process. The ED noted that he believes that most organizations do strategic planning, but fail to execute it. But since he was involved in the process, the strategic plan is embedded throughout the organization. This significant situation the ED chose to tell, is an example of how distributed leadership was used by the board to foster a shared vision. However, vertical leadership is still present as the board “had to ultimately approve the final decision” (ED18).

Including senior staff in the strategic planning process was commonly discussed by respondents in the participating organizations. Further comments from one ED and one BD regarding the inclusion of staff in the strategic planning sessions demonstrate this:

We have a yearly planning, a retreat where we do planning for the coming year, and often the board will do a workshop together in the morning, then we will bring in senior staff to do the planning in the afternoon. (ED1)

We were talking strategic direction. We expect their input and advice but in the end we will determine whether that is the direction we are going or not. It was really good. Really useful. And it changed every subsequent retreat. So now it is very much a partnership. But we depend on them and they are pretty aware of how much we depend on them. (BD5)

Oswald et al. (1994) found a positive relationship between including upper management in the strategic planning process and their organizational commitment and job involvement. In the current study, the direct contact with not only the ED, but also members of the senior management team, allows for rich channels of communication (Galvin et al., 2010) between the board and multiple members of staff. During the strategic planning process, where the board is formulating a vision for the organization, members of staff who perceive the board to be displaying charismatic attributes may engage in surrogate behaviours themselves, “through promoting the leader, defending the leader, and modeling followership” (Galvin et al., 2010, p 481).

Throughout this section I have provided evidence of both vertical as well as distributed leadership. In the current study, board members are future-oriented, have a clear vision for the future, and take action to enable a shared vision. These behaviours are consistent with attributes associated with the inspirational motivation component of a transformational leader. By including senior staff in vision setting (e.g. the strategic planning process), the shared leadership across hierarchical boundaries characterizes distributed leadership. Therefore, in this section I have provided evidence that in the

context of the board-ED relationship and strategic planning, the leadership process is consistent with previous empirical studies (e.g. Collinson and Collinson, 2009; Jones, 2014; Kramer and Crespy, 2011; Pearce and Sims, 2002), which suggest that distributed leadership and forms of vertical leadership, such as transformational leadership, should not be considered mutually exclusive.

#### *4.3.9 Summary*

Board members in the current study are generally positive, enthusiastic, and optimistic. Other studies have found that positive moods positively influence motivation and increased efforts among followers (Bono and Ilies, 2006; Cole et al., 2009). Bono and Ilies (2006) found that even when interactions between leaders and followers are brief, a leader's positive emotional expression can influence follower mood. Their findings are promising in that board members displaying transformational leadership behaviours may still have an indirect influence on staff who they have infrequent contact with.

In this section I also demonstrated that each respondent type felt that board members were passionate toward the organization's mission – a finding that can be explained by self selection theory (Wittmer, 1991). Many board members have a personal connection to the organization's mission that increases their desire to serve on the board. Despite the frequency of this finding, it was perceived that board members should put their emotions aside when making material organizational decisions. This suggests that too much positivity can be detrimental to organizational outcomes. An example significant situation was presented whereby leading with hearts and emotions left an organization vulnerable to severe financial consequences. Positivist research has seemingly assumed that more is better (e.g. the MLQ measures frequency), and has thus not paid attention the limits of select behaviours. I explore the implications of this further in the next chapter.

It was also found that board members make decisions in the interest of the organization even if it will knowingly negatively affect an individual or group of

individuals. Examples of change management processes were presented which were perceived as having a positive outcome, many of which brought about decreased short-term staff morale. The conceptual and empirical literature has been relatively silent on the dialectics, tensions, and paralleled negative consequences of leadership behaviours. Current conceptualizations implicitly assume leadership results in a positive conclusion for all parties, overlooking the fact that an elite group decides on who benefits and who does not.

Organizational documents commonly referred to creating and maintaining the organization's vision to be the role of the board – a contention supported by respondent comments and discussions. Board members also viewed their role as being future-oriented, looking many years out into the future. Although visionary statements are not unique to transformational leaders (Sosik and Dinger, 2007), many authors stress that transformational leadership is concerned with creating a vision (Dvir et al., 2004; Sarros et al., 2008; Sosik and Dinger, 2007), particularly one that is widely shared (Dvir et al., 2004). Therefore, with respect to one of the primary facets of transformational leadership, vision, board members in the current study demonstrate behaviours consistent with transformational leadership. Furthermore, EDs in the current study demonstrate a passion for and commitment toward supporting the vision of the organization.

Unique to hierarchical structures that occur as a result of a governance framework, a board's vision was found to be communicated through a strategic plan. Given strategic plans have been described as weak situations in that available stimuli are often ambiguous (Mischel, 1977; Waldman et al., 2004), this calls into question the board's ability to influence followers. This, however, may not be the case given participating boards generally include senior staff in the strategic planning process, a tactic which has been found to have a positive relationship with senior management's organizational commitment and job involvement (Oswald et al., 1994).

The visionary component of transformational leadership has received attention in the romance of leadership literature, with some authors noting that when we think of historical charismatic leaders we think of a visionary person (Sosik and Dinger, 2007). The visionary component has thus been criticized for exemplifying the heroic paradigm. This romanticized orientation ignores the role of the follower in the vision setting process, while assuming that leaders are best positioned to articulate the organization's strategic path (Kohles et al., 2013; Kohles et al., 2012). However, the current study provides support for a two-way communication process, whereby the ED, and commonly other members of the top management team, are commonly included in the vision setting process. Not surprising then, there was repetition in the data whereby EDs share the vision for the organization. Comments that demonstrated the EDs' ownership of the vision include "it was our dream", and "we have [an ED] who believes in it as well".

I therefore presented evidence of transformational leadership as well as evidence of distributed leadership with respect to the visionary leadership process. The hierarchical structures endorsed in a governance structure promote vertical leadership, as the final decision still rests with the board.

## 4.4 Idealized Influence

### 4.4.1 *Introduction*

It is argued that transformational leaders advocate a vision that is discrepant from the status quo and promote a need for change (Brown and Trevino, 2009; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Griffin et al., 2010). As a result, scholars of transformational leadership theory claim leaders exhibiting behaviours of idealized influence will be admired, respected, and trusted by followers (Bass and Riggio, 2006). In this section I present the findings of the current study that relate to idealized influence behaviour and attributed.

Evidence is presented demonstrating that board members have lofty goals, take aggressive steps to achieve those goals, are accepting of risk, push through challenges, challenge the status quo, and bringing new ideas to the organization. Embedded in the discussion is how this relates to transformational leadership theory. It was found, however, that internal staff and volunteers are generally not aware of who is on the board or what the board's function or influence is on the organization. This finding raises questions about how distant followers form perceptions of board members. Despite the repetition of finding of low awareness, each respondent type felt that board members do have a strong reputation with those who are aware of their existence.

### 4.4.2 *Big goals*

Board members felt that having big goals, being aggressive in executing those goals, and making quick decisions are desirable, and often necessary, attributes of a board member. Executive directors, however, had mixed reactions to the lofty goals set by the board. When the goals originated from themselves, or other board members, the board tends to be aggressive in seeing these goals through to completion.

Examples, highlighted in the interviewees' accounts of significant situations, of boards having big goals, include large missions, overall organizational growth, fundraising targets, the size and timing of infrastructure projects, and increasing geographical reach. These detailed accounts of events provide a refined understanding of the leadership process, beyond the relatively vague prescriptions of transformational leadership.

The BD of the largest organization (by gross revenue) in the current study spoke positively of big goals with regard to organizational growth:

Probably about ten, 12, years ago the board sat around in a conference saying what do we want to do. We had built [this building] at the time already. So we have got these different sites. Do we want to maintain, or do we want to grow? The more discussion we had around the table the more we felt if we maintain we will actually be going backwards. We felt we had to grow. The board at that conference made a decision, directed [ED4], let's look at opportunities, growth, and I think that was a major positive for [N4]. ... Yes it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy. (BD4)

The respondent then spoke about how large infrastructure projects and increased capacity to serve clients subsequently resulted from such big goals. He further commented that:

I think between this building and the [other building], it has put N4 on the strategic map in Alberta as one of the leading providers. (BD4)

The comments from the BD demonstrate that he attributes a lot of the success and growth of the organization to the big goals that board members in the organization have subscribed to. And despite some challenges associated with growth, such as “[outgrowing] ourselves as an organization a lot of times” (BD4), the BD was clearly proud of such success, and attributed it to the lofty goals set by the board many years



prior. In setting this goal, the BD also noted that there was collective influence, with the ultimate decision resting with the board:

With [ED4's] help the board was able to make a good decision. ... The ultimate was the board's decision. (BD4)

Another example of a large goal is with respect to setting the organization's mission. A comment from a BD of another organization speaking positively of big goals with regard to mission include:

But anyway, one positive one was we did a lot, the board did a lot, of work in redefining its mission, the [N16] mission. So the focus before was like neighbor helping neighbor and trying to decrease the amount of poverty, etcetera. But the shift went, we actually went out on a limb and the new mission is to eliminate poverty. And so that's a pretty big lofty goal. (BD16)

These examples are representative of evidence that respondents generally spoke positively about boards and board members having big goals. Just as importantly, respondents referred to big goals as contributing to organizational successes of growth, organizational awareness, successful infrastructure projects, and overall organizational success. More general comments from multiple respondents with respect to big goals can be found in *Figure 4.4*.

Figure 4.4 Big goals

We have five or six multimillion dollar ideas. All of them doable. I am not saying we will do them all. I am just saying I need [board members] that can engage in those kinds of conversations. (ED16)

[The board] needs to set strategic priorities and direction and guidance around that and think bigger and bolder and do those kinds of things as opposed to dealing with the minutia, and getting hung up in the details. (BD18\_2)

#### 4.4.3 Aggressive behaviours

In addition to having big goals, a number of board members spoke positively about being aggressive in order to fulfill the organization's goals and mission. In a number of circumstances, typically when under pressure of timelines, board members spoke about situations where aggressive behaviours were a necessity to achieving organizational goals. In one human services organization, the BC spoke about the possibility of losing the organization's main facility when their commercial lease is set to expire in the near future. Due to the fact that the real estate market in the area is quite tight at the moment, the board needed to be aggressive in securing the purchase of the building in which the organization currently resides. Comments from this respondent include:

Yes we wanted to be aggressive. We had to be aggressive or we would lose our home. We had to find ways of securing our building. And we knew there were people circling around looking for opportunities in the ... area. So we started hard negotiating. (BC8)

The board aggressively made an offer to purchase without yet having an understanding of how they will finance the purchase of the building. The respondent used this example as the board acting in a way to turn a negative external threat into a

positive outcome. Further examples of the board members alluding to aggressive behaviour as a positive leadership attribute for a board can be found in *Figure 4.5*.

Figure 4.5 Aggressive behaviours

Unless you are willing to be aggressive and take calculated risks you won't get anywhere. You can't just wait and sit for it to come into your lap. You have got to go out aggressive and get it. (BC11)
There is also provision for the board to select two additional people at large from either one or both communities. ... We chose not to exercise it for the first year because we didn't know how it was going to function. We didn't want to be slowed down in what we are doing. (BC11)
And that was like I said very recently happened, which allowed us to take advantage of that situation. But pushed the boundaries of what we had within our current structure. (BC14)
So overall the organization is better for it. It is a positive outcome in the end. Because now we have got the right people that we are going to need moving forward. But it was a long process to get there. It was the board's involvement on these committees and pushing him beyond what he got pushed to on a day to day basis by [ED7]. (BD7)

In a board-ED relationship, and hierarchy set by a governance structure, often times the board sets the organizational goals, but the ED is the one who is delegated to execute these goals (Carver and Carver, 2009; Jager and Rehli, 2012). In one instance the ED demonstrated frustration with the lofty fundraising goal set by the board:

As an agency we have been insolvent for many years. So the top priority when I started was finance. And the board set targets for fundraising, which were really kind of drawn, pulled out of the air... (ED17)

When asked if he was involved in setting those targets or if he joined the organization after they had been set, the respondent noted:

I came on after. The fundraising was about 30 thousand dollars a year. That's what we were doing. And we set a target of 400 thousand dollars. ... Because the target I had was lower. It was about 200 thousand dollars that I felt was manageable. And I think beyond that would be gravy. They had wanted a target of like 800 thousand dollars. It was absurd. So we sort of found the middle ground. (ED17)

This example, while demonstrating an ED's frustration with the lofty goals set by the board members, also provides a good example of the role of collective influence in the leadership process. In this particular example, the board accepted advice from the ED in setting the targets. Further dialogue, however, demonstrated that it was clear that the board had the final say and (disproportionately) more influence in the final decision than the ED.

Consistent with big goals, board members in this study were accepting of risk in order to achieve such goals. After recalling a significant situation whereby the board dismissed their previous ED, the BC commented:

Why is it a positive outcome? Because I think a couple things. The board acted decisively in saying the CEO we had in place was not going to work for us over time. We made a hard decision about needing to move on and going to the unknown. (BC16)

Another BD noted that the board was willing to accept financial risk in order to move the organization forward in achieving a lofty infrastructure goal set by the board:

Of course it was a major financial challenge. We have a seven million dollar building and we were only going to get at most a million dollars out of the sale

of our group homes and property. We had to raise the additional money which we did through successful lobbying of the provincial government and the county and then we mortgaged the rest, and we are probably running at a small deficit operationally, but I think in the end it took a lot of courage to make that decision both in terms of risk or liability for the organization, but also in the face of what I call an ideological challenge from our major funder. (BD5)

This board made a decision to construct a new building that was built with an atypical design, which “took some courage from the board because we were going upstream” (BD5), with little support from funders. The result of this situation was that the organization now has more capacity, and is providing “a better quality of life” (BD5) for the organization’s clients. Both of these stories provide an example of a positive outcome from the board having pushed through challenges to achieve a big goal, despite resistance. More general comments from each respondent type with respect to pushing through challenges to achieve organizational goals, despite resistance or risk, are presented in *Figure 4.6*. The themes in this section are a contribution to the leadership literature, as advocates of transformational leadership have been relatively silent on the processes underlying the achievement of big goals.

Figure 4.6 Push through challenges

<p>We still need to tackle it. It's not like we are putting our head in the sand and saying oh the government won't fund it therefore the problem doesn't exist. New Canadians will still come to this country and feel alienated from the society they have been inserted into. (BC10)</p>
<p>The thing is once you have made your mind up and the thing you think is the correct thing to do is to stick to it. I believe we have done that on a lot of things. Even with the resistance that we had from people, we said it is the right thing to do. ... That's fine, we overcame that. We're there. (BD11)</p>
<p>It is easy to say we are not ready. But the board said this is the right thing to do and we are going to do it. (ED4)</p>
<p>The board rose to the occasion and said yes that is the right thing to do. It's needed in [name of city] even though the general public is strongly against it. ... The board held solid. Said no that is not going to happen. ... Because it was the right thing to do wearing their hat as a foundation board member. (ED11)</p>
<p>Like all of this stuff has yielded positive results but there certainly a lot of negativity and the board, to its credit, was quite comfortable and aware that when we do this, that's when you can expect that change is painful. And people won't like it, and people won't be happy, but so long as at the end of it all we are in a better place it is worth it. (ED17)</p>

#### 4.4.4 Quick decisions

Quick decisions were also generally perceived as a positive leadership attribute of a board. Examples of decisions that were perceived to be made quickly include processes within an amalgamation, firing of an ED, and speed to restructure processes to allow for acceptance of a donation which was tied to atypical criteria. In each instance, the speed of the decision was viewed as contributing to a positive outcome. Consistently, a number of respondents commented, during the significant situations, on times when the board did not make a quick decision, and later realized that it should have. Despite this,

a number of organizational actors interviewed spoke negatively about times when boards moved quickly in hiring an ED – a process in which numerous respondents commented on as having detrimental effects on their respective organization.

During some point in their respective interviews, each of the three respondents from a seniors' housing organization spoke about the amalgamation of their organization with another organization. Throughout this process, the BC commonly referenced how quick decisions at multiple points along the amalgamation process contributed to the success of the amalgamation. During the process, many considerations needed to be discussed and quickly agreed to among board members. The BC made the following comment with respect to the speed of that particular decision:

We had to decide on a new name. We had to decide on a new logo. And we had to decide how we were going to do it. ... How long do you think it took us to pick our logo and decide our name? ... About 5 minutes. That is the level of cooperation we attained in moving this forward. And everything moved forward on that and trust. (BC11)

Another organization removed a former ED abruptly after discovering fraud had occurred. When asked if the board was exercising leadership in removing the former ED, the BC responded with:

Yes. Strong, strong, strong, strong. Because they executed it right away. ... Met with her within a few days. Presented to her, and then let her go. And right away the committee started to find a new director for [N12]. (BC12)

The story of replacing the ED was told by the BD as resulting in a positive outcome, because the current “atmosphere is better” (BD12).

The above example significant situations demonstrate repetition in the empirical material that respondents generally noted quick decisions to be a positive attribute of

board members. Conversely, there was repetition in the empirical material that hiring of an ED should not be a process whereby the board makes a quick decision. Numerous respondents viewed a previous hiring of an ED to result in a negative outcome, in part due to a quick decision being made. Often times, board members felt pressured with the notice of the departure of their existing ED, and then made a quick decision to fill the role. In a number of instances, boards quickly hired internally to fill in the gap:

[N16] struggled with a CEO who left about three years ago now, and she kind of left the board in a lurch. Kind of said I'm leaving in a month, because of health issues. Panic set in. What the heck are we going to do about this? We did a quick turnaround where we hired internally, someone internally. ... The consensus was to go internally, hire someone right away. This person was well known. (BC16)

This quick decision was soon found to be a poor decision. The newly appointed ED “didn't have the capacity, skill level, ability, to really report to the board” (BC16), and a functioning relationship between the board and the ED was never properly developed. Learning from this mistake, the organization then took the proper time when they replaced her as the ED. This story is not unique to this organization, and was paralleled in a number of organizations. Respondents from other organizations spoke positively of times when they took time in the decision process in replacing an ED.

Interestingly, the board included a staff member in the hiring process. The intention of including staff was “to build trust with staff”, “to convey to staff the message that you are going to be part of the process”, and because “she was a human resource expert” (BC16). While presenting this situation as an example of the importance of taking time to hire an ED, embedded in this situation is also an example of distributed leadership.

These example significant situations demonstrate that quick decisions are important behaviours of board members and are often perceived to contribute to positive organizational outcomes. However, as no behavioural attribute is effective in every



situation (despite what advocates of transformational leadership would suggest), making a quick decision when recruiting a new ED was often discussed as leading to a negative outcome – most often ultimately resulting in the need to replace the ED role (again!).

In this section, I provided evidence of board member behaviours of big goals, aggressive behaviours, and making quick decisions. Consistently, accepting of risk and pushing through challenges to achieve such goals were commonly reflected on as being positive attributes. In the next section, I continue to highlight board member behaviours that are consistent with idealized influence, specifically, challenging the status quo and idea generation.

#### *4.4.5 Challenging the status quo and idea generation*

In addition to quick decisions, big goals, and aggressive execution, transformational leaders displaying behaviours consistent with idealized influence are said to present a vision that is discrepant from the status quo, promote a need for change (Brown and Trevino, 2009; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Griffin et al., 2010), and are able to establish the norms and culture in an organization by demonstrating creativity themselves through idea generation (Wang and Zhu, 2011). In this study, respondents commonly noted that board members demonstrated this by bringing new ideas to the organization and by pushing for change.

In relation to both challenging the status quo and idea generation, examples of occurrences where board members initiated an idea in the reported significant situations include:

- amalgamation with another organization
- bringing forward a creative financing solution
- restructuring senior management positions
- increasing client access to services
- creating new processes for ED evaluations

- overhauling staff remuneration packages
- changing the way information is presented to the board
- developing board policy and charters
- creating new board processes
- choosing a new governance model
- moving from an operational board to following a governance model

A number of participating organizations have recently moved toward a governance model or a different governance model. The restructuring of the governance model was presented as the chosen significant situation by at least one respondent in six participating organizations (N4, N9, N10, N14, N16, and N17). The common theme in each of these six organizations was that the adoption of a new governance model stemmed from board members recognizing the need for change. The move toward a governance model was most commonly triggered by an extended period of operational issues and/or turn over of the ED position. In one example (N17), the organization was nearing bankruptcy and experiencing severe attrition at the senior management level for the past seven years, having moved through four EDs and five chief financial officers in three years. With the organization in crisis, the board decided it was time to do an overhaul of the board governance model. After going through this process, each respondent type noted that the organization is in a better position than it was just a few years ago.

Another organization was similarly faced with a number of years of consecutive deficits, which coincided with three EDs in just over a one-year period. In addition to this, the board experienced turnover in its own membership. Both existing board members and new board members recognized the need for a new governance model. The following comments from the BC and the current ED demonstrate the board's involvement in this change:

Something else is that the board recognized that it was part of the problem. And it took action to affect that change. And recognized that the model that it had

used, and had been handed down from one board to another, was no longer working. (BC16)

In changing the governance model the board had “people who have had to shift their thinking about how they look at ... being a board member” (ED16). And to do so meant that the board felt that it was “necessary to essentially scrap everything and begin again” (BD16). This example clearly demonstrates board members’ willingness to challenge the status quo in an effort to overhaul their respective governance models.

Another example of the board bringing new ideas to the organization includes initiating changing the way information is presented to the board from the ED. In one organization, a newly appointed board member initiated this request. Her comments are as follows:

Both acknowledged that was indeed a bit of a modus operandi that they had going and nobody was really comfortable with it but they weren’t quite sure how to tackle it. I did have some suggestions around tackling it, because process I am good at that. I think that it was, with any CEO who does his job very well and is firmly entrenched in that, I am not sure that it was the most inviting thing he had heard. But I think he’s come to realize that you get a lot different kind of board support if the board feels like they are doing their job and they are part of it and not just that they are rubber stamping things, or they are backed into a corner and a commitment has been made and they don’t have a choice. So I think it has been positive for everybody. ... The board could have sat there and thought to themselves, or I could have, or my colleagues at the table could have thought I am really new. What do I know? He knows better than me, delivers great results. Who am I to challenge the way this happens? Or the chair could have said I do not want to rock the boat. ... I think there was leadership that said we can make this better. And it may not be easy to get there, but it’s worth while. So I do think that was leadership. (BD9)

Another example of board members being innovative, which led to a successful outcome, includes an innovative idea from a board member of N2. The organization was “struggling with closing the final part of the fundraising campaign” (BD2) when one board member came forward with an innovative financing idea. The board member suggested that the organization obtain the remaining funds with a bank loan secured against future donor commitments. Other board members were “exercising ... leadership and they were accepting of an idea that was unusual” (BD2). Prior to this idea, it “was a bit frustrating because we couldn’t ... start construction” (BD2). The BD noted that this idea allowed the organization to complete the project, and allowed the organization to continue momentum with respect to capital projects.

It is evident that board members in this study are change agents, challenge the status quo, and bring new ideas to the organization. Change promoting behaviour is also important as it has been shown to affect team performance because followers individually perceive their leaders as role models and thus become more committed to change (Nohe et al., 2013). In this section, I have provided examples of times when board members challenged the status quo and brought ideas to their respective organizations. Significant situation stories of restructuring governance models, challenging the way information is presented to the board, and an innovative financing idea were further developed to highlight the embedded behaviours. These examples demonstrated how organizations directly benefited from such behaviours. Further comments from BDs and EDs representing the general attitude among respondents when it comes to being a change agent and challenging the status quo are presented in *Figure 4.7*.

Figure 4.7 Challenge the status quo

<p>Like for instance right now I believe the government is saying we have got to have more designated assisted living. ... We are looking at this and saying you are right on the verge of or already gone over the fact that assisted living spaces are, there are too many. And you are saying that is what you should build. Not long-term care facilities, not other streams. And we are saying I am not sure we want to go with you guys. (BD4)</p>
<p>I think [N5] is perceived, and rightfully so, as being one of the strongest providers in the province. But you can't stand still. You can't feel that you've got it all right. You have to be willing to explore other ways of doing business. And sometimes you have to challenge the ideology of the moment. ... But that took some courage from the board because we were going upstream. (BD5)</p>
<p>And when you do that program by program, year after year, you can lose sight of is this even something that is even valuable or that we should be offering. Or should we step back and have the courage to say to our funders no we are not interested in doing that but we would like the funding to do this and this is why. (BD17)</p>
<p>I think we need specific skill sets, but we also need people that have the ability to be flexible open thinkers around community issues, because the way in which [N7] may need to work five years out could look very different. We need to start positioning ourselves for that. So we need board members that can help us move that way. It is not going to serve the agency well to have board members that think in a very kind of this is the way we do it, this is the way we have always done it. (ED7)</p>

Interestingly, although challenging the status quo did occur in stable environments, often times major restructuring of board processes was triggered by a crisis. This finding is consistent with the literature, whereby transformational leadership is more likely to emerge and be most effective in relatively unstable, uncertain, or unpredictable environments (Bass, 1998; Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Waldman et al., 2004). Furthermore, Shamir and Howell (1999) argue that an unstable environment is not a necessary condition for charismatic leadership to emerge, but times of crisis increase the likelihood that such attributes will emerge.

#### *4.4.6 Board not being innovative*

In the above section I demonstrated the theme, which was prevalent in the empirical material, that board members generally view themselves as exhibiting behaviours consistent with idealized influence whereby board members demonstrated an ability to be innovative, creative, and advocates for change. Despite the board members' perception of themselves, and my ability to present a number of examples thereof, EDs generally challenged such a contention. Consistently, board members periodically noted that their colleagues do not display such behaviours.

Comments from both the ED and BD of one organization highlight the contradiction in perception among the respondent types. The interview with the ED was conducted first whereby the ED made the following comments regarding the lack of ideas being generated from board members:

The creative side comes from our leadership team. We have a very innovative and creative forward thinking leadership group. It would be a tough crowd to try and stay ahead of. (ED5)

[The board] could bring more new ideas. I think sometimes they arrive at board meetings with the belief that [ED5] has already got it all done and he will tell us what we should do. I think they have come to be very very reliant on myself. I probably have allowed that to happen because of the experience, the knowledge, I have got in this field. So when I leave they are going to have a real, kind of a new experience, because their role and responsibilities are going to change significantly. (ED5)

This same ED also spoke about innovative ideas for revenue generation coming through employees and not as a result of a board initiative. Armed with the knowledge of the ED's perception, I further probed the BD of the same organization regarding his perception of where revenue generation ideas and innovations stem from:

We have got a lot of focus on supplementing our funding through various fundraising initiatives. We have been quite successful. (ED5)

When asked whether “a lot of those, lets call them innovations, are a lot of those coming up through administration or is the board driving those ideas?”, the respondent noted: “Both” (ED5)

This set of comments highlights the contradiction in perception between the respondent types, whereby the EDs generally felt the burden for organizational change was placed on the ED, while board members viewed themselves as agents of change and idea generators.

In a number of instances the ED explicitly noted that major innovations stem from the internal leadership team, and then receive the board’s stamp prior to implementation. Comments from an ED as well as BDs that highlights this contention include:

They are busy. They lean really heavily on the executive director to be the innovator and the creative. They don’t get into the strategic planning, visioning. Which I believe they should. (ED11)

It is not a very innovative board, but it hasn’t been asked to be an innovative board until maybe the last year and a half. But it’s changing. It takes a while. A board is like the Titanic. It’s big and slow moving. (BD7)

I don’t even think we get great ideas. We have very few. (BD15)

Other examples of board member resistance to change include resistance to embrace a longer-term focus, not challenging an ineffective strategic planning process, and resistance to accept organizational change. The BC of one organization spoke about select board members being resistant to change during a restructure of the organization.

She commented that “for a lot of board members, particularly long time board members who stayed during this transition, it was hard to let go” (BC2). When asked how the organization moved from the resistant state to the current state, the BC responded with, we “got rid of the old board members who were more resistant [(laughter)]” (BC2). The respondent further spoke about how the resistant board members’ frustration would be “vented at board meetings” (BC2). In the end, however, the board members self recognized that there “reaches a point where you can stay too long. And they were ready to go” (BC2). The process moved forward by bringing on new board members who are more suited for the current structure and recognize their roles within that structure. The end result was positive because the new structure works well for the organization, but resistance by select board members was viewed as a negative attribute.

When respondents felt that board members were not currently practicing innovation and idea generation, the reasons provided include:

- being a subsidiary of a multinational organization, the governance structure, funding structure, and execution of the mission are “completely fixed”
- the stakeholder organizations which founded the organization are reluctant to embrace change
- maintaining board life is easier and less fearful than change
- bringing new ideas would bring extra work for the board
- the board is over reliant on the ED to be the innovator
- the current board composition impedes innovation and idea generation

Note that the first two points represent organizational structure and bureaucratic constraints. Specifically, a number of respondents thereby perceived that the structure in which board members operate impedes board members’ ability to display charismatic attributes of challenging the status quo and bringing new ideas to the organization. This is consistent with the literature, which has found that transformational leadership will be less likely to emerge when constrained with bureaucratic structures (Bass, 1985; Lowe et al., 1996).



Multiple respondents spoke about board composition being an issue for impeding creativity and innovation. The board of one organization (N15) has moved over time from having the founding board members occupying the board seats, to a more recent board composition of professionals being recruited for a desired skill set. The ED, however, felt that the increased attention to recruit for select skill sets (e.g. accounting, legal, finance, etc.) has come as a trade off to creative thinking. Similarly, the BC and BD of another organization (N17) both spoke about the composition of their board as negatively affecting the board's ability to be creative and innovative.

Although board members frequently felt being a change agent and challenging the status quo was a positive attribute of a board member and boards, organizational documents rarely prescribed this as a role of board members. Only two examples were found in organizational documents, which highlight encouraging change as a desirable behaviour of board members:

In order to achieve my responsibilities as a Director, I will facilitate and encourage change when it would improve Board processes. (N9)

As a member of the board I will always work to learn more about the Board member's job and how to do the job better. (N5)

Bringing new ideas to the organization and challenging the status quo are clearly desirable behaviours. However, in the current study, I presented examples of times where numerous respondents claimed that other board members were resistant to change. By referring to such attributes in organizational documents, board members would be more aware that this is a desirable leadership behaviour of a board member, and may be more receptive to embracing change. Unfortunately, board documents are not consistent with what respondents believe to be important, as only two examples of such language in organizational documents were found.

#### 4.4.7 *Distance endorsed by governance structure*

Exploring internal perceptions of the board is an important undertaking given the fact that idealized influence is defined not just by a leader's behaviour, but a leader's influence is just as importantly determined by how followers perceive the leader (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Conger et al., 2000; Nohe et al., 2013; Yukl, 1999). Although there is not a perceived heightened level of dis-admiration, disrespect, or distrust for the board by people internal to the organization, many respondents from each participant type frequently noted a lack of awareness. In presenting idealized influence attributed, this section draws heavily from responses and discussions during *Section II* and *Section III* of the interview guide as well as analysis of organizational documents.

In many instances employees and volunteers of the organizations do not have direct communication with board members, and may not know who sits as a member of the board. The following comments from EDs highlight the perceived lack of awareness among internal actors of who sits as a member of the board:

Because for a lot of the front line staff the board is just an entity, a faceless entity. They hear the term the board. They don't know who it is. (ED12)

But I wouldn't say, again a staff group wouldn't really know the board members or have much sense of them. Its not that they are not respected. It is that they are not known to be respected. I think those that know them do respect them. (ED8)

Board members generally shared this same perception, being aware that internal stakeholders have little direct contact with individual board members, thereby having minimal awareness of who sits on the board:

But I have to ask the question, do the staff really know the board? Do the board really know the staff? Because in the Carver model there is not a lot of mixing. The board hires the ED, the ED hires the staff. So to really answer this question, how do the board and the staff get to know each other in order for the staff to have faith in the board? That I think is a question. (BD10)

Outside of a few of us on the board, the general staff don't even know who we are. (BD4)

In most organizations participating in this study it is clear that there is limited direct contact, communication, or other interaction, between board members and employees or volunteers beyond the board's direct contact with the ED. In this study it is evident that such distance leads to a perceived lack of awareness of the board among members of staff and volunteers of the organization.

A number of organizational documents highlight that distance is endorsed through the organization's chosen governance structure. The following select excerpts from orientation manuals highlight this contention:

The Board has, in effect, only one staff member, which is the Executive Director. The Executive Director is, therefore, solely responsible to the Board for all authority and accountability to staff. (N3)

The Board of Directors normally communicates within the Foundation and with member facilities through the Executive Director who is the official link between the Board and the organization. (N11)

Further excerpts that demonstrate the chosen governance structure results in distance are presented in *Figure 4.8*.

Figure 4.8 Distance prescribed by structure - documents

All Board authority delegated to the staff is delegated through the President/CEO. (N4)
All administrative authority, within the limits defined by the Board (i.e. Executive Director Constraints), is given to the Executive Director. This means that staff authority and accountability is, as far as the board is concerned, the accountability and the authority of the Executive Director. (N11)
The Board builds a relationship between the Board and its single senior staff person... (N14)
All Board's authority delegated to all other staff is delegated through the Executive Director. (N14)

Participating organizations, with very limited exception, currently operate as prescribed. The following comments from board members are representative of organizational processes whereby communication and delegation to staff is executed through the ED:

The board hires one staff person... That is the executive director. I try very hard not to give work, make assignments, criticize or analyse the work of the staff. (BC10)

There are different types of boards that you can operate on, but ours is a governance board. And so we don't have any interaction with any of the staff obviously. (BD3)

Further comments are presented in *Figure 4.9*.

Figure 4.9 Distance prescribed by structure - interviews

One of the key things you know around the board governance is... you really have one employee, the CEO. (BC16)
And it's none of our business to say anything to the staff or the staff to say anything to us. That is something that we really had to set in stone. We are here to speak in this room – the boardroom. Not to shelter staff. That is not our role. (BD3)
...the communication to staff is through the CEO, not from us directly, except for our annual retreat. (BD5)

In addition, board meetings are generally in the evenings when employees are not in the building. The one board meeting that I observed was conducted outside of the organization's office, in a hotel conference room, since the organization does not have adequate facilities to house a meeting of that size. After a review of board meeting schedules, commonly found in the board member orientation packages, as well as discussions with respondents, it was found that this occurs in a number of organizations. The infrequency, time of day (evenings), and location (commonly offsite) each further contribute to the distance between the board members and staff and volunteers. Although a limited number of board meetings per year has been examined with respect to board effectiveness (Conger et al., 2001; Forbes and Milliken, 1999; He and Huang, 2011), it has not been systematically examined with respect to follower perceptions.

The hierarchical structure that results from a governance model, combined with the part-time nature of the board's role, and the fact that meetings generally occur without staff involvement, each contribute to staff and volunteers having limited direct contact with board members. Although distance and transformational leadership has been recognized as an understudied field (Collinson, 2005), a number of recent empirical studies (e.g. Cole et al., 2009; Howell et al., 2005; Murphy and Ensher, 2008; Popper, 2013) have examined distance in relation to the effects and perceptions of transformational leadership.

Distance can be conceptualized as a matrix of physical distance, social distance, and interaction frequency (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002). Social distance has been defined by Antonakis and Atwater (2002) as the “differences in status, rank, authority, social standing and power, which affect the degree of social intimacy and social contact that develops between followers and their leaders” (2002, p 682), whereas Cole et al. (2009) take a somewhat narrower perspective, defining social distance as “the hierarchical distance between the senior level managers and the rank-and-file memberships of the organization” (2009, p 1699). Evidence from participating organizations suggests that in board member-employee/volunteer relationships, social distance is primarily a result of the chosen governance structure of the organizations whereby in each of the organizations in this study the board has only one direct report, which is the ED. Therefore, the chosen governance structure has an impact on the ability to be perceived as a transformational leader – an important contextual finding.

In the current study, meeting frequency, timing, and location also have an effect on physical and interaction frequency factors of distance. However, a small number of organizations have attempted to mitigate against the lack of internal awareness by hosting joint events between the staff and the board members. Below are comments from one respondent who felt that the event was successful in minimizing follower distance:

I think it was the intention to introduce the staff and their particular responsibilities to the board. So I think it did reach its objective. And I think that’s probably a good thing to do at least once a year, whether it’s at your AGM or what not. If this is an important question than the only way to be admired, respected, and trusted, is to come together at least once. And if there are decisions that the board makes that are contrary to how the staff feels than you need to be able to explain that or mediate that. (BD10)

In this section, I have presented the repetition of findings that each respondent type generally felt that people internal to the organization are unaware of who the board members are, or what they do. In the next section, I provide evidence that this physical, social, and interaction frequency distance does not appear to cause a negative perception of board members.

#### *4.4.8 Positive perception*

Despite limited contact with employees and volunteers in hierarchical ranks below the ED, each of the 18 EDs interviewed in this study generally spoke highly of the board and respective board members. When EDs spoke positively about individual board members, or the board as a whole, common reasons included their commitment to taking action on a specific project and then following it through to completion, being supportive of the ED, having an expertise (e.g. business skills, knowledge of a particular sector), displaying empathy for a staff member, holding other board members accountable, and having strong external connections and influence (e.g. government influence). Unlike most sections in this chapter, this section continues to draw primarily from *Section II* and *Section III* of the interview guide.

After a discussion about the board strengthening the remuneration package for all staff in the organization, the ED from this organization mentioned:

I count myself very lucky that I have a phenomenal board. I have been with other organizations. I have been on boards myself. And that's the one thing I really did appreciate about [N12's] board's philosophy... (ED12)

A number of EDs admired their board members for having access to networks that could bring benefits to the organization and / or for having influence in the community (e.g. fund development, policy change). Some comments relating to this include:

The fellow we brought in last year ... has been a big part of the Rotary Club, big part of the Chamber of Commerce. ... These are the guys that we want on our board. (ED5)

But now a board member walks in here and staff are happy to see them. It's good. And they know that they are helping us out in the community. They know they are out there. I often say I feel like the board has got my back. They often have. And staff feel the same way. (ED10)

And that's what really excited me when we brought her on board. She did also have a link to some very strong social networks, which was ideal. (ED15)

Other EDs admired their board members for having select skills that are helpful for moving the vision of the organization forward. Comments from three EDs who believe select members of their organization's board have valuable skill sets include:

The board from what I have described to you, it is pretty hard not to have a great deal of respect for people with [BD5's] stature. ... a banker standing up giving a financial statement. (ED5)

I am the envy of I do not know how many nonprofits, because I have not one but three accountants on the board. And people involved in healthcare, and people pursuing their careers in law. (ED6)

So it was their personal time and that commitment, but also what they did was they, the people that came into those working committees brought with them some really credible skill sets. They shared not just their time, they shared their expertise. They could do some of the project work that even I couldn't do. We have [name of director]. She's highly credible. (ED7)



Further examples of comments from EDs, which highlight their positive perception of the board and individual board members, are presented in *Figure 4.10*.

Figure 4.10 EDs admire board members

I don't think anything holds us back. We do practice what we preach. We walk the talk. We have I think a very effective board. (ED5)
I have been with [N7] for fifteen years and have really truly been blessed that I have worked with such amazing board members. (ED7)
They would be perfect if they stayed just the same as they are. ... We have an absolutely perfect running board. I can't imagine it being better. (ED9)
But really honestly I cannot say enough about the kind of leadership that [BC10] has brought to it. And so he has really guided us in a really good way. (ED10)

Given most literature on charisma, and idealized influence, is conducted on direct reporting relationships (Galvin et al., 2010; Kelley and Kelloway, 2012), this begs the question of the board's idealized influence having an effect on the organization beyond their immediate direct report - the ED. Distant followers have less information regarding the leader's behaviours. Impressions of distant leaders will therefore be made up of assumptions and attributions of their traits (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Chun et al., 2009; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Popper, 2013). Although distant followers are more likely to be idealized (Cole et al., 2009), the current study cannot confirm such a perception beyond the perception of the ED, as internal actors other than the ED were not interviewed.

Leader-follower distance does not mean that the behaviours of board-level transformational leaders, specifically idealized influence, are unable to affect other actors in the organization. In such instances, distant leaders may have a cascading (dominoes) effect on distant followers, through intermediate leaders (Shamir, 1995).

Using the theoretical model proposed by Galvin et al. (2010), it can be argued that in many instances the ED may act as a surrogate in the idealized influence process. In this study, the ED has direct contact with the board members, which allows for rich channels of communication (Galvin et al., 2010) between the board and the ED. In the model proposed by Galvin et al. (2010), if the ED perceives board members to be displaying charismatic attributes, surrogate behaviour will be manifested “through promoting the leader, defending the leader, and modeling followership” (2010, p 481). In this framework, modeling followership occurs when a follower (having direct contact with the leader) is a “visible representation for others of an appropriate response to or interaction with the leader” (2010, p 481), which then helps “distant followers develop their perceptions of the leader based on observations of the attitude and behavior of the surrogate” (2010, p 481).

Since fieldwork in this project was restricted to board members and EDs, the level of surrogate behaviour, and the effects of the same, can only be assumed using theory. On the one hand, this is a probable scenario given the level of contact between the board and the ED, and the leadership attributions (e.g. admire the board) EDs make concerning the board members as leaders. On the other hand, the perception of the board being referred to as a “faceless entity” to employees in lower hierarchical positions suggests that promoting the leader is not occurring in the current environments.

Other than a few isolated instances, it was rare that the respondent EDs spoke negatively about current board members. When they did, comments were in regard to select issues or individual members. For example, in a few instances EDs spoke negatively about board members who do not lead by example by financially donating to the organization. There were, however, a number of discussions with EDs who did not admire previous boards or board members. One board member, who had recently resigned, had not handled a conflict of interest properly, which created conflict between that individual board member and both the ED and the whole board. In an earlier section, I also presented examples whereby negativity and public criticisms by board members reduced the level of admiration EDs held of those select board members.

It is also apparent that board members have a tendency to admire fellow board members. When board members spoke highly about their colleagues, reasons provided were typically with regard to the following overarching themes:

- skill sets (e.g. legal)
- having a high level of intelligence (e.g. “[BC11] is a smart guy” (BD11), “We have got a smart board” (BC8))
- having strong external connections and influence (e.g. government influence)
- working on and completing a project that was perceived as having a positive outcome
- for initiating change or being receptive to change

Example comments of board members speaking positively of their colleagues include:

I think collectively we are doing pretty good, again, I think we have good board leadership in the form of our chair. And we have good executive leadership in terms of our ED. And I feel that there is a good spirit among people among the board. And that we are all willing to really work at it. I would actually say we are in a pretty good place. (BD10)

At this point my feeling is that our board is as good as it can be. Can you tell I am excited about this board? (BD16)

I say that everybody on our board in some ways are leaders. And we are trying to change our society and our environment that these women are in. (BD3)

In the above section, I have demonstrated that the structure within which board members operate creates leader-follower distance between board members and staff. This is an important contextual finding. This distance has created a lack of awareness of

board members among individuals internal to the organization. Although it is difficult to further infer the perceptions among distant followers (e.g. staff and volunteers), EDs admire their board members, and board members speak highly of their colleagues. This is an important finding as a leader's influence is characterized by how followers perceive the leader (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Conger et al., 2000; Nohe et al., 2013; Yukl, 1999). With respect to distance followers, practitioners armed with this knowledge can take steps to promote board members in a positive light.

#### *4.4.9 Summary*

In the current study, BDs and BCs spoke highly of times when the board had lofty goals, and was aggressive with timelines of executing these decisions, were accepting of risk, and pushed through challenges to achieve their end goal, made quick decisions, challenged the status quo, and generated ideas. In the next chapter, I highlight that while some of these behaviours are explicitly discussed in the transformational leadership literature, others are not.

Despite this, combined with the fact that EDs generally admire their boards, EDs still generally view their board members as not being change agents or bringing new ideas to the board. Given the fact that the influencing ability of a transformational leader is determined by how followers perceive the leader (Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Conger et al., 2000; Nohe et al., 2013), this finding raises the question of the likelihood that EDs act as surrogates (Galvin et al., 2010) in promoting the board (in relation to acting as a change agent) to actors in lower levels of the organization. The fact that the respondents assert the board to be a "faceless entity" further suggests surrogate behaviour is not perceived to be occurring.

It is also evident that distance has led to a perceived lack of awareness of board members among members of staff and volunteers of the organization. The hierarchical structure that results from a governance model, combined with the part-time nature of the board's role, and the fact that meetings generally occur without staff involvement, each contribute to staff and volunteers having limited direct contact with the board.

Board governance processes of the organizations under analysis limit direct contact, communication, and other interaction, between board members and employees or volunteers, beyond the direct contact with the ED. Specifically, the board has only one staff member, and consistent with organizational documentation, all communication and direction goes through the ED to other organizational actors. This is an important finding, as it suggests that the structure in which board members function results in distant relationships with internal actors, and has an affect on the ability to be perceived as a transformational leader. This finding is unique to board member research when compared to typical leadership studies on leaders within the organization. Leaders in the organization are commonly full-time and have no formal restrictions on their communication with staff.

## 4.5 Autonomy

### 4.5.1 Introduction

In this section, I present the findings that each respondent type regularly commented that the board should provide autonomy to the ED, allowing the ED to execute daily operations. Autonomy is commonly defined as the extent to which employees have a major say in scheduling their work, deciding on procedures to be followed (Hackman and Lawler, 1971; Volmer et al., 2012), and the quality or state of being independent, free and self directing (Harrell and Alpert, 1979). Definitions of empowerment such as the “delegation of decision-making responsibilities and the removal of bureaucratic control” (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013, p 363), management practices aimed at “cascading power, decision-making authority and responsibility down to lower levels of the organization” (Sun et al., 2012, p 55), or “involving the delegation of authority and responsibilities to followers” (Hakimi et al., 2010, p 702) are closely related to autonomy.

Numerous authors associate autonomy and empowerment with transformational leadership and suggest empowering followers is one of the defining features of transformational leadership over transactional leadership, whereby transformational leaders emphasize independence and proactivity of followers over control or exchange (Castro et al., 2008; Dvir et al., 2002; Kark et al., 2003).

Consistent with organizational documentation, it was found that each participant type views providing the ED with full autonomy to execute board chosen ends to be vital to a board-ED relationship, and also critical to achieving positive organizational outcomes such as growth. Despite this, respondent comments with respect to the current situation are mixed. This suggests that often times select board members overstep their role boundaries and meddle in previously delegated territory. A discussion of consistencies and inconsistencies between behaviours prescribed by organizational

documents and perceived current behaviours in this section provides a good example of the knowing-doing gap.

Further findings in this study include antecedents of giving up decision control. Trust in the ED, trust in the governance system, providing role clarity and setting role boundaries, and providing clear expectations are each found to be prerequisites of providing autonomy. Each of these antecedents are then discussed as they relate to leadership theory. Examples of success stories are embedded throughout this section that can be attributed in part to autonomy, role clarity, and boards staying true to their governance model. In contrast, example significant situations are provided of less desirable outcomes that respondents attribute to occurrences of board micromanaging.

#### *4.5.2 Thou shall not meddle*

Organizational documents collected commonly mentioned the importance of defining a clear distinction between the roles of the board and the roles of staff. Furthermore, documents frequently mentioned that the board *should* delegate day-to-day management of the organization to the ED, who has autonomy in choosing how to operate the organization with an eye toward fulfilling ends set by the board. The following excerpts from organizational documents suggest the board should delegate operational decisions, thereby providing autonomy, to the ED:

The Board's authority is to establish the broadest policies and implementation of these policies is delegated to the Executive Director. (N14)

The Board of [N13] is empowered to delegate authority and responsibility for implementation of the policies of [N13] to an Executive Director. (N13)

Further excerpts from organizational documents prescribing the board to delegate operational decisions and implementation of operational processes to the ED are displayed in *Figure 4.11*.

Figure 4.11 Delegating operational decisions - documents

<p>The Executive Director is authorized to establish all further policies, make all decisions, take all actions and develop all activities, which are true to the Board's policies. Areas may be "undelegated" by the Board through new policy development, but until such time the Board will respect all choices made by the Executive Director. (N3)</p>
<p>The President/CEO is authorized to make all decisions, take all actions, and develop all activities, which are true to the Board's policies. (N4)</p>
<p>The details and specifics regarding implementation of programs and policies are the responsibility of the Executive Director and staff. (N8)</p>
<p>Policy implementation and operational policy development is the function of the Executive Director, whose authority is delegated by the Board and defined through constraint policies. (N17)</p>
<p>One way in which the Board will discharge its duty to manage the business and affairs of the Association is by delegation of authority to the [CEO]. The CEO will be appointed by the Board and charged with the day-to-day leadership and management of the Association. The CEO is expected to honestly and candidly keep the Board fully informed as to the Association's progress and of any material deviations from the goals, objectives or policies established or approved by the Board. (N18)</p>

Once the board has delegated operational decisions to the ED, it is clear from organizational documents that the board is not to interfere with responsibilities in the purview of the ED. Examples of document excerpts denouncing interference include:

As a member of the Board I will not interfere with the duties of the administrator or undermine the administrator's authority. (N5)

As a member of the Board, each director will understand the difference between governing and managing, and not encroach on management's responsibility. (N15)



Further document excerpts prescribing that the board should not interfere with responsibilities in the purview of the ED are highlighted in *Figure 4.12*.

Figure 4.12 The board should not interfere - documents

<p>The [Chair] is not allowed to make decisions within the “Executive Director Limitations” policy area which is in the purview of the Executive Director. (N3)</p> <p>[The Board] must also oversee (not manage) the executive’s administration of the organization. The oversight role is at once critical and difficult. The board must keep an eye on how well they are gaining earned revenues. But, it must do so without invading the executive’s management responsibility. (N3)</p>
<p>Board Chair authority does not extend to making implementation decisions within the Strategic plan or Operational Policy areas, each of which is the responsibility of the President/CEO. (N4)</p>
<p>The Executive Director is empowered to take all actions and develop all activities that are true to the Board’s polices. He/she is empowered to make all policies and all decisions other than those made by the Board. The Board can, by changing its policies, remove areas of the Executive Director’s authority. But, the Board will always respect the Executive Director’s choices as long as the authority to make the choices belongs to the Executive Director. (N8)</p>

Consistent with organizational documentation, each respondent type generally commented there *should* be a clear distinction between the role of the board and the role of the ED and staff, and that the ED should be provided full autonomy to execute the responsibilities delegated to him or her. The following comments from board members are representative of respondents’ perception that the ED should have full autonomy in carrying out such responsibilities:

I think it’s important for the board to give staff the ability to make decisions to use their judgment, because in reality they know better what they think would,

like day-to-day stuff, how to effectively run the organization than we would. (BC3)

They should not meddle in the day-to-day needs unless the executive director brings you an issue you have to deal with. Otherwise they should stay completely out of it. (BC11)

It was clear from the interviews that EDs shared this same view. Comments from two EDs that indicate the board *should* give the ED full autonomy to execute board driven ends include:

The key with any kind of board staff relationship is a delineation of responsibilities. And once the board knows what their role is and the staff knows what their role is, the rest is basically easy. Just gets done. Where the hiccups occur is when people step on each other's roles. (ED9)

I think their role should be to set direction, not tell you how to do it. So to set a clear vision. I mean the role is not just on strategic planning. But to set a clear vision. And then to evaluate against it. But not show you how to do it. And not even question how you do it, unless it is something inappropriate. But basically say, you know what [ED10] I want you to do this. I don't care how you do it, and this is the outcome that I want. (ED10)

Further comments from each respondent type who note that the ED should have full autonomy to execute the operations of the organization are presented in *Figure 4.13*.

Figure 4.13 Delegating operational decisions - interviews

<p>To me good leadership is understanding that there are boundaries to each. If they go too much in the operational they just confuse things and they actually stop being a true governance board of keeping the vision. (ED2)</p>
<p>But I was clear that if they wanted to hire me they would have to leave me to do the operations. They'd tell me, give me the strategy of where they wanted to go, and give me a budget, and then it would work. And so they are responsible for the direction of the organization, but not the operations of the organization. (ED9)</p>
<p>The board needs to recognize the difference between operational and governance as I have talked about. Because it is so easy to fall into that trap. Because you see something and it is like you have the background to even have the answer of what to do. But that's [ED1's] job. (BC1)</p>
<p>We shouldn't be sticking our noses into management or leadership or who's a good employee or who isn't. Because we don't know, and it's arrogant for us to think that we would know how to run the place better when we just pop in every once in a while. You have an ED working there every day. (BD12)</p>
<p>It would be a little different in that I believe a board of directors should not necessarily be, well they shouldn't be actioning. Their responsibility is not to action things. Their responsibility is to direct and delegate. I think that is the most efficient type of board. (BD15)</p>

The above comments were selected from the general open interview questions to represent the fact that each respondent type frequently noted the board should give full autonomy to the ED to perform his or her role, and furthermore, the board should not interfere with the ED in executing any roles and responsibilities that have been delegated to the ED. However, evidence was found within organizations of times when it is clear that board members understood that there are boundaries to their role, respecting this autonomy, and times when board members overstepped their role. Comments from each of these ends are briefly presented, which provides a presetting to

example significant situation whereby positive outcomes are attributed to autonomy and examples of situations whereby negative outcomes are attributed to meddling. Comments from board members highlight the fact that giving the ED autonomy is *currently* generally occurring in the participating organizations include:

But on day-to-day operations in the lodges we do not interfere. I know some lodges like to pick out the colors of the drapes, the cutlery, and the plates and all that stuff. None of your business. You stay away from it. (BC11)

[ED13] makes millions of decisions that are not my business. They are her business. And I don't mess with her business. And I don't like other people to mess with her business. That's why we have a job description. (BC13\_1)

Similarly, comments from EDs highlight the fact that giving the ED autonomy is generally occurring in the *current* environment in the participating organizations:

You know they show a lot of due diligence but they also are really clear in letting me run the shots. (ED10)

I count myself very lucky that I have a phenomenal board. I have been with other organizations. I have been on boards myself. And that's the one thing I really did appreciate about the [N12] board's philosophy, is that they really do recognize that they are a governance board. And that they, I know that they are just a phone call away should I need something. But at the same time I don't feel like I'm being micromanaged or that we are going in opposite directions. (ED12)

Further comments from each respondent type which highlight that autonomy is currently occurring are presented in *Figure 4.14*.

Figure 4.14 The board does not currently interfere

<p>Yeah, they had that leadership too, and vision to see that if they wanted to grow the organization, they wanted to meet our cause in a greater amount, that they needed staff, and they needed to give the staff the authority, the flexibility, the imagination to get the job done. And that is where most boards fall down, is they don't have that leadership to pull back and say, let somebody else do it. (ED9)</p>
<p>We like to have, we are a governance board, and we like to have our operations separate from the operations of the shelter. And we literally just approve what is going on at the shelter rather than really get into who is, you know, all of that we leave to our executive director pretty much. (BD3)</p>
<p>Our board in particular, we are not really micromanagers. We are broad oversight, broad direction. (BD8)</p>
<p>You can't just walk into the [organization] and tell people that we are going to hire someone for that or you are going to fire someone for that. That's somebody else's job. We are there as sort of guardians. We are not there as the operator of the [organization]. (BD14)</p>
<p>I was the one that was President when we hired our executive director. There are certain things that we expected of him in his job description. I guess I am more here is your role, go ahead and do your job. (BC2)</p>

From the above examples it is clear that each respondent type asserts that autonomy is essential in a board-ED relationship. However, a number of respondents noted that often times board members overstep their role boundary and interfere with the work of the ED. Comments from each respondent type who note that the board does *currently* overstep their role are as follows:

I mean they couldn't have, completely have faith in me because I was brand new. I mean they had enough faith that they hired me, but at the same time they were a little bit more picky. I can't explain. They were more involved hands on. .... And I sometimes would think like really, aren't you supposed to be a governance board. (ED10)

Well going back to the one problem that I brought up, there is a tendency, particularly in one board member, to be a little too close to the client. (ED11)

Further comments from each respondent type with respect to a lack of autonomy are presented in *Figure 4.15*.

Figure 4.15 The board does currently interfere

<p>Some of them remain active in management. The board had been a bit of a management board before my time. And some people have had issues letting go of the moving to more of a governance role. They ask questions that they shouldn't. They try to give advice that they shouldn't. And that's more the older board members. People who are close to the end of a six year term. They have done two three-year terms. Some of them still feel like they should be giving that input. (ED17)</p>
<p>But I also think sometimes that they make requests of the staff which are not in line with the role of the board. Sometimes senior directors are not able to say no because it is a governance organization, I am your boss, and I tell you to do something and you do it. (BD1)</p>
<p>Board members are getting involved in operational stuff and it is something we are trying to stay out of. But we do try to help out the executive director too so. (BD6)</p>
<p>But conversely we have had times where it was like ok we got to as a board realize we are getting our fingers into the ops. (BD18_1)</p>

Despite repetition in the findings of organizational documents prescribing a separation of management's role and the board's role, and the clear advisement from each respondent type that providing the ED with autonomy is necessary to the functioning of the organization, there are still mixed results of what is currently occurring within organizations. I was thus able to provide comments from each respondent type that demonstrates that sometimes the board picks up their prescriptions, while other times select board members get "involved in operational stuff" (BD6). These general comments provide a transition into a number of stories, which I present

next. I provide examples of significant situations in which the respondents attribute a positive organizational outcome to be the result of the board providing the ED with autonomy to execute operations. I also provide example stories whereby board members meddle in previously delegated responsibilities, to the frustration of the ED.

The ED of one organization spoke about the overall success of the organization to be due to the board giving “staff the authority, the flexibility, the imagination to get the job done” (ED9). In this organization the ED was hired at a time when the board members were still taking on a number of operationally focused roles. With respect to setting clear role boundaries upon hiring him, the ED noted:

But was clear that if they wanted to hire me they would have to leave me to do the operations. They’d tell me, give me the strategy of where they wanted to go, and give me a budget, and then it would work. And so they are responsible for the direction of the organization, but not the operations of the organization. (ED9)

In this organization the board sets direction through the strategic plan and tells “management what they want, what they expect” (ED9). And then it is up to management to execute that plan, with autonomy. When asked why this is a positive story, the ED noted that “if anyone asks why [N9] is so successful I always say its because the board kept to their word [(referring to not meddling)]” (ED9).

The ED of a housing facility for a vulnerable population spoke about the board meddling in what he believed to be an operational decision, by overriding his decision on a staffing issue. The ED had promoted an employee to a supervisor role, but her promotion created conflict among a small group of staff who then proceeded to influence clients to write letters to board members. The board then fired the person who was just promoted. The following dialogue demonstrates the respondent’s frustration with the process:

...the board got way more involved then they should have. ... It ended up, against my recommendation, the board fired the person I promoted. And basically a year later the disgruntled employees were feeling like they were running the organization because they had one, so it escalated rather than solving the problem. To me it is an example of something that the board shouldn't do that they got involved in. (ED11)

... There are also very clear in our policies that the board isn't involved in human resources. They have one employee, which is executive director. The executive director is empowered to hire or fire. Whatever is required to provide smooth operations of the corporation. (ED11)

In this particular situation the ED felt the board should not have reduced the ED's decision control. The ED perceived the board increasing their control over him to lead to operational issues as well as a decreased level of trust in the board-ED relationship. When I asked "how did that affect the relationship between you and the board, or did it?", the ED responded with the following comment:

It did. I was willing to let it go and carry on. However, ... it decreased my level of trust in the board knowing what they are supposed to be in and what they are not supposed to be in. So I was much more careful after that to be sure that I knew what was going on. That I knew when things like this were starting to emerge. So it created a bit of distrust between me and the board. (ED11)

In the above quotes it is clear that the ED believes that the board should not have reduced his decision control, which "was the total wrong thing to do about the situation" (ED11). When asked whether the board was exercising leadership in this example, the ED further noted:

I think that it is important that a board of directors support and follow the advice of their senior executive director. If they are unwilling to follow the advice of



the executive director then the system won't work. You either get rid of the executive director or you follow his advice. (ED11)

The respondent mentioned that this was a negative outcome because "it took almost two years to get any sense of teamwork back in the building" (ED11).

In two organizations, respondents spoke about the board overstepping its role boundary by interviewing staff members during the performance evaluation of the ED. At the time, the ED was not aware of them approaching staff. Furthermore, in one instance, when the board perceived there to be a staff morale issue the board ventured further into the ED's role. Both the BC and the BD of this organization mentioned this situation as one of their chosen significant situations. The following comments from the BD represent both respondents' perception of the situation:

It was a competency issue of the board members who had done the assessment, and the problem there they had was they went along and they did a bunch of staff interviews and got a ton of negative feedback, and they couldn't filter through that employees will always give negative feedback just because it's a boss server type relationship. They were getting involved in politics of the office as well. There were politics going on in the office. It came to people where we trust the ED, we do not trust the ED. The stuff that was in there were minor, but it was in her performance review. That was kind of a tense board meeting. They overreacted. ... there were some comments in there about the staff and they totally overreacted and tried to dig in further, and we were like we need to step back further. That is a staffing issue that was going on. But again it was not a board's job to go delving in. (BD6)

In this significant situation the BD chose to tell, the respondent notes that "it was not the board's job to go delving" (BD6) into a staffing issue. When the board meddled into a previously delegated role, it created tension between the board and the ED. Interestingly, both of the board member respondents chose to tell this story as both their

significant situation that resulted in a negative outcome and their chosen significant situation that resulted in a positive outcome. In each case, the respondent spoke about the initial performance review (e.g. above quote) as a negative outcome, and then how the board reacted and corrected the situation as a positive outcome. The BC chose to identify this situation as a significant situation which resulted in a positive outcome, because in the second attempt the board enacted an evaluation process based on outcomes that were measurable (evaluating ends).

In the above I provided examples of positive outcomes (e.g. organizational growth), which participants attribute to the board providing autonomy to the ED. Examples were also provided of times where board members overstepped their roles, reducing the ED's decision control, which led to undesired outcomes (e.g. reduced trust in the board). In the next sections, I explore the antecedents of providing such autonomy.

#### *4.5.3 Trust in the ED and the governance process*

A key contribution of the current study is the exploration of the antecedents of the delegation process, including identification of role boundaries, role clarity, clear expectations, trust in the executive director, and trust in governance control systems. The current study therefore addresses an under-explored area in the literature identified by Chua and Iyengar (2011) through identifying the underlying mechanisms that foster delegation from the perspective of the board members. A number of respondents cited trust in the ED (and/or staff) or trust in the governance process as a prerequisite for enabling the board to provide the ED with autonomy.

The BC of one participating organization spoke about providing autonomy being a key factor in the success of the amalgamation with another organization. He further spoke about trust being an antecedent to providing autonomy. In speaking about providing autonomy to the ED during this process, the respondent noted the following:

What was said is we are going to trust you with the details. Don't bother us unless you have got a problem. We completely trust you. We never gone down that path and checked the detail. We trust him to do what he had to do. We never checked them. We never encountered a problem yet. Unless you demonstrate trust in those below you, you won't get anywhere. (BC11)

When I asked if the board was exercising leadership behaviours in this example, the BC continued to note:

We understood our role. We knew we had to stay at a 50,000 foot level. And we had to trust those below us to do it. (BC11)

It is clear that this BC views trust in the ED as an antecedent of relinquishing control. Similar comments from respondents citing trust as a prerequisite of autonomy include:

But we essentially place our faith in them to do the job and we don't interfere. (BD5)

It's a fine balance of engagement and over engagement and I think our board, I am really lucky. They don't interfere in what I do. They trust me to get on with it. (ED8)

I think that they lead, they give me direction, but they give me a ton of ability to do it on my own too. So that's another good leadership skill, is trust in your staff. Having faith in your employees. That sort of thing. (ED10)

Similarly, numerous EDs cited the need for board members' trust in the governance and control systems as a prerequisite to relinquishing control. One ED spoke about select board members not having trust in the governance model and reporting systems as hindering their receptiveness to giving up control. In this organization, some board

members had been with the organization when it went through a near bankruptcy so are struggling to give up control and to trust the governance systems:

We have some board members who were board members during a very difficult time. And to go to more of a governance, a true governance model, means relinquishing control and trusting the mechanisms you have created. And they are not entirely there. (ED17)

For example, the board receives quarterly financial statements, but certain board members would like to see them more frequently and “insist on unnecessary, unpractical, reports, documents, make more work than you need to”, which is “not the ideal” (ED17).

Comments from two other EDs who refer to trust in the governance mechanisms and process as an antecedent of relinquishing control are as follows:

I mean it’s confidence. You hire somebody, what if he steals the money? ... So you set up, every month you send the audit and risk and the information so that there is accountability. And there is accountability. And you make sure that that happens. But you don’t get in the way of getting it done. Our boards at [N9] have been absolutely wonderful that way. (ED9)

So what I would say is that that development of the trust that is there is they are learning to have a bit of trust and patience to see a process through. (ED14)

The above comments provide evidence consistent with the general tone of respondents’ perceptions whereby trust in the ED, and trust in the governance and control mechanisms, are viewed as antecedents of relinquishing control. These findings are not surprising given previous studies have found managers grant greater autonomy and resources to trusted subordinates (Brower et al., 2009; Hakimi et al., 2010). Through delegation, leaders dependent on their subordinates (Hakimi et al., 2010) are

vulnerable to the integrity and competence of the subordinate. Giving up control can thereby be viewed as an expression of trust in the individual's capabilities and integrity (Avolio et al., 2004; Chua and Iyenger, 2011). Relinquishing control being contingent on trust in the governance and control systems is a distinct, but powerful finding.

#### *4.5.4 Role clarity and clear boundaries*

Respondents provided illustrations of how to tactically ensure that the board does not "micromanage" the ED. Examples include i) communicating role clarity to board members through board training and discussion, ii) having a BC that is conscious of the boundaries of each actor's roles and being able to guide board meeting conversations respectively, iii) having an ED who is able to challenge the board when the board oversteps its roles, and iv) setting clear expectations (ends) to the ED. First, role clarity, or the need for role clarity (e.g. define role boundaries) was commonly found in organizational documents, as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

The responsibilities of each Director include ... understanding the difference between governing and managing the corporate enterprise and clarifying the extent of management's responsibilities. (N9)

The Board will take up the model of policy-based governance in its Board work: having a preoccupation with strategic leadership rather than administrative detail... that emphasizes a clear distinction of Board and staff roles... (N14)

Further document excerpts are presented in *Figure 4.16*.

Figure 4.16 Role clarity - documents

<p>The Board will approach its task in a manner, which emphasizes strategic leadership more than administrative detail, clear distinction of Board and Staff roles... (N3)</p>
<p>The board shall have job descriptions for all board positions. The board will review the job descriptions every three years to ensure they provide an accurate reflection of the duties of board members. All job descriptions will be included in the Board Orientation Manual. (N6)</p> <p>The Board will govern with emphasis on strategically leading rather than attending to operational detail. (N6)</p>
<p>These terms of reference are prepared to assist the Board and management in clarifying responsibilities and ensuring effective communication between the Board and management. (N15)</p>
<p>... delineating the authority to be retained by the Board from that which is delegated to ... the CEO/ED. (N16)</p>
<p>... define the boundaries of prudence, ethics and authority within which the Executive Director functions as well as set performance expectations of the Executive Director. (N17)</p>

Consistent with the above theme presented from organizational documents, numerous respondents similarly alluded to the importance of discussing, documenting, and orientating board members of the boundaries of their roles as being important in understanding role clarity. In one organization the BD spoke about hiring an outside consultant to assist with the transition from being an operationally focused board to being a governance board. During this transition the BD commented on the importance of discussing and understanding the roles attached to each organizational actor. His comments are as follows:

If this fits into your category of positive, the positive for me is, the issue for me was we wanted to be a governance board and we wanted to know how to get there. We went through the whole process of determining that with the board. I dragged them through that and then we started to work on what does that mean, how are we going to get there. So we hired an outside consultant to come in and start to work with us. Help us understand what it meant, what our responsibilities were, what our roles were, what our executive director's roles were, [organization] staff roles were. (BD14)

He added that the management of the organization is now in the hands of the ED. "And so my mantra was if it has to do with the operation of the [organization] we don't deal with it. For me that was a huge positive" (BD14). From the BD's perspective, "that is probably the best thing that we have done in my tenure there, is to get away from that operational" (BD14). From the above quote, the BD is clear that an antecedent to the success of this restructure is to understand "what our responsibilities were, what our roles were, what our executive director's roles were, [organization] staff roles were" (BD14). In speaking about the reorganization to a governance model, with clear distinction in roles, the ED notes how this has led to successful outcomes:

And I look back and I could probably say I made 15 to 20 independent organizational / operational decisions that to the best of my ability met not only my executive limitations but were my best decisions with confidence that the board would support it, instead of hesitating on it. And our result was we had a major financial improvement in the organization... (ED14)

Further comments from respondents referring to the importance of discussing the boundaries of board member roles as being important to understanding role clarity include:

And so I think that sometime we need to look at how is the Carver model serving us. What is working well? What is not? What is the role of the board in terms

of setting vision? What is the role of the staff? Where do they come together?  
We have done some of that. (BD10)

So the take away out of that is don't assume that every CEO you recruit, or every board member that comes on a board, actually knows how the board governance should run. And so it is ok to actually set that so you have that clarifying discussion. That just allows stuff to be out front and nip it in the bud. And get things organized properly. (BD18\_1)

We spend a lot of time on job profiles or job descriptions. So as far as how it should be practiced, we are just back from reviewing this two weeks ago. I would say that the job description that is listed in the governance policy is pretty well right on. (ED4)

Ensuring board meeting discussion does not intrude into discussing roles previously delegated to the ED is frequently cited in both organizational documents, and by respondents, to be the responsibility of the BC. Document excerpts include:

The [Chair] is responsible for setting up the meeting content. Issues will only relate to those, which according to Board policy, are clearly within the mandate of the Board. (N3)

At meetings the Chairperson makes sure the subjects of discussion are those issues that, according to Board policy, clearly belong to the Board to decide, not the Executive Director. (N8)

Similarly, comments from EDs in this regard suggest this to be the responsibility of the BC as well as the responsibility of individual board members:

And for the last couple of years we've worked on various exercises and tried to define roles and responsibilities. And this last time around they all agreed that



they'd give permission to each other to just say in a meeting, you know I think we are getting too deeply into operational things. (ED1)

When asked if she had seen that work in meetings, the ED responded with:

Some people are more comfortable doing that with other board members, others are less comfortable doing that. (ED1)

Are there times they get down into the operations and sometimes go there? Yeah. But the chairs are very good about pulling us out. (ED18)

So far I have discussed the role of the board in setting clear boundaries and defining roles. However, a number of EDs spoke about their own role in ensuring the boundaries are adhered to. Executive directors having a role in this process is counter to the unidirectional presupposition of transformational leadership.

Three EDs (each of which are 51 years of age or greater) commented that it is appropriate (sometimes a necessity) for the ED to push back on select discussions, informing board members when they have drifted across the boundary of their role and infringed into previously delegated operations. Comments include:

... I'll just say it's none of your business. This is our plan. This is what we did. This is how we've researched it and this is where we are going. Whether we got the best lease agreement or not is the same as whether I pay my executive assistant an extra dollar or not. That's not their concern. (ED9)

I have an interesting board at the moment. They are very very interested in the operational sides of things, so part of my challenge is to reassure them that things are being taken care of by staff. (ED1)

Its very important that board members understand what a governance model is when they are on that type of board. Sometimes you have to draw a clear line and say this is my decision. Even though they have an opinion and you value that, but they cannot directly interfere with the operations of the organization. And that can be difficult for people who are genuinely interested and have an opinion. (ED6)

These three comments, from EDs over the age of 51, provide interesting findings of the role of the ED in maintaining role clarity and clear boundaries. Top-down leadership theories (e.g. transformational leadership theory) have been relatively silent on such issues.

#### *4.5.5 Clear expectations*

In addition to providing a clear line between the roles of the board and the roles of the ED/staff, it is also important to outline organizational goals (ends). If the ED has clear expectations on what the board expects for an outcome, the ED can then work toward achieving the end goal. This is an important finding since Gebert et al. (2003) find clarity of the strategic course set by the organization to be necessary in the delegation process. Representative excerpts from organizational documents include:

In filling its duty as policy-maker, the Board will always work from the broadest, most general statement of policy about a particular functional area when setting policy and move to sufficiently specific policies to where the Board is clear in terms of its intent or end result. (N8)

Authority and responsibility for the operations of [N17] is delegated to the Executive Director, who is employed by the Board for the specific purpose of achieving the outcomes objectives established by the Board. (N17)

The essential and primary role of the Board is to maintain currency of the vision for [N17], define and refine Ends and establish necessary and appropriate policies. (N17)

Consistent with organizational documents, respondents generally felt that the board's role is to set clear expectations (ends) for the ED, and monitor against those expectations. A number of respondents mentioned that the board's role is to set clear expectations for the ED. Representative comments from EDs include:

The board's job is to do a strategic plan. And tell management what they want, what they expect. And then management can put an operational plan that meets the strategic plan. That was done right away too. (ED9)

They had clear ideas of what they wanted me to do. So it wasn't like [ED16] come on and figure it all out for us, right. (ED16)

Representative comments from BDs mentioning that the board's role is to set clear expectations for the ED include:

We said this is your role. This is what your expectations are. (BD7)

And his bonus is based on the same kind of, bonus'd on meeting your budget, exceeding your budget, bringing in revenues, to the growing your service levels in the company. We sort of started to set goals and objectives that were clear. (BD14)

It is clear that setting expectations (e.g. organizational ends) for the ED is an antecedent of the autonomy process. When referring to transformational leaders empowering subordinates, Bass and Riggio (2006) claim empowerment can have "negative consequences when the followers' goals are out of alignment with the organization's goals" (2006, p 198-199). A logical antidote would therefore be to set

clear expectations and organizational ends. In the participating organizations, board members thus mitigate against the potentially negative consequences of autonomy by providing clear expectations and setting organizational outcomes. When referring to shared leadership, O'Toole et al. (2002) note "it doesn't matter so much how responsibilities are divided as it matters that the individuals involved are clear about their roles" (2002, p 259).

Increased role ambiguity has been contended to be a negative effect of increased autonomy (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013). The current study outlined tactics used not only by board members, but also EDs, to ensure the identification of role boundaries and role clarity, but just as importantly, how to stay within those boundaries. Just as clear expectations offsets the potential of goal misalignment, the identification and maintenance of role boundaries offsets the role ambiguity as a potential negative consequence of increased autonomy.

#### *4.5.6 Summary*

There was overwhelming evidence that each respondent type deliberated that the organization functions best when the board stays within the boundaries of its role (not meddling in the execution of strategy). This ideal delineation does not always occur; A number of significant situations resulting in a negative outcome were presented by respondents which they attributed to board members meddling in day-to-day organizational roles - a responsibility held by the ED. Numerous authors associate autonomy and empowerment with transformational leadership and suggest empowering followers is one of the defining features of transformational leadership over transactional leadership, whereby transformational leaders emphasize independence and proactivity of followers over control or exchange (Castro et al., 2008; Dvir et al., 2002; Kark et al., 2003).

The findings of autonomy in the context of the nonprofit board-ED relationship appears to be more in line with a hybrid model of leadership. The act of providing

autonomy (e.g. giving up control), as found in the current study, is by definition recognizing and allowing for alternative influences. Characterizing autonomy in this way suggests that autonomy is a form of distributed leadership, as distributed leadership “involves relinquishing control” (Kramer and Crespy, 2011, p 1025). However, the findings of board members in the current study providing an active (and top-down) role in providing role clarity and setting role boundaries, and providing clear expectations, can be characterized as vertical leadership. Furthermore, maintaining role boundaries were then found to be shared across hierarchical levels. This suggests that the leadership process in the context of nonprofit board governance is not a simplistic linear process, and may be more complex than advocates of transformational leadership currently suggest. A further examination of theoretical implications of this can be found in the subsequent chapter.

Although autonomy has been associated with transformational leadership (and arguably distributed leadership), the study of job autonomy has been studied in behavioural models including Hackman and Oldham’s (1975) job characteristics theory. According to the job characteristics model, organizations are able to encourage positive work attitudes and increased quality by enhancing a combination of five dimensions – variety, identity, significance, feedback, and autonomy. Autonomy has long been contested to bring about individual benefits as well as organizational benefits. Job autonomy has been positively linked to employees feeling responsible for their job (Volmer et al., 2012; Parker and Sprigg, 1999), better work performance, job satisfaction, motivation, well-being (Chua and Iyengar, 2011), reduced job turnover intentions, role conflict and anxiety (Spector, 1986; Volmer et al, 2012), and has been found to be beneficial for creative work involvement (Gebert et al., 2003; Jung et al., 2008; Volmer et al., 2012).

In order to ensure board members work within their prescribed roles (not meddle), respondents claimed to have success by ensuring roles are communicated to board members through board training and discussion, by having the BC guide board meeting conversations, and having an ED who is able to challenge the board when the board

overstep it's roles. Furthermore, boards providing autonomy set clear expectations to the ED with regard to the desired outcome. Providing clear expectations and setting goals is also a characteristic of transformational leadership (Conger et al., 2000; Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Jung et al., 2003).

Trust in the ED and in the governance control mechanisms appears to be an antecedent to relinquishing control. This is, however, not surprising given previous studies have found managers grant greater autonomy and resources to trusted subordinates (Brower et al., 2009; Hakimi et al., 2010). For example, observing student behaviour in a lab simulation, Hakimi et al. (2010) found leaders empowering behaviour to be contingent on their trust in follower performance and integrity.

Trust is commonly studied in the transformational leadership literature in regard to followers trusting the leader (e.g. Bass and Riggio, 2006; Braun et al., 2013). Although exploratory, the finding of the importance of trust in the transformational leadership-autonomy relationship is therefore an important finding. The finding of trust in the ED to be a prerequisite to relinquishing control is an important finding, as leader trust in followers is widely overlooked in the literature (Brower et al., 2009; Hakimi et al., 2010). Furthermore, relinquishing control being contingent on trust in the governance systems is a unique, but powerful finding. Examples were presented where board members being unfamiliar with the control mechanism are more likely to cross over the boundaries of their roles – a behaviour which frustrates EDs.

## 4.6 Individualized consideration

### 4.6.1 Introduction

One way that transformational leaders are said to influence those around them is through individualized consideration whereby “transformational leaders pay special attention to each individual follower’s needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p 7). The transformational leadership component of individualized consideration includes both developmental (coaching and mentoring) and supportive behaviours. By placing these behaviours into the same construct it is assumed that leaders display each of these behaviours, having a unidirectional influence on followers.

In this section, I present the findings of individualized consideration. However, the findings in the current study with respect to individualized consideration are not as simplistic or unidirectional as advocates of transformational leadership claim. I highlight the respondent comments that suggest that mentoring and coaching is either not the board’s role or that board members do not have the capabilities or knowledge to provide this function. Despite the lack of developmental behaviours found, supportive behaviours are a lot more repetitive in the empirical material. The findings of a lack of developmental behaviours, combined with findings of supportive behaviours, provide support for criticisms of having diverse behaviours within the same construct (e.g. Yukl, 1999). Since developmental behaviours were scarce in the empirical material, I am obviously unable to draw on examples from the significant situation section of the interview guide. Respondent comments detailing why developmental supportive behaviours are relatively absent are primarily drawn from discussion during *Section III* of the interview guide. Presentation of the evidence for supportive behaviours, which were present in the empirical material, draws on the significant situations.

Positivist (often deductive) studies of transformational leadership theory infrequently challenge underlying assumptions, which contend influence to be top-

down. One interesting finding in the current study is repetition of evidence that individualized consideration in a governance context frequently occurs in the opposite direction. Specifically, I provide evidence of many EDs discussing providing individualized consideration to the board through coaching and mentoring. The findings presented in this section therefore directly challenge the tightly held assumption of unidirectional influence, while supporting a recent dialogue in critical leadership studies that suggests that (in the context of the board-ED relationship) the leadership process is more complex than advocates of transformational leadership theory would suggest.

#### *4.6.2 Top-down coaching and mentoring*

Individualized consideration includes both developing (coaching and mentoring) and supporting behaviours (Bass, 1985; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 2002). In this section, I explore developmental behaviours, which occur when transformational leaders advise employees on their career, encourage them to undertake further training, and delegate with the intention of facilitating skill development (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006), and includes coaching and mentoring (Yukl, 1999). I begin this section by presenting the findings that EDs do not feel that they are receiving coaching and mentoring from the board. Two primary reasons were found in the interviews that provide reasons for a lack of coaching and mentoring by the board. Executive directors commented that either it is not the board's role or the board does not have the capabilities or knowledge to provide this function. In regard to respondents not feeling that it should be the board's role, a number of ED's comments are highlighted:

That is less important, because if you hire someone who is high quality you shouldn't have to spend that much time doing it. (ED10)

Well I'm not sure the board's role is to deal with my individual needs or be my coach and mentor. (ED11)



Similarly, the following statement by a BC represents a common contention among board members with respect to the board's role as a coach and mentor to the ED:

It doesn't feel like [ED16] needs to be coached or mentored, our current CEO. He really knows the job inside and out... I would be concerned for an organization of our size if you ever hired an ED that needed to be coached or mentored. For a smaller organization I could see it. But for a large organization, an eight million dollar organization, you want somebody that can walk into the job. (BC16)

A number of EDs felt that mentoring and coaching is a board's role, but that the board is unable to provide this support due to their lack of capabilities or knowledge. Comments that exemplify this contention include:

I don't think my needs are particularly well met. That isn't because they are bad people or anything. It just is what it is. Because partly to meet my needs they need to understand the place, and if they don't understand the place it is hard to meet my needs. ... I think they need to understand what my life is like here to meet my needs, and if you don't know what my life is like here it is hard to... They are nice people. But I feel often quite isolated and kind of unsupported. (ED8)

One of the problems right now with most boards is they have no outside source of information. They don't research the industry. They don't get information from outside sources other than that provided by the organization. (ED11)

I would say you would be lucky if you had that on your board. That they could coach and mentor you. (ED13)

Interestingly, each comment came from EDs in organizations with a very positive board-ED relationship. For example, ED8 felt he has "a great board" which is very

supportive of him in other ways, including providing guidance and expertise on major projects. His concern was specific to the distal nature of the board, and wondered how a group of people who come into the organization ten times a year, usually when clients are not present, would be able to properly understand his needs.

Other authors in the nonprofit governance literature have noted a similar ED contention. For example, Hoye and Cuskelly (2003) noted board members to be characterized by organizational staff as being remote or disinterested. The voluntary nature of board positions in nonprofit organizations leads to board members allocating a limited amount of time to fulfilling board activities (Brown, 2005). This is then combined with the fact that board members meet infrequently. During the interviews, respondents referred to the frequency of their board meetings to range between four and ten times per annum.

When developmental support did occur, the BC was frequently seen by all three participant types to primarily occupy the role of coach and mentor, which occurred in informal one-on-one meetings with the ED. Respondents in a number of organizations claimed to have seen increased collegiality and increased board support for the ED as a result of these one-on-one sessions. The following comments highlight respondents' view that mentoring and coaching is typically the role of the chair:

I am not sure that is an entire board's, holistic board's, job to do that. To have one or two members on your board, especially the board chair, that should be practiced. The board chair should be your champion. (ED2).

The other thing I do with [ED14] is I have a biweekly coaching session with him. He and I get together, talk about what kinds of things he struggles with or needs to work on. I give my opinions from an HR perspective and sort of as a senior leader perspective. (BD14)

Further comments from respondents who note that mentoring and coaching should be the role of the BC are found in *Figure 4.17*. In a few instances participants noted that individualized consideration, primarily mentoring and coaching, can come from multiple members of the board. However, in such a circumstance it is still conducted on an individual bases, and not at the board table.

Figure 4.17 Coaching and mentoring as a BC's role

<p>There have been instances where I have been a coach to the executive director while I was the board chair. So we would get together and talk board chair to executive director for an hour and sign checks and discuss the organization and that sort of stuff. ... I have had lots and lots of experiences like that so I can bring both sides to the table. (BC10)</p>
<p>I think that it is too large of a body. Like in my role here [(referring to reporting to a board in her day career)], if my entire board were doing that it would make me nuts. They are all different people and they all know a different level. I have a reporting relationship with, and a mentoring relationship with, my president. So it is very focused and very direct. And I think that is the most important thing. (BD9)</p> <p>But you agree that it should come from somewhere? (researcher)</p> <p>Yes. Just not the board as a whole. But the chair or the executive committee, absolutely. ... I have seen our chair do that very actively. (BD9)</p>

Two BCs spoke about age and tenure as a factor in defining the board-ED relationship. Executive directors of greater age also tended to feel that they did not need mentoring as a result of their age. Two EDs (51 to 60 years of age, and 61 or greater, respectively) mentioned age as being a factor in not wanting a mentor:

And you know what Greg, maybe it is because of age. Generational things. I am at a time in my career, not that I don't need people's opinions and help, but I'm not looking for mentors anymore. I am looking for colleagues. I am looking for people to work with, and get things done. When I first started I was a CEO

when I was 35. It probably looked a little differently on how I engaged my board. I think it does depend on demographics a little bit. (ED16)

That's clearly a different experience than when I, when [a previous board chair] was my mentor for the first ten years of my life in this position. There were very few weeks when he wasn't in my office a couple of hours. ... come in, and poke his head around the corner and say hey ... I put off your time. We would have a cup of coffee and chat often about the organization, about sometimes war stories. But he really was my absolute mentor in terms of learning about leadership, learning about governance, learning about parliamentary procedure. (ED5)

The BC or another organization spoke about the EDs age as being a contributing factor for her not requiring coaching and mentoring:

If we had a really young ED, someone who this was the first, she was taking this on as her, if she was younger, had some sort of progressive experience, but was younger, then I might be more as a, and she might look at us more as coaches and mentors. (BC7)

It is possible that a limitation of the current study is that the types of questions asked were not able to draw out developmental behaviours among board members. However, this is unlikely for two reasons. First, the technique used was able to draw out evidence of supportive behaviours. Secondly, there was overwhelming evidence in *Section III* of the interview guide and related discussion from respondents noting that it is not the board's role or the board does not have the capabilities or knowledge to provide this function. For these reasons, I argue that a lack of finding of developmental support is not due to a limitation in the methods employed, but more likely suggests that such behaviours are not present to a noteworthy extent in the interactions between board members and the ED in participating organizations. This is an interesting finding, as key behaviours in the transformational leadership model (e.g. developmental behaviours) are absent in the current context.

In the significant situations presented in this study, there was little evidence of board members demonstrating developmental behaviours in their interactions with EDs. In this study, the repetition of findings were presented whereby EDs felt that mentoring and coaching is either not the board's role or the board does not have the capabilities or knowledge to provide this function. In addition, numerous EDs and board members commented that it is not the role of the "entire board". Some evidence was then provided whereby such behaviours were displayed by the BC in a one on one session.

#### *4.6.3 Top-down supportive behaviours*

Supportive behaviours have been defined in the leadership literature as revolving around emotional support, relating to the well-being of a subordinate, with defining features of support to include "acting friendly and considerate, being patient and helpful, showing sympathy and support" (Amabile et al., 2004, p 13), and involving "the provision of sympathy, evidence of liking, caring and listening" (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006, p 39). Despite the lack of finding of participating boards providing coaching or mentoring, there was a repetition of findings of general support to the ED in the form of acting as a sounding board, responding to specific requests for support (e.g. board member expertise), as well as being generally supportive of the ED's role in executing his/her responsibilities in achieving board developed ends. I present evidence of supportive leadership behaviours by providing examples of significant situations whereby respondents note supportive behaviours.

At a strategic planning session, members of the board suggested that the ED examine whether a chief operating officer would be beneficial, because "they worried that I was going to burn out" (ED9). When the ED later realized the role was not appropriate for the current organization he released the chief operating officer from the role. He then called a meeting of the board's HR committee to let them know and to talk about options within the organizational structure. The BD respondent of this same organization spoke about being called into the committee meeting to discuss options for the organizational structure. The respondent commented about the board committee convening to provide guidance and support, as requested by the ED:

But he also asked me to convene a meeting of the HR committee to talk about what were the options for the future. Was a replacement of this role the appropriate thing to do or should there be a different look see? I thought great use of resources. (BD9)

She further noted that “he asked and I was happy to do that” (BD9). When I asked the respondent if the board was exercising leadership behaviours in this example she noted:

I think they were trying to. I think they were trying to be the right kind of governing body and the right kind of leaders to support their CEO. (BD9)

In this example the ED respondent noted that the board was exercising supportive leadership by providing guidance with the intention of ensuring he did not “burn out”. The BD defined leadership in this example as supporting the ED when he made a request for guidance.

The BD of another organization spoke about defining the relationship between the board and the new ED. She noted that the “executive committee, which is the two vice-chairs and the board chair and the past chair, ... we meet on some regular basis” (BD18\_1). The meetings are “more lets just have a dialogue” and asking the ED “what is keeping you up at night” (BD18\_1). When I asked to clarify the nature of these meetings, the respondent further noted:

We do it at lunch. It is meant to be informal. It is meant to be what are you worried about. How do we help you. What questions that you might want to ask us for advice. It’s not part of his formal review. It is just our way of staying connected and trying to make sure that we are supporting him. (BD18\_1)

In this example, the BD spoke about supporting the ED. I particularly found her comment of “what is keeping you up at night” (ED18\_1) interesting, and interpret that as being aligned to the definition of supporting behaviour as outlined by Yukl et al. (2002) – concern for the needs and feelings of others.

Supporting behaviours also include a provision of sympathy and caring (Amabile et al., 2004; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 2002). This is particularly present in the significant situation one ED chose to speak about. The ED spoke positively about the board being sympathetic to a staff member:

We had a staff member, long serving staff member, who in 15 years you could count on two hands the number of times she had ever taken a sick day in her life. She was always there, dependable, families loved her. And was diagnosed with cancer and had to undergo chemo and what not on a fairly, I think it was on a daily basis or every second day. Anyways, she was the type of person who being at work would be good for her. The board realized, you know what, if this is what she needs, they didn't necessarily cut her salary. They just said how many years has she not taken sick days. So if she couldn't come into work one day they were very forgiving of that. And then there were days she would work extra hours. They were very, they sort of made a board decision to amend the HR policy as it stood for a special...circumstance. (ED12)

The ED further commented that the particular staff member “had said that is probably what got her through that” (ED12). The ED appreciated the fact that the board looks “at the individual first and what they can do to support” (ED12). I interpret the board's response to amend the HR policy to be in line with supportive behaviours.

The below comments from board members further demonstrates the fact that board members feel the board is generally supportive of the ED:

And then [ED8] relayed to me that when I was the chair, well he is the executive director right, and he typically only sees the board once a month. And it is kind of lonely at the top for him, right. So he appreciated external discussions too. (BD8)

I mean we do support her in terms of any meetings. Whenever she wants us she taps me and I need you here. Please come. Help me present to whatever foundation. (BC15)

Similarly, EDs tended to feel that they are generally supported:

... and because [the chair] is so good at supporting what I do. (ED2)

They are really supportive. They are kind of there when I want them and need them. To me that is ideal. (ED8)

I feel very supported as an Executive Director. (ED15)

Further comments from EDs with respect to feeling supported are presented in *Figure 4.18*.



Figure 4.18 Supportive behaviours

Sounding board for some of the struggles with the operations. (ED3)
They are very responsive and you know I can run all sorts of things by them. Not everybody has good boards. Understanding. (ED10)
And like I said, there is not one person on the board that isn't willing to go that extra if they need to. And I know that if I was struggling with something that I can pick up a phone or I can just send out an email to the board saying you know this is something that has come up part way through between board meetings and would appreciate some feedback. They are very good at we just reply all and can have an electronic conversation depending on the need. (ED12)
I requested their assistance. They came together. They gave me their guidance. We drafted the letter. ... And there was a resolution in there. (ED14)

After receiving adverse feedback on a staff morale survey, the ED felt that the board was very supportive of him:

They were quite reassuring of me that I should not read too much into this. There's good reasons for this. Generally when you break it up into areas you can see that certain areas you are gaining confidence and others are angry. But anger and quality of service don't line up necessarily. And we could show we were producing better outcomes. Our work was getting better, but our morale was just very very low. (ED17)

Support also occurred in terms of providing guidance and support on an area of expertise. Comments from two EDs that highlight this finding include:

They should be a resource for the executive director. It is kind of lonely sometimes when you can't take some information down onto the floor. So they need to support and act as a consultant on issues and debriefing. (ED7)

My reflection back is that I actually tapped them on the shoulder. I said can you help me with this. Take your board hat off and give your guidance in your portfolio. So we have a communications committee that has one of our marketing people from the board on it. That was set up as an official one, not to the guidance of the facilitator, but as a board they decided it was valuable and I lean back on. (ED14)

Our former board chair is an HR professional. So we have had some specific situations, can you take your board hat off and help us work through this? This is what we were thinking. (ED14)

Supportive leadership has been defined as providing emotional (provision of sympathy, evidence or liking, caring and listening), informational, instrumental and appraisal support for followers (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006), and showing consideration, acceptance, and concern for the needs and feelings of other people (Yukl et al., 2002). Converse to coaching and mentoring (developing others), from the above comments it is clear that board members provide support by simply being available and responsive to the ED's request for help, being available to provide guidance and expertise, acting as a sounding board upon the ED's request, and being sympathetic.

Supportive leadership has been found to reduce occupational stress (Kahn and Byosiere, 1992), and to positively affect job satisfaction, career certainty, role breadth self-efficacy, and affective commitment (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). However, prior studies have found only a weak relationship between the supporting behaviour and follower performance (Yukl et al., 2002).

#### *4.6.4 Bottom-up individualized consideration*

At the other end of the spectrum is what I term bottom-up individualized consideration. Bottom-up individualized consideration occurs when the ED of the organization provides developmental support in the form of coaching and mentoring, and supportive

leadership behaviours consistent with individualized consideration, to the board or members of the board. This contrasts with the dominant emphasis of transformational leadership theory, which tends to depict such behaviours as flowing from leaders to followers, rather than the other way around. When asked the extent the board pays attention to the ED's individual needs by acting as coach and mentor, a number of EDs noted this reverse relationship. Comments from ED in this regard are as follows:

... they very much depend on the executive director to almost mentor and coach them. They are not taking their leadership. They tend to fall most of the time to the executive director to take the lead. It puts a lot of the burden on the executive director. (ED11)

I almost feel like that statement is reversed in our particular situation. I almost feel like the coach and the mentor and not the board coming back. (ED15)

I think in many cases the mentoring goes the other way. I think good CEOs mentor board members. And good board members become great colleagues. (ED16)

One ED mentioned that he coached the BC on how to speak to the board about board member financial contributions to the organization:

The pure financial piece is more and more important. I do something called an ICA, which is an individual contribution assessment. And I coach board chairs to do it. I don't like doing it myself because it is not my place. I will coach them. I work with them. (ED2)

Another ED spoke about coaching the BC on how the BC could better facilitate board conversations:

That's one of the reasons why we have been working more toward making more time for generative conversations. Trying to model that. I actually consult in generative conversations with other organizations. I have been able to help [BC16] out by saying here are some things you might want to think about when you are trying to lead those things. (ED16)

An ED's influence with respect to the board-ED relationship has previously been studied in the nonprofit sector. In an earlier section, I highlighted the study by Hoye and Cuskelly (2003), which found that "in many cases the executives perceived that they provided much of the leadership for their boards." (2003, p 67). Consistently, CEO power in for-profit organizations has been found to be positively related to CEO seniority (Ostrower and Stone, 2010; Stone and Ostrower, 2007). Thus, findings of bottom-up leadership are not surprising from the governance literature. Although the component of individualized consideration, specifically mentoring and coaching, in a board context has not been systematically studied. The findings of bottom-up individualized consideration are, however, contradictory to what we would expect to find in a board-ED relationship when looking through the lens of transformational leadership theory.

#### *4.6.5 Summary*

Individualized consideration includes both developing (coaching and mentoring) and supporting behaviours (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 2002). Although Bass (1999) initially contended individualized consideration "is displayed when leaders pay attention to the developmental needs of followers and support and coach the development of their followers" (1999, p 11), there has been a "shift in the definition of individualized consideration away from developing subordinates to something more akin to supportive leadership" (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006, p 38).

Developmental support occurs when transformational leaders advise staff on their career, encourage them to undertake further training, and includes coaching and mentoring (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 1999). In this study there was little

evidence of the board paying attention to the ED's developmental needs. Reasons for a lack of developmental behaviours include the perception that it is not the role of the board, or that board members do not have the capabilities or knowledge to provide this function. Additionally, respondents commented that greater age and tenure are both factors for not requiring coaching and mentoring.

Despite the lack of findings of developmental support, I provided evidence of the repetition of findings of the board demonstrating supportive leadership behaviours. More specifically, boards provide support to the ED (or staff) in the form of acting as a sounding board, responding to specific requests for support (e.g. board member expertise), demonstrating sympathy, as well as being generally supportive of the ED's role in executing his/her responsibilities in achieving board developed ends.

From the evidence presented in this section, I provide two contributions to theory. First, evidence of supportive behaviours and a lack of evidence of developmental behaviours provides further support for examining leadership behaviours unconstrained by transformational leadership theory. Some authors have found these two behaviours to be activated at different times in the leadership process (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010), while others have found that they lead to different outcomes (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl et al., 2002). The next contribution is that evidence of top-down individualized consideration (in the form of supportive behaviours) and bottom-up individualized consideration suggests hierarchical boundaries are commonly crossed in the leadership process. Although exploratory, this finding supports recent criticisms of transformational leadership, whereby current research on transformational leadership assumes influence is top-down.

## 4.7 Distributed leadership

### 4.7.1 *Introduction*

Distributed or shared leadership often involves lateral, downward, and upward influence (Pearce and Conger, 2003). In the earlier sections of this chapter, I have focused primarily on the evidence of top-down influence, and the behaviours that are demonstrated by board members. In this section, I present evidence from the significant situations whereby mutual influence is at the fore. In doing so, I present examples of significant situations where the board worked collaboratively with the ED or members of staff. Positive results of such situations are presented. Consistently, I present example significant situations whereby the board did not elicit or accept input in the decision making process from the members of staff. Such situations generally resulted in less desirable outcomes. In the latter parts of this section, I discuss how the hierarchical structure (e.g. as prescribed in organizational documents) contributes to the leadership process.

### 4.7.2 *Distributed leadership*

On many occasions, respondents did not refer to the board-ED relationship as a leader-follower relationship, but as one of collegiality, shared influence, and two-way support. In this section, I start by highlighting the perspective of EDs who claim to be in a collegial relationship with the board, and board members who claim to be in a collegial relationship with the ED. I then provide examples of significant situations where collegial relationships are occurring, as well as respective positive outcomes when such relationships occur. The prescriptions that I present, along with the numerous example significant situations, provide evidence of distributed leadership among the board and the ED in the board-ED relationship.

Collegiality between the board and the ED comes in a number of forms and in numerous situations. Comments from EDs explicitly mentioning mutual influence in the board-ED relationship include:

I have been with [N7] for 15 years and have really truly been blessed that I have worked with such amazing board members. I have always had a very collaborative relationship with them ... (ED7)

I did not feel that somebody told me what to do. And I did not feel that I told the board that this is what I want them to do. The end result was a collaboration. (ED14)

Board members similarly frequently viewed themselves as colleagues of the ED, as noted by the below comments, which are representative of board members' perceptions:

Myself and the people around the table see ourselves as colleagues of [ED7]. I know that technically I am her boss, but we don't work in that hierarchical approach. (BC7)

But [ED4] has had a lot of input. A lot of input, because we did need a fair bit of help. (BD4)

Further comments from each respondent type which highlight mutual influence in the board-ED relationship are presented in *Figure 4.19*.

Figure 4.19 Mutual influence

<p>In the last two years the relationship with the board has been one of change. One of discovery of what they see as an emerging model or approach for governance for themselves. And relationships with myself or the CEO. Also my lead team, that they never really had before. In terms of working closely together, being aligned, them having access to my, I have three lead team members, the COO, CFO, and a chief programs officer. This is what I call a turn around event. (ED16)</p>
<p>Once it was approved by the board there was a lot of work by the ED and myself. (BD2)</p>
<p>We definitely work with her hand in hand. We would not be functioning very well without [ED3]. She does a lot for the shelter and we support her and respect her. She does the same for the board. ... I think it is a very good support between the two. (BD3)</p>
<p>There were one or two board members that were involved with [ED7] at a relatively lower level. They would go with her to meetings with the Ministers or the collaborative meetings we would have. (BD7)</p>

Distributed leadership was regularly present in the significant situations respondents chose to speak about. Most times this type of relationship occurred outside of board meetings, such as in committee meetings, strategic planning sessions, lobbying efforts, ad hoc projects, and/or in dealing with time sensitive issues. In a number of instances, members of the top management team also worked closely with the board. This occurred during policy development and during major projects that fall within the board's responsibility. Examples provided by respondents of times when the board and the ED (or staff) worked together in a partnership or a collegial manner include:

- turnaround of the organization's financial situation
- hiring of the ED
- developing the strategic plan



- removal of a board member with a mental illness, in a professional manner, and subsequently creating a new role for him
- meeting with external stakeholders (e.g. banks, elected officials, landlord)
- setting the board meeting agenda
- fund development and fundraising efforts
- reorganizing the governance structure
- solving complex staffing challenges

I now present a number of these examples, starting with times when the board and the ED worked together. After that, I present an example of a significant situation whereby two respondents from the same organization spoke about a time when they each felt the outcome would have been more desirable if the board and management would have worked more closely together, ultimately encouraging more participation and influence by the management team.

Respondents from two organizations spoke about a collaborative effort to lobby elected officials. When one organization (N5) received notice that the Provincial government was making “massive cuts” to their funding, board members and the ED worked closely in lobbying elected officials. The ED noted that he and two board members attended a public forum, where board members asked questions of the Minister. He noted that the board members’ involvement was important because “the board played a critical role in being [viewed as] less of a self-interest group” (ED5) with less of a vested interest relative to internal actors, who rely on the funding for their paycheck. The “board has been involved very much in meetings with MLAs and attending public forums” (ED5). Four board members and the ED met with two elected officials, and have scheduled a meeting to meet with a third.

During this process, the ED took the lead on keeping the board members informed and setting up meetings and tours with the elected officials. The ED has more information and contacts in their industry and more influence when dealing with government administration. The board members bring legitimacy and displayed

leadership “in making sure the message is heard” because as “a board member people tend to listen a little bit more” (BC5). When I asked “who do you think would be driving the bus for these conversations?”, referring to the meetings with the elected officials, the ED responded with:

Usually it is myself. A CEO that’s in his first ten years of a position is a different CEO than one that is this long into the game. The board defers quite a bit to myself simply because of the experience. I have been associated with [N5] longer than any one of them has been. So I would have privileges that other CEOs would not have. And I guess also responsibilities that other CEOs don’t have. Because when you have got this much experience and you have been around you better have learned some things along the way. (ED5)

This quote demonstrates that the ED has had influence in the advocacy process. The ED presented this situation as his chosen significant situation which resulted in a negative outcome due to the fact that there is still uncertainty in the level of funding cuts. However, he appeared pleased with the process of working collaboratively with board members to lobby elected officials, and was “optimistic there will be some rethinking of this process” (ED5) – referring to the government’s financing agenda.

In another organization (N1), the board and ED worked collaboratively to lobby municipal administration and municipally elected officials regarding parking issues in the area of the organization’s main facility. Although the ED noted that they stayed within their prescribe roles, with the ED meeting with administration and the board members primarily influencing councilors, she viewed it as a joint effort. The “board chair and myself met with each of the councilors at the time and talked to them about what the new [facility] would do and also what the needs are for people to be able to access them” (ED1). When I asked who was driving the major discussions about the parking lot, the ED responded with “I would say probably equal” (ED1). This comment clearly demonstrates her perception of mutual influence in the advocacy process. The ED viewed the collaboration as successful because they “got some concessions” (ED1)

with respect to parking. This example was, however, used as her negative situation since “it is still not an ideal situation” (ED1).

One newly hired ED attributed the removal of a deficit and turnaround of the organization to be the result of building a mutual relationship with the board. His comments were as follows:

So that’s their turning point is when they realized they had to shift. They needed a culture that was more, where the organization’s board and CEO were more in a partnership ... (ED16)

The same ED spoke about the board having success involving the staff in the hiring process when he was recruited. His comments are as follows:

They involved all of the staff in some of those activities. The management staff. So they took some steps to try to include all staff in the decision about a permanent CEO. They did that because they had, previously they had one CEO here for ten years, and then the next one lasted a year. And then I came in as interim. People were getting nervous about who is going to be at the helm. So I think they provided leadership. I think they did a good job. (ED16)

The BC of this organization also spoke about the inclusion of staff in the hiring process, noting we “were very deliberate about that, about engaging staff in the process” (BC16). When I asked why the board felt that was important, he noted not only “was it important because we wanted to build trust with the staff” (BC16), but also noted:

Because she was a human resources expert. So she had a lot of skills. But we also wanted to convey to staff the message was that you are going to be part of the process here. And we are going to figure out ways for you to be meaningfully to be involved. So we did do that. And staff had an opportunity to actually talk to the two final candidates at one point. So there was a big public

meeting where they came able to answer questions. And then give feedback to the [N16] staff person that was part of the hiring process directly. So we took some steps around that. Of course the more consultation you do the longer the process is. Again it was about building relationships, so we were committed to doing that. (BC16)

From this it is clear that both the ED and the BC of this organization viewed inclusion of staff in the hiring process to be beneficial. Not only did it help to build trust, but more important to the direct outcome was that the staff member that was directly involved in the hiring process had certain skills that were important to the process, potentially offsetting gaps in the expertise of board members.

One ED spoke about the creation of the board agenda to be a collective task between the ED and the board:

So the board chair and I discuss the agenda before the board meeting and then I send out an open question to the other board members, is there anything else you would like on the agenda. So we construct it together and then the chair you know, leads us through the agenda, but again there is no one taking over, or coming in sort of with their own agenda. (ED6)

Another ED spoke about working together with the board on a building purchase:

So at the end of the day we ended up getting a mortgage, so they were very involved in that. ... So they got really kind of engaged in that. It was a very motive time, really. But it was great, they were very supportive of me. It was good because we were really working together on it. And they were really engaged. And the board meetings were always really packed. Everyone came and they would go on for a long time. (ED8)

Significant situations that resulted in a negative outcome were frequently attributed by respondents to be the result of the board working in isolation, without properly eliciting input from the ED. In one extreme, the board made a staffing decision against the recommendation of the ED. This led to a “decreased level of trust” in the board-ED relationship.

In another organization, each of the three respondents referred to a situation whereby the board made a strategic decision to increase its geographic reach. The board committee did not elicit proper input from the ED or other staff. As a result, the implementation was seen by all three respondents to have attributes that were not desirable, such as multiple marketing, legal, stakeholder communication, and other challenges during implementation. One of the BDs interviewed noted:

I would say the other thing would have been our consultation. So our board chair or the committee chair probably needed to work through with the exec on if we make this final decision. Implementation – how do we handle? So we need a better communication I would say between the board and the exec around how do we actually make this a reality. And how do we want to market a message around this. I think it is a little bit around consultation around the impact of the decision. And probably involving him in that conversation before you ultimately make it, so that you know what the relative impact would be. (BD18\_2)

The ED in this same organization echoed the BD’s comments as follows:

Nobody had thought about the implications about doing that. ... I think they should be saying ok the decision has been made. Management inform us of what the implementation strategy and plan is. Is there one in place? ... And we didn’t do that. There was no checking with the lawyer of what that might be. It was just done and passed. ... [There] is a conversation that needs to take place around those critical changes. (ED18)

This finding brings to light the fact that the role of the ED (or the inclusion/exclusion thereof) in influencing the process can have an impact on the outcome. The comments from the two respondents above demonstrate a number of consequences of not having elicited input from the ED. The ED further commented on the fact that “there was probably a breakdown [, and] some board members would understand that there was a lack of management and board connection on that” (ED18). When asked why he identified this situation, the ED noted “that would be probably the one example where I could say we could have done that collectively better” (ED18).

When one of the BDs was asked who was driving this process, she responded by noting this “was 100 percent driven by the board” (BD18\_1). “The board actually struck a task force” which “was led by one of the board members. It was felt to be a piece of governance work” (BD18\_1). The board’s role was “doing the due diligence that needed to be done on a number of fronts to make sure that that was the right decision for the organization” (BD18\_1). The dynamic was a bit of a “push-pull with the CEO”, with the CEO initiating the discussion, and the board then taking it on as a “piece of governance work”. The BD also noted a lesson from this process to be “involving [the ED] in that conversation before you ultimately make it” (BD18\_2). From this, it is clear that all three respondents from this organization retrospectively felt the outcome would have been more desirable by increasing the ED’s level of involvement and influence in the process. Interestingly, although the respondents referred to consultation, better communication, and collective effort, it is clear that the final decision still rests with the board.

In one organization, the newly hired ED headed a campaign committee in order to raise funds for the organization. The committee included board members and members of the general public. The ED noted that it was “a committee that reported to me” (ED17). The board members on the committee took up the role of “calling up friends” (ED17). A “lot of board members it turned out had connections with various foundations. And we were leaning on them as well” (ED17). When I asked whether

this “reversing of hats” does anything to affect the board-ED relationship, the ED replied with:

Sometimes, yes. Because it can be a little awkward when you have somebody who is not pulling their weight. And we did. We had one of the executive members was on the campaign cabinet and was basically there to hold me accountable. She was not raising any money. And so I had to ask her to leave and then go to a board meeting. It can cause a little bit of tension when they’re, because the dynamic was switched. If they are not pulling their weight I need to call them out. Usually they are the one doing that to me. (ED17)

By having open discussions and clarifying the role of committee members, the “awkward” dynamic was “sorted out” with “no hard feelings” (ED17). However, there was the awkward dynamic with the reversal of roles. In this example, the board and the ED chose an ad hoc committee structure that contained a reversal of the hierarchical structure normally existing in a board-ED relationship. When one board member chose not embrace this role, it created “a little bit of tension” (ED17). Advocates of distributed leadership claim that any individual actor can embrace a leadership function, as the task and situation may call for, then step back once the situation permits, allowing others to step in and lead (Contractor et al., 2012; Pearce and Conger, 2003). Although this was attempted in the current organization, one likely reason for the challenges faced by this organization is that it is difficult for individuals to relinquish control (Kramer and Crespy, 2011). Most importantly however, is that moving toward a more distributed form of leadership is encumbered by current systems, work practices, and hierarchical structures (Carsten et al., 2010; Fletcher, 2004), which are explicitly present in a governance structure.

With respect to mutual influence, two EDs spoke about age and tenure as a factor in defining the board-ED relationship. Comments, which I quoted earlier for a different purpose, from one ED include:

A CEO that's in his first ten years of a position is a different CEO than one that is this long into the game. The board defers quite a bit to myself simply because of the experience. I have been associated with [N5] longer than any one of them has been. So I would have privileges that other CEOs would not have. And I guess also responsibilities that other CEOs don't have. Because when you have got this much experience, and you have been around, you better have learned some things along the way. (ED5)

The second ED commented on age being a factor for him being able to push back in protecting previously prescribed role boundaries. From his comments, it is clear that he believes age to be a factor contributing to his influence in the board-ED relationship:

I'm not doing this for career advancement. I'm doing it so it works. I am sort of at an advantage to most EDs or CEOs that are, would be more reluctant to say this is not the way it works. Because I should have been retired eight years ago. A pension. So I'm doing this only because I love the work and I love how we help families. But if there is any kind of uncomfot zone for me I'm out of here. And that is sort of unique. That's unique. Because you can be a lot more bold when you aren't looking for a promotion, for salary increase, you are not looking for, you can be a lot more bold. But it's a lesson to other organizations that if you are bold with those roles it works. It works. (ED9)

As with earlier comments of older EDs feeling like they do not need a coach and mentor, an ED's influence in the decision making process and in maintaining role boundaries appears to be more pronounced with age.

Despite the repetition in the empirical material of distributed leadership, organizational documents frequently prescribe a top-down characterization of the board-ED relationship. After an examination of the organizational documents of the 18 nonprofit organizations under analysis, it is clear that the board formally holds seniority in title. In addition, orientation manuals that include organizational charts also depict



this hierarchical relationship. Examples of excerpts from organizational documents demonstrating this formal hierarchy include:

The Board will approve the hiring and release of the Chief Executive Officer, including the Chief Executive Officer's employment contract. (N5)

The President & CEO reports to and is responsible to the Board... (N9)

With assistance of the Governance Committee, the Board will be responsible for:

- The appointment, termination and succession of the CEO/ED;
- Approving CEO/ED compensation;
- Approving terms of reference for the CEO/ED;
- Monitoring CEO/ED performance and reviewing CEO/ED performance at least annually, against agreed upon written objectives;... (N16)

Further example excerpts from organizational documents are presented in *Figure 4.20*.

Figure 4.20 Promoting a hierarchical relationship

<p>The Board shall govern and manage all of the affairs of the Society to the best of its abilities. This includes recruitment, election and if necessary dismissal of the President &amp; CEO, and engaging in any other activities that promote the purposes of the Society. (N9)</p>
<p>The Board of Directors is responsible for the appointment, evaluation, compensation and release of the Executive Director... (N11)</p>
<p>The Executive Director is accountable to the Board in all matters related to the programs and the staff of [N17] over which he/she has authority. (N17)</p>
<p>The Executive Director will comply and cooperate with the monitoring processes established by the Board. (N17)</p>
<p>The Board has responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the appointment, termination and succession of the CEO;</li><li>• establishing CEO compensation;</li><li>• approving terms of reference for the CEO and delegation of authority to the CEO;</li><li>• monitoring CEO performance continuously and formally reviewing CEO performance at least annually ... (N18)</li></ul>

In each organization under analysis the board holds the power to appoint, terminate, monitor, and evaluate the ED as well as determine his or her compensation. The ED holds no formal power over the board or individual board member in terms of their appointment. These excerpts demonstrate the repetition of findings in the organizational documents that the ED in each organization is clearly subordinate to the board in the organizational hierarchy. Specifically, organizational documents portray and promote a top-down, unidirectional, influence from the board to the ED, thereby not encouraging distributed leadership.

### 4.7.3 *Summary*

In the significant situations highlighted in this section, evidence indicating the existence of distributed leadership was presented. I presented example significant situations that respondents chose to tell whereby desirable outcomes were attributed to the board and the ED working in partnership, with the ED (or members of the senior management team) having influence in the process. Examples were presented whereby mutual influence helped to build on one another's weaknesses. I then presented a number of examples of significant situations whereby the board worked in isolation on important decisions. In these examples, the outcome would have been more desirable if the board and management would have worked more closely together, ultimately encouraging more participation and influence by the management team.

With distributed leadership, leadership can come from anyone regardless of their formal position, and activities are accomplished by a collective rather than by individuals in formally defined positions (Jones, 2014; Kramer and Crespy, 2011). In the examples I presented in this section, respondents felt the benefits of including influence across hierarchal levels to be to capture further expertise and experiences in the process. When the EDs were not consulted, the board missed out on including their expertise in the decision making process. Advocates of distributed leadership outline benefits of distributed leadership to be the inclusion and pooling of diverse expertise, ultimately compensating for any weaknesses present in formal hierarchical positions (Gronn, 2002; Kramer and Crespy, 2011), which overcomes the need for the board to perform all of the essential leadership functions (Gronn, 2002).

Authors of distributed leadership also claim that distributed leadership will be more important when the task is highly interdependent, complex, and requires creativity (Pearce, 2004). In the significant situations I presented in this section, the roles of each actor can clearly be characterized as interdependent. Since each situation presented is also a non-routine task, often having potential staff morale, political, financial, and legal implications, a case can be made that distributed leadership was present (or should have

been) for complex decisions. Complex decisions require multiple perspectives, knowledge of the internal and external environment, and diverse expertise.

In the organizations under analysis, I have therefore demonstrated that distributed leadership is often present, and perceived to be a desirable leadership process. In this respect, the findings of mutual influence in the current study are not consistent with what would be expected from the transformational leadership literature. However, organizational documents still promote vertical leadership and hierarchical structures. Similarly, even when the ED and members of the senior management team were consulted in the decision making process, the end decision in most examples still rested with the board. These findings are consistent with Jones (2014) who found that distributed leadership “is not synonymous with democratic decision making” (2014, p 129), and that distributed leadership is a supplement to, rather than a replacement for, traditional forms of leadership extending down from formal hierarchical positions. Hierarchical structures continue to reinforce top-down influence (Carsten et al., 2010), with formal leaders still holding strong position power (Grint, 2010a; Oc and Bashshur, 2013).

#### 4.8 Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the leadership process in the context of the nonprofit board-ED relationship. The research design allowed me to shed some light on the behaviours of board members while being open to influences of contextual and situational factors, and influences of other organizational actors. Through inductive coding, it was found that the empirical material would most logically be organized and presented using the overarching labels of inspirational motivation, idealized influence, autonomy, individualized consideration and distributed leadership.

With respect to inspirational motivation, I started this chapter by providing evidence that positivity, enthusiasm and optimism are perceived as desirable behaviours among

board members. This was supported with example significant situations were each behaviour was displayed. It was also found that board members in the organizations under analysis have a passion for the organization's cause, and are then able to identify with the mission and make decisions in line with achieving that mission. In the next chapter, I discuss how (whether) each of these relates to transformational leadership theory. Board members are also future-oriented while creating a vision for the future. In order to foster a shared vision, a number of boards include the ED and senior staff in the strategic planning process. Throughout the visionary process I provided examples of significant situations that included elements of both vertical leadership as well as distributed leadership.

Idealized influence behaviours of big goals, being aggressive in executing those goals, making quick decisions, pushing through challenges to achieve their end goal, challenging the status quo and idea generation were generally perceived by board members as being ideal characteristics of a board member. Some dialectics in this section include the EDs often having frustration with the large goals and aggressive timelines, and quick decisions being viewed negatively when hiring an ED. Additionally, EDs commonly commented that board members are not being change agents or bringing new ideas to the organization.

Next, I presented the findings that relate to idealized influence attributed. The hierarchical structure that is promoted in a governance model creates a leader-follower distance between board members and employees/volunteers. This is then compounded with the part-time nature of the board's role, and the fact that meetings generally occur without employee or volunteer involvement. Each of these combined often results in the board being described as a "faceless entity". The finding that the chosen governance structure impacts on the ability to be perceived as a transformational leader is an important contextual finding.

In the next section, I presented repetition in the empirical material, whereby organizational documents and each respondent type commonly referred to autonomy as

a necessity in the board-ED relationship. I then presented numerous example significant situations whereby respondents attributed autonomy to lead to positive outcomes. Examples were also provided of times where board members overstepped their role boundaries, reducing the ED's decision control. Such stories typically led to undesirable outcomes (e.g. reduced trust). A further contribution of the current study is the findings and exploration of the antecedents of providing autonomy to the ED. Not only was evidence provided of an underexplored area in the leadership literature of trust in the ED, but furthermore, trust in the governance system was found as an antecedent; The latter being unique to the context of board member leadership. Throughout this section, I have embedded findings of ED influence in the leadership process. For example, EDs of greater age claimed to play a role in maintaining role boundaries. In the next chapter I outline how autonomy, as found in the current study, has characteristics of both top-down and distributed leadership models.

The section on individualized consideration is discussed in the next chapter as having two contributions to the literature. First, the findings challenge current conceptualizations of transformational leadership theory, which places diverse behaviours in the same component. Specifically, top-down supportive behaviours were repetitive in the data, while top-down coaching and mentoring were not. The next contribution is that evidence of bottom-up individualized consideration suggests that in the context of the board-ED relationship, hierarchical boundaries are commonly crossed.

In the last section of this chapter, I presented evidence of distributed leadership. In many instances each respondent type referred to the board-ED relationship not as one of a dichotomized leader-follower relationship, but as one of collegiality and shared influence. Numerous significant situations were presented whereby members of the board and the ED (or employees) worked together. Interestingly, although the relationship was described as collegial, often times the board still had the final decision making authority. In the next section, I further develop how this relates to current theoretical and empirical research (e.g. hybridity).

Throughout this chapter, I presented evidence whereby behaviours identified in the significant situations told by respondents are theoretically validated to be representative of select behaviours contained within the model of transformational leadership. However, as no behaviour is relevant in every situation, dialectics are embedded throughout. I have also presented evidence throughout each section whereby the context (e.g. governance structure) influences the leadership process. Another interesting finding that is embedded within each and every section of this chapter is evidence of both vertical leadership and distributed leader. In the next chapter, I engage with each of these findings as they relate to theory.

## Chapter five: Discussion and conclusions

### 5.1 Introduction

The research questions in this thesis were built on what I have argued to be shortcomings in the leadership and governance literature. In the introductory chapter, I discussed the need for a new lens in the governance literature - one that recognizes that board members are human actors working within a social context (He and Huang, 2011). The academic and practitioner literature have also been calling for an increased role of the board; one that recognizes that board members (potentially/should) play a role beyond monitoring and controlling, and beyond resource acquisition. Characterizing the board members and the board context in this way suggests that a natural trajectory would be to examine the influence process at the board-level through psychological and behavioural lenses. However, previous research bringing the leadership literature into the board domain has been scant (Bailey and Peck, 2013; Chait et al., 2005; Erakovic and Jackson, 2012; Erakovic et al., 2011; McCambridge, 2004; van Ees et al., 2009).

Failing to further problematize the concept of leadership at this point would have led me to uncritically apply current approaches to leadership research in an examination of such actors. The natural course of action then would have been to use a behavioural description questionnaire (e.g. MLQ), examining the extent to which board member behaviours align with a predetermined list of behaviours (no more, no less). However, throughout a review of the literature, I argued that current leadership theories (e.g. transformational leadership) are plagued with conceptual and measurement problems.

Transformational leadership theory has been defined in terms of both behaviours and effects (Avolio et al., 1999; Spector, 2014; Tourish, 2014; Yukl, 1999; Yukl et al., 2002), is still (after 30 years) ambiguously defined (Hinkin and Tracey, 1999; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999), has diverse behaviours within the same



construct and between constructs (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 1999), still has unclear inclusion/exclusion criteria for behaviours in the model (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), and has been criticized for missing key behaviours that are represented in other leadership and behavioural models (Antonakis et al., 2003; Michel et al., 2011; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004; Yukl, 1999). For these reasons, it is important to understand the leadership process at the board-level “without the handicap of the higher-order label” of transformational leadership, but while still recognizing the contribution that the theory has made (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013, p 3).

Throughout this thesis, I have also argued that leadership research has been dominated by positivist approaches (Collinson and Grint, 2005; Ford, 2010; Gardner et al., 2010). Such approaches have been unable to challenge the underlying assumptions (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). Behavioural description questionnaires, focusing exclusively on the leader’s behaviours, continue to reinforce leader agency (Collinson and Tourish, in press), and are closed to the exploration of alternative influences. Additionally, such approaches are also relatively insensitive to context (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010).

Current leadership research has generally been accepting of conventional conceptualizations and (mostly) flawed empirical frameworks, compounded by a narrow ontological positioning, and has thus been unable to problematize the concept of leadership (Bryman 2004). When viewing leadership as a complex, co-constructed, fluid process, involving multiple actors, and intertwined with contextual and situational factors, it is not conceivable to believe that universal laws will be obtained or be practically relevant (Bryman, 2004; Ford, 2010; Shamir, 2007; Tourish, 2014; Tourish, 2013a). Consistently, “the more ‘scientific’ our methods of analysis become, the less likely we are to understand leadership because it is not accessible to scientific approaches” (Grint, 2000, p 4). Subscribing to this positioning, I addressed the research questions of this thesis by adopting an interpretive, inductive, theory building approach, and by taking the stance that leadership and governance involve social actors and to generalize or to claim that a definitive truth can be discovered would be a considerable

leap of faith (Laughlin, 1995). The inductive approach to research design and data-driven coding of the empirical material allowed for the discovery of behaviours, influences, and contextual and situational factors, unconstrained by the perils of transformational leadership theory.

Within this positioning, I argue that the employment of the CIT (critical incident technique; Flanagan, 1954) is, of itself, a contribution to the leadership literature. Although the CIT has been used quite extensively in multiple disciplines, including varied streams within the general management literature, it has unfortunately received only scant (and mostly quantitative) employment in the leadership literature. The CIT question was crafted to minimize researcher presupposition, allowing for the discovery of alternative explanations to the leadership process (e.g. influence of other actors), and is especially sensitive to the context in which governance actors engage. Given that the technique focuses the respondent onto actual events (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Moss et al., 2003), it elicits rich details of specific situations, including background context, which has been called for in leadership research (Ford, 2010; Lewis et al., 2010).

In the following sections, I present a dialogue between the findings in this study and current literature. I start with a discussion of which leadership behaviours respondents claimed to be desirable in the context of board leadership. This provides a platform to interrogate a number of conceptual and empirical shortcomings of transformational leadership theory. A discussion of autonomy further highlights such challenges, while drawing attention to contextual factors as well as to influences from alternative organizational actors. This is followed by a discussion of bidirectional influences in the leadership process. Throughout this chapter, implications for theory remain at the fore. This is then followed by a discussion of limitations, recommendations for future research, and implications for practice. I end this chapter with a more focused set of conclusions.

## 5.2 Select top-down behaviours

### 5.2.1 *Introduction*

After 30 years of research on transformational leadership, the question of what transformational leadership actually is still remains a difficult question for theorists to answer (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). This is due to the fact that the theory has been ambiguously specified, with behaviours broadly defined (Hinkin and Tracey, 1999; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999). Despite such shortcomings, others have ironically noted that the model is missing key behaviours that are found in other leadership models (Antonakis et al., 2003; Michel et al., 2011; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004; Yukl, 1999). These contentions draw attention to the lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria of transformational leadership. Bass (1985) and the mass bandwagon of researchers that followed suit have not clearly defined transformational leadership, why some behaviours are in and others are out, or how the behaviours are conceptually claimed to work together or substitute for one another (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013).

In the analysis chapter, I presented evidence of a number of behaviours that have been argued to fall within the constructs of inspirational motivation, idealized influence, and within individualized consideration. The presentation of such behaviours is a catalyst to discuss conceptual and measurement problems within transformational leadership theory.

### 5.2.2 *Inspirational motivation*

Consistent with descriptions of inspirational motivation, the respondents in the current study referred to board members as being positive, enthusiastic, optimistic, visionary, long-term oriented, and as promoting a shared vision. The respondents additionally noted displaying passion for the organization's cause, identifying with the organization's mission, and making decisions that are in the best interest of the organization and consistent with the organization's mission, as desirable behaviours. In

this section, I highlight how (and whether) each of these findings relates to transformational leadership theory.

The respondents in the current study claimed that board members demonstrate positivity, enthusiasm and optimism. Most authors describe such characteristics as being key components of charisma (e.g. Bono and Ilies, 2006; Ilies et al., 2006), and most specifically, of inspirational motivation (e.g. Antonakis et al., 2003; Bass et al., 2003; Eagly et al., 2003). This is an important finding, as other studies have associated such attributes among leaders with desirable outcomes (e.g. mood contagion, follower commitment, increased effort) at the individual and organizational level (Bono and Ilies, 2006; Cole et al., 2009).

Although the exhibition of such characteristics is not directly referred to on any item on the MLQ, “talks optimistically” and “talks enthusiastically” are contained in the primary measurement instrument (Author’s own interpretation of the MLQ; Avolio and Bass, 2004). Therefore, the finding that board members display positivity, enthusiasm, and optimism, and that such behaviours are perceived by each respondent type to be desirable behaviours, is consistent with behaviours of transformational leadership. However, these behaviours are not unique to transformational leadership and have been studied in other leadership models (e.g. Authentic leadership; Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Luthans and Avolio, 2003; Woolley et al., 2011) and have frequently been examined unconstrained by such models (e.g. Eberly and Fong, 2013).

Despite the repetition of findings of positivity, passion for, and identification with, the organization’s mission being desirable attributes of board members, the respondents commonly mentioned the ability to make emotionless decisions as a necessity of board member behaviour. This seemingly paradoxical finding can be explained in a number of ways. It suggests that there is a point at which excessive positivity, enthusiasm, optimism and passion become harmful. The MLQ rates behaviours on a frequency scale (Avolio and Bass, 2004), whereby more is presumed to be better. Silent in transformational leadership theory is that with all behaviours there is likely an optimal

amount to display, and that amount is unlikely to be the maximum amount (Yukl, 2012). Using the example of positivity, excessive positivity can hinder critical thought (Collinson, 2012).

With few studies emphasizing the quality and timing of behaviours (Yukl, 2012), the use of the CIT provided detailed accounts of situations in which positivity is considered desirable, and detailed accounts of when positivity and emotion are detrimental to organizational outcomes (e.g. leading with hearts and emotion left the organization vulnerable). Therefore, the detailed accounts of situations wherein leadership behaviours are perceived to be desirable in the board context are clearly a contribution to the literature, which normally prescribes more as being better.

The board members in the organizations under analysis also have a passion for their organization's cause, and are thus able to identify with the mission of their respective organization. Consistent with this finding, each respondent type spoke about board members making decisions that are perceived to be in the best interest of achieving their organization's mission. This supports the suitability of research on such behaviours at the board-level and the appropriateness of a leadership lens, while further reinforcing the limitations of current lenses. For example, such findings contradict the core assumptions of conflict of interest and self-interest found in agency theory (the most frequently used board lens).

Although it is said that transformational leaders make decisions in line with the collective sense of the mission (Bass and Riggio, 2006), advocates of transformational leadership rarely mention being passionate for an organization's cause, or being able to identify with an organization's mission, to be part of the model. Consistently, such behaviours and attributes are not contained in the measurement instrument (Author's own interpretation of the MLQ; Avolio and Bass, 2004). In this sense, I have identified behaviours that are perceived by the respondents to be important in the board leadership context, but that such behaviours are missing from transformational leadership theory. This further highlights the lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria in Bass' (1985) model

(van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). Current methodologies (primarily positivist positioning, employing behaviour description questionnaires) would have been unable to problematize the concept of leadership. In the current study, by using an interpretive, inductive, theory building approach, I was able to identify behaviours not explicit in the dominant leadership theories, which are important to the current context, and I was able to further elaborate on the intricacies of such behaviours.

In the current study, organizational documents frequently referred to the role of the board as creating and maintaining the organization's vision. It is also clear from the respondents' comments that board members not only perceive this to be of importance, but that such behaviour is also occurring. Many board members in the current study spoke about their role being to look many years into the future, and to have a clear vision for the future, and identified long-term orientation as a desirable characteristic of a board member.

Charismatic leaders have been described as future-oriented (Bass, 2003; Karakitapoglu-Aygun and Gumusluoglu, 2013; Waldman et al., 2004), with a key element of inspirational motivation being the articulation of a vision (Griffin et al., 2010; Kark and Dijk, 2007; Sarros et al., 2011). One of the sample questions on the MLQ within the inspirational motivation construct asks whether the leader "articulates a compelling vision of the future" (Avolio and Bass, 2004, p 115). Transformational leaders tend to articulate visions that are value-based (Brown and Trevino, 2009; Kark and Dijk, 2007), optimistic (Dvir et al., 2004; Sosik and Dinger, 2007), inspirational (Conger et al., 2000; Sosik and Dinger, 2007), discrepant from the status quo (Conger et al., 2000; Griffin et al., 2010; Levay, 2010), ambitious (Sarros et al., 2008), and future-oriented (De Hoogh et al., 2005; Ilies et al., 2006; Kohles, 2012). Leader vision has been linked to a number of desirable outcomes, such as employee motivation, organizational commitment, organizational culture, and support for innovation (Dvir et al., 2004; Kohles et al., 2013; Sarros et al., 2011; Sarros et al., 2008).

The findings of the current study are also consistent with theoretical contentions that state that higher-level leaders are more likely to engage in visionary behaviours. Shamir and Howell (1999) contend that the formulation and articulation of a vision is more likely to apply to higher level rather than lower level managers. Consistently, the visionary component of charisma is a tool available to high-level leaders, with large spans of control, who may have less ability to build relationships with individual followers by other means. The finding of visionary leadership in the current study demonstrates the need to examine such behaviours at the board-level. However, as visionary and strategic leadership have long been topics of conversation in the organizational behaviour literature, there is nothing particularly unique about the visionary leadership behaviour in transformational leadership (Sosik and Dinger, 2007).

Many other behaviours in the transformational leadership model have been found to be less relevant to higher level and distant leaders. For example, conceptual papers have argued (e.g. Shamir, 1995), and empirical papers have found (e.g. Dvir et al., 2002), that the means by which leaders influence followers requires a different set of behaviours with higher distance than with lower distance. In the current study, developmental behaviours were quite scant; and reasons were provided for this. The findings in the current study thus lead to the conclusion that not all behaviours are equally important (not chosen as memorable to discuss in the significant situations) in the leadership process at the board-level. Such findings contribute to the concern raised by critical leadership authors, who note it has not been conceptually specified how certain behaviours work together or why certain behaviours (specifically behaviours more pronounced in lower level leadership) are included while other behaviours are excluded (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013), and that not all behaviours are relevant in every situation or context.

### *5.2.3 Idealized influence behavioural*

In this section, consistent with idealized influence, I presented evidence of board members having lofty goals, taking aggressive steps to achieving those goals, pushing through challenges, taking risks, challenging the status quo, and bringing new ideas to

the organization. Each of these behaviours has been associated with transformational leadership. However, given the ambiguity of the definition of transformational leadership, the lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria, and the inconsistency between the conceptual and measurement models (Hinkin and Tracey, 1999; van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999), these topics have seen variable levels of conceptual and empirical attention.

Transformational and charismatic leaders have been characterized as exhibiting ambitious goals (Schaubroeck et al., 2007), challenging goals (Karakitapoglu-Aygun and Gumusluoglu, 2013), lofty visions (Conger et al., 2000), and lofty goals (Balkundi et al., 2011). Examples of ambitious and lofty goals in the significant situations include large missions, organizational growth, fundraising targets, size and timing of infrastructure projects, and increasing geographical reach. With respect to such transformational leadership characteristics, board members in the current organizations demonstrate such behaviours. Although theorists of transformational leadership may have identified an important behaviour when describing a leader, large goals are not present on the MLQ (Author's own interpretation of the MLQ; Avolio and Bass, 2004). Therefore, the conceptual definition has not been consistent with how advocates of transformational leadership have continued to quantify the model, with respect to a behaviour that is particularly important to the present context. Thus, the continued use of current methods would not have been able to capture this important behaviour. Through the use of the CIT, I was able to identify such behaviours, and provide examples of positive situations that were perceived to have originated from the lofty goals of board members.

Consistent with big goals, I presented behavioural themes whereby board members push through challenges and take aggressive steps to achieve those goals. It was clear from the interviews that each respondent type noted such behaviours to be necessary for the achievement of big goals. Examples of significant situations were presented in which aggressive actions, and pushing through challenges and resistance, underpinned the achievement of big goals. Since advocates of transformational leadership have been



relatively silent on the underlying processes for such behaviours, another contribution of the current study is the ways in which leaders are able to achieve such goals. Although this terminology is not frequently used in the leadership literature, transformational leaders have been characterized as demonstrating persistence and determination (Avolio and Bass, 2004; Bass and Riggio, 2006; Diaz-Saenz, 2011). The terminology used in the literature to explain the behaviours through which large goals are achieved is thus of a lot more 'passive' nature, than how respondents in the current study have chosen to characterize these behaviours.

With respect to idealized influence behaviours, it can therefore be concluded that the behaviours of board members in the organizations under analysis can be explained (in part) by transformational leadership theory. Specifically, select behaviours from the model of transformational leadership were found to be repetitive in the data at this level of the organization. The empirical construct of idealized influence has very diverse content (Yukl, 1999), and has conceptually been defined as having even greater breadth than that measured on the MLQ. For example, talking about the importance of mutual trust (Yukl, 1999), the display of ethical behaviour (Burns, 1978), or the creation of strong emotional ties between the leader and the follower (Rowold and Heinitz, 2007) were not identified through the current research approach.

From the empirical material, it is evident that the board members of the nonprofit organizations under analysis display select behaviours consistent with charisma (inspirational motivation and idealized influence). This is not surprising, given a number of authors have conceptually claimed or empirically found such behaviours to be more frequently displayed among organizational actors residing at higher organizational levels (Bruch and Walter, 2007), and to be more effective at such levels (Edwards and Gill, 2012).

In earlier chapters, I argued that diversity within the dimensions is not only conceptually problematic, but creates measurement problems when attempting to quantify the constructs of transformational leadership. The heterogeneity of influencing

factors is also problematic as it would be irrational to believe that all behaviours will be practiced (or relevant) in all situations. The findings in the current study (e.g. that select behaviours are repetitive, while others were not repetitive in the respondents' account of events) support the need to examine leadership behaviours unconstrained by the diversity and ambiguity of transformational leadership theory (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013).

#### *5.2.4 Individualized consideration*

One way in which transformational leaders are said to be able to influence those around them is through individualized consideration, whereby they “pay special attention to each individual follower’s needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p 7). Individualized consideration includes both developmental (coaching and mentoring) and supporting behaviours (Bass, 1985; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 2002).

Developmental support, which includes coaching and mentoring (Yukl, 1999), occurs when transformational leaders advise employees on their career, encourage them to undertake further training, and delegate with the intention of facilitating skill development (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). Supportive leadership has been defined as “showing consideration, acceptance, and concern for the needs and feelings of other people” (Yukl, 2002, p 20). Supportive leadership behaviours include: listening carefully, effectively managing the emotions of followers, and showing concern for followers’ welfare, demonstrating evidence of caring, showing consideration for the feelings of others, and the provision of sympathy (Amabile et al., 2004; Dawley et al., 2008; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006; Yukl, 2012).

The inclusion of these distinct behaviours within the single component of individualized consideration has received only scant criticism. In an empirical examination of employee attitudes in a large Australian public sector organization, Rafferty and Griffin (2006) found developmental and supportive leadership to be empirically distinct constructs, which correspondingly have different effects on

followers. Recent scholars have also criticized the inclusion of supportive behaviours in the transformational leadership model, due to empirical examinations having demonstrated weak relationships with desirable outcomes (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006, 2004; Yukl, 2002).

In the significant situations presented in this study, little evidence was found of board members demonstrating developmental behaviours in their interactions with EDs. In this study, the repetition of findings were presented whereby EDs felt that mentoring and coaching were either not the board's role or that the board does not have the capabilities or knowledge to provide this function. A lack of evidence of developmental support can be explained from the literature in a number of ways. First, in a mentoring relationship, the mentor is commonly characterized as a senior employee and the protégé as a more junior, less knowledgeable employee (Dawley et al., 2008). Such relationships are also commonly characterized with the mentor being of greater age than the protégé (Bass, 1985; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). Although EDs tended to be younger than BCs, only one ED was under 41 years of age. In addition, even advocates of transformational leadership would be unlikely to characterize an ED as a junior employee.

Although the board is formally in a superior hierarchical role to the ED, the ED is a full-time employee of the organization, making it difficult for part-time board members to be viewed as 'senior' in terms of knowledge. In addition, the EDs in the participating organizations had the longest average tenure (8.11 years) of each of the three roles under analysis, followed by the BCs (7.44 years) and BDs (6.14 years). Such findings further challenge the board members' abilities to be viewed as a mentors to the ED.

If my findings were inconsistent with other empirical examinations, the lack of findings of developmental behaviours could be explained primarily with the contextual peculiarities of board member research. However, others authors have identified a similar phenomenon in other contexts. For example, Arnold and Loughlin (2010) interviewed senior leaders from both the public and private sectors across Canada. The

authors found that leaders more frequently reported engaging in supportive, as opposed to developmental, behaviours of individualized consideration. Although the current study and findings by Arnold and Loughlin (2010) suggest that developmental behaviours are used less frequently, such a finding should not undermine the importance of engaging in such behaviours. In a study of employees in a large public sector organization in Australia, Rafferty and Griffin (2006) found that developmental leadership had a positive relationship with affective commitment, career certainty, role breadth self efficacy and job satisfaction. In a meta-analysis, Allen et al. (2004) similarly found mentoring to be related to job and career satisfaction and commitment.

Despite the lack of findings of board members engaging in developmental behaviours, I provided evidence of the repetition of findings of board members providing general support to the ED. More specifically, board members in the current study provided support to the ED by acting as a sounding board, responding to specific requests for support (e.g. board member expertise), demonstrating sympathy, and being generally supportive of the ED's role in executing his/her responsibilities in achieving board developed ends.

The findings of supportive behaviours being more repetitive than developmental behaviours is not surprising as studies have found such behaviours to occur more frequently (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010). Similarly, recent work has commonly defined the component of individualized consideration as being synonymous to providing supportive leadership behaviours (Arnold and Loughlin, 2006; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). However, such a shift is arguably problematic, as empirical work has found supportive behaviours to have a weak relationship with desirable outcomes (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010; Rafferty and Griffin, 2006).

It can therefore be concluded that supportive and developmental behaviours are not exhibited simultaneously, or with equal weight, with the former tending to be more commonly displayed. The lack of developmental behaviours found in the current study is particularly troubling for transformational leadership theory, as it is a major element

of individualized consideration, and it has been noted that individualized consideration “distinguishes transformational leadership” from other modern leadership theories (Rafferty and Griffin, 2004, p 333). I have therefore found conceptual flaws with respect to the very component that is supposed to differentiate transformational leadership theory from other leadership theories.

#### *5.2.5 Intellectual stimulation*

Throughout the analysis and discussion chapters, intellectual stimulation has not received any attention. There was not enough repetition, in my (subjective) reading of the empirical material, to form themes of behaviours that are said to make up the construct of intellectual stimulation. This lack of finding could be due to a number of factors. For example, one could speculate that either the behaviours were not present (being less prominently used in the context of board leadership) or that this type of behaviour is not readily captured by the methods employed in the current study. For example, to “re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate” (A question on the MLQ; Avolio and Bass, 2004, p 112), may not be a memorable behaviour to recall in an interview setting.

Additionally, the way in which the component is defined is a likely contributing factor. The component of intellectual stimulation is ambiguously defined, whereby what the leader actually says or does is not clearly specified (Yukl, 1999). Intellectual stimulation is also defined in terms of both an absence of behaviours and by the effects such behaviours have on followers. For example, Bass and Riggio (2006) contend that “ideas are not criticized because they are different from the leaders’ ideas” (2006, p 7). Defined in this way, because criticizing of ideas was not repetitive in the data, does this mean that every study that does not find such behaviour (an absence of such behaviours) confirms that intellectual stimulation is present? Not surprisingly, intellectual stimulation is the most underdeveloped component of transformational leadership theory (Lowe et al., 1996; Rafferty and Griffin, 2004).

### 5.2.6 Summary

The findings of the current study have clearly shone some light on conceptual problems with transformational leadership. In the empirical material, I found *select* behaviours that were repetitive, while other behaviours were not particularly repetitive. The behaviours that were found in this study, which were highlighted by respondents to be desirable attributes of board members, are not unique to transformational leadership. For example, visionary leadership and positivity, which were particularly pronounced in the current project, have also been examined in other leadership models, and studied independent of (and unconstrained by transformational) leadership theory. Individualized consideration, which has been argued to be a distinguishing feature of transformational leadership theory (Rafferty and Griffin, 2004), involves diverse behaviours that are displayed at different times.

I can therefore conclude that the behaviours within the model are diverse, with select behaviours being more prominent in the context of board leadership (findings of the presence of some behaviours and of the absence of others). Additionally, the behaviours found are not particularly unique to transformational leadership theory. The findings of the current study therefore support recent conceptual criticisms, which suggest that individual behaviours should be examined without the “conceptual shackles” of transformational leadership theory (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013). An analysis of individual distinct behaviours, such as I have performed, allows for a “more comprehensive analysis of the elements and conditions” of effective behaviours (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013, p 47).

From a practitioner perspective, such a diverse and conceptually ambiguous model is impractical. Since scholars have been unable to clearly define transformational leadership, how can it be taught? The report provided to practitioners, based on their MLQ ratings, includes a construct score, whereby “a lower score on intellectual stimulation, for example, means exhibiting less of this style” (Avolio and Bass, 2004, p 9). With such diverse behaviours appearing within each construct, and activated in

different contexts and situations, how does one improve their leadership ability based on such an overarching score? Even Avolio and Bass (2004) recognize that leaders “should pick just one area to work on and to focus on for at least three months or optimally six” (2004, p 9). If it is impractical to work on multiple behaviours at one time, the behaviours within a construct are diverse, and different behaviours are relevant at different times, what is the practical relevance of such an ambiguous theory? – especially one that is claimed to be universally relevant and fails to recognize dialectics (unknown, unintended, inconsistent, or even conflicting outcomes). For example, I have demonstrated that current theory fails to recognize too much of a good thing (e.g. positivity) or negative side effects (e.g. reduced morale when fixated on mission driven decisions).

The approach used in this thesis allowed me to inductively examine the leadership process. Had I employed a behavioural descriptive questionnaire, as is frequently the case (Bryman, 2004; Hunt and Dodge, 2001; Yukl, 2012), a number of the behaviours that organizational actors purport to be important at the board-level (e.g. passion, aggression) would not have been discovered. Similarly, the contextual factors and influences of other organizational actors, which I present in the following sections, would not have been captured to the same degree.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I spent some time presenting the numerous calls for examining board members through a leadership lens. The repetition of findings of numerous *select* behaviours being displayed at the board-level supports the suitability of the adoption of behavioural lenses at the board-level.

### 5.3 Autonomy, contextual and alternative influences

#### 5.3.1 Introduction

Autonomy and empowerment have historically been examined within seemingly paradoxical frameworks; this has included investigating them as a part of the definition of laissez faire leadership (Bass, 1999), as a key feature of transformational leadership (Castro et al., 2008; Dvir et al., 2002; Kark et al., 2003), and as one component of the jobs characteristics model (Hackman and Oldham, 1975), while others have characterized it as a stream of shared leadership (Kramer and Crespy, 2011; Pearce, 2004; Pearce and Sims, 2002). In the current project, the process of providing autonomy and empowerment takes on characteristics consistent with both vertical leadership (e.g. active leader agency) and distributed leadership. The act of providing autonomy involves relinquishing control, which is a form of distributed leadership. The ED similarly plays a role in maintaining previously defined role boundaries, which is evidence of bidirectional influence. However, the board plays a disproportionately larger role in delineating and maintaining role boundaries – characteristics I demonstrate as being consistent with transformational leadership.

Being historically viewed as a passive leadership style, empowerment was included in the definition of laissez faire leadership (Bass, 1999). However, it was later seen as a proactive approach, whereby empowerment by the leader “implied giving followers autonomy, but giving it with reason and interest in what was delegated” (Bass, 1999, p 21). Numerous authors associate empowerment with transformational leadership, suggesting that empowering followers is one of the defining features of transformational leadership over transactional leadership, whereby transformational leaders emphasize the independence and proactivity of followers over control or exchange (Avolio et al., 2004; Castro et al., 2008; Dvir et al., 2002; Kark et al., 2003). Interestingly, despite this theoretical contention, autonomy is not part of the MLQ (Author’s interpretation of the MLQ; Avolio and Bass, 2004; Yukl, 1999).



### *5.3.2 Providing autonomy and empowerment*

Consistent with the organizational documentation, it was found that each respondent type views granting full autonomy to the ED in pursuit of board chosen ends to be an ideal practice in a board-ED relationship, and also to be critical for the achievement of positive organizational outcomes such as growth. In the documents it was frequently mentioned that the board should delegate the day-to-day management of the organization to the ED, who has autonomy in choosing how to operate the organization with an eye toward fulfilling ends set by the board. Given that autonomy is part of the governance structure that boards have chosen to construct (e.g. which is also supported by board documentation), I can conclude that the provision of this level of autonomy is also a contextual finding. Thus, the chosen board structure promotes autonomy.

### *5.3.3 Accepting autonomy and empowerment*

It has also been contended that individual characteristics affect the autonomy process. Individuals who are at the higher levels of an organization have been found to attach more value to control and autonomy than those individuals at the lower levels of the organization (Huang et al., 2010). Ergeneli et al. (2007) note that individuals with high self-determination often feel that they have the autonomy to determine how to execute their role. The finding of EDs embracing autonomy and empowerment are therefore not surprising, given that they occupy the highest role within the organizational structure, reporting formally to the board. Chen and Aryee (2007) note that in order for delegation to be effective, the individual must be “willing to accept responsibility for the execution of duties assigned to him or her” (2007, p 235). Ergeneli et al. (2007) similarly note that the individual receiving decision control must be aware of it and feel empowered in order for the organization to reap the benefits of the empowerment process. In the current study, the comments made by EDs provided evidence highlighting the fact that giving the ED autonomy is currently generally occurring in the participating organizations. Executive directors are therefore aware of the level of autonomy being provided. It is clear that EDs appear to not only embrace their role, evidence was also

provided of EDs expressing frustration when board members overstepped the role boundary (meddle), and entered into a previously delegated responsibility.

The findings of both EDs and board members having high expectations of autonomy/empowerment are also of importance, as Humborstad and Kuvass (2013) found role ambiguity to be lower when the expectations of empowerment of both leaders and subordinates match. When leaders overestimate subordinate empowerment expectations, role ambiguity increases and extrinsic motivation decreases. In this study it is clear that both the board members and the ED share a clear understanding that the execution of strategy is to be delegated to the ED, without board interference. This high level of autonomy, driven by the chosen governance structure, combined with the desire for autonomy of higher level employees (e.g. the ED), suggests that this level of autonomy is an important contextual finding. A high level of autonomy is thus not only more prominently embraced at this level of the organization, but is further promoted in the context of the board-ED relationship.

#### *5.3.4 Role clarity and clear expectations*

When examining behaviours through complex leadership models (e.g. transformational leadership), the ability to capture the intricacies of individual processes is quite limited. By examining autonomy outside of a predefined framework, I was able to capture a number of intricacies related to this process. This study not only examined the level of autonomy and empowerment at the highest level, but also further identified a number of antecedents in the autonomy and empowerment process. Despite the benefits of autonomy, contexts exist wherein too much autonomy can lead to increased role ambiguity, reduced motivation, greater stress and anxiety, insecurity, as well as reduced organizational commitment. Increased autonomy has most notably been identified to increase role ambiguity (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013). Spreitzer (1996) similarly notes that “imprecise lines of authority may create uncertainty” (1996, p 497). Role ambiguity is the “extent of uncertainty about the expectations of one’s roles” (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013, p 365). Gebert et al. (2003) find that there can be too much autonomy being provided if it is not “absorbed” by the recipients.

In an earlier influential paper on psychological empowerment, Spreitzer (1996) notes that only when “individuals understand their roles in organizations can those roles take on personal meaning” (1996, p 487). Uncertainty and role ambiguity are dealt with in participating organizations by means of two overarching techniques – i) role and boundary clarity, and ii) setting clear expectations. There was congruence between the organizational documents and the perceptions of board members and EDs with respect to the need for delineating clear roles and role boundaries.

In order to ensure that board members work within their prescribed roles (and not meddle), respondents claimed to have achieved staying within role boundaries by ensuring roles are communicated to board members through board training and discussion, by having the BC guide board meeting conversations, and having an ED who is able to challenge the board members whenever they overstep their roles. This is an important finding, given that the underlying tactics used in organizations to achieve role and boundary clarity have not been developed in the literature. These findings further provide clarification and practical applications for practitioners on how to inform and adhere to role boundaries. Important to leadership theories is that the board clearly plays a disproportionately larger role in defining roles and setting role boundaries. The empirical material in this study suggests that leadership theorists need to pay more attention to these issues, but an examination of such intricacies is difficult to carry out when working within (constrained by) a complex model such as transformational leadership.

The organizational documents, and each respondent type, also commonly referred to the board’s role in setting clear expectations for the ED, and monitor against those expectations. Since role ambiguity is the “extent of uncertainty about the expectations of one’s roles” (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013, p 365), setting clear expectations would logically represent a remedy. Avolio et al. (2004) contend that goal clarification is among a number of factors that facilitate feelings of empowerment. Providing clear expectations and setting goals is an attribute of transformational leaders (Conger et al.,

2000; Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Jung et al., 2003). Spreitzer (1996) notes that if “people do not know the extent of their authority and what is expected of them, they will hesitate to act” (1996, p 487). Gebert et al. (2003) similarly find clarity of the strategic course set by an organization to be the necessary in the delegation process. In order for individuals to feel empowered, they must therefore understand the goals and expectations of their organization (Spreitzer, 1996). In the current study, each respondent type referred not only to the importance of the board outlining organizational goals (ends), but also to the fact that setting clear expectations for the ED are currently occurring in the participating organizations. If the ED has a clear perception of the outcomes expected by the board, she/he can then work toward achieving the end goals.

The findings in the current study, of board members providing an active (and top-down) role in providing role clarity, setting role boundaries, and providing clear expectations, can be characterized as vertical leadership. Despite the disproportionately larger agency role played by the board in the autonomy process, the ED also played a role in maintaining role boundaries, as evidenced by EDs taking a stance in protecting previously defined decision control. The findings of autonomy in the context of the nonprofit board-ED relationship therefore appears to be more in line with a hybrid model of leadership. The act of providing (e.g. giving up decision control) and maintaining autonomy, as found in the current study, by definition recognizes and allows for alternative influences. Characterizing autonomy in this way suggests that autonomy is a form of distributed leadership, in the sense that distributed leadership “involves relinquishing control” (Kramer and Crespy, 2011, p 1025). This finding undermines the purely unidirectional focus of transformational leadership.

### *5.3.5 Trust in the ED and the governance mechanisms*

This study focuses not only on examining the level of autonomy and empowerment provided at the highest level, but, more importantly, identifies a number of antecedents in the autonomy and empowerment process. The current study further examines an underexplored research area by identifying the underlying mechanisms that foster delegation (Chua and Iyengar, 2011) from the perspective of the board member. Board

member trust in the ED appears to be a prerequisite to relinquishing control. This is not surprising, given that previous studies have found that managers grant greater autonomy and resources to trusted subordinates because the manager has more confidence that the task will be completed (Brower et al., 2009; Hakimi et al., 2010). Through delegation, leaders dependent on their subordinates (Hakimi et al., 2010) are vulnerable to the integrity and competence of the subordinate. Giving up control can thereby be viewed as an expression of trust in an individual's capabilities and integrity (Avolio et al., 2004; Chua and Iyenger, 2011).

Trust is commonly studied in the leadership literature, as well as the autonomy and empowerment literature, in regard to followers' trust in the leader. The finding of trust in the ED as a prerequisite to relinquishing control is an important one, as the leaders' trust in their followers is widely overlooked in the literature (Brower et al., 2009; Hakimi et al., 2010). Furthermore, there is a lack of field research exploring trust as a prerequisite to autonomy/empowerment (Ergeneli et al., 2007). Although it is exploratory, the repetition of findings of the importance of trust in the board-ED relationship is therefore significant. Only by problematizing leadership could I have found that the leaders' perspective of other organizational actors impacts the leadership process. Advocates of transformational leadership (and other vertical leadership theories) have been fixated on the infamous others' perception of the leader.

Relinquishing control being contingent on trust in the governance and control systems is a distinct, but equally powerful contextual finding. Given the exploratory nature of this finding, future research should further develop which control mechanisms foster trust, and how board members judge the integrity of such control systems. Examples were presented in which board members, being unfamiliar with the control mechanism, were more likely to cross over the boundaries of their roles – a behaviour which frustrates EDs.

### 5.3.6 *Summary*

The recurrence of findings of autonomy and empowerment is presented as a central theme in the empirical material. The exploratory findings first identified congruence between organizational documentation and the expectations of multiple actors with respect to autonomy. Executive directors clearly embrace autonomy in deciding how to execute board-driven ends. This finding is not surprising, given that early scholars on autonomy have argued that later career, ambitious people, are more likely to seek autonomy (Harrell and Alpert, 1979), and within the context of the relatively low power distance of Canadian culture. The current study outlined the tactics used by both board members and EDs to ensure the identification of role boundaries and role clarity, and just as importantly, of how to stay within those boundaries. The identification of role boundaries and role clarity, clear expectations, trust in the ED, and trust in governance control systems, were then found to be antecedents to delegation.

I then demonstrated that the process of providing and maintaining autonomy in the context of the nonprofit board-ED relationship presents elements of both vertical leadership and distributed leadership. The board has a disproportionately larger role in defining boundaries and providing role clarity, as well as in setting expectations.

It has not been entirely clear in the literature whether autonomy is a conceptual aspect of transformational leadership. While Bass (1985) initially considered it as part of laissez faire leadership (Bass, 1999), select authors later positioned it as part of transformational leadership (e.g. Avolio et al., 2004; Castro et al., 2008; Dvir et al., 2002; Kark et al., 2003). Interestingly, it must not have been perceived to be pertinent enough to be included in the empirical model, as it was never added to the MLQ (Author's own interpretation of the MLQ; Avolio and Bass, 2004; Yukl, 1999). This is another example of an important element of the leadership process (at least in the context of nonprofit board leadership), which has not been fully developed in the leadership literature. This further highlights the ambiguity in the way transformational leadership has been defined (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013; Yukl, 1999), and the

inconsistency that exists between the conceptual definition of transformational leadership and how it has been operationalized (Hinkin and Tracey, 1999).

Studying autonomy (and other leadership processes) free from the preconceptions of leadership theory has benefitted the current study. This has allowed for a deeper exploration of the underlying processes (e.g. antecedents), of the influences of multiple actors (e.g. board and ED both play a role in the autonomy process), and of the contextual and situational factors in which organizational actors are intertwined.

## 5.4 Alternative influences

### 5.4.1 Introduction

Although Burns (1978) acknowledged that leadership is a process of mutual influence, both Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) continued to focus almost exclusively on the role played by the leader in the leadership process, ultimately ignoring the role of the follower (Howell and Shamir, 2005). Research on current leadership theories (primarily transformational leadership) has continued down this path.

Top-down theories reinforce the traditional follower image, as research agendas with this fixation place the leader at the center of the relationship, with the follower's identity, values, personality, experience, and attitudes commonly examined as a moderator (at best) of the leadership process (Howell and Shamir, 2005). Therefore, the theory of transformational leadership seems to have also left a gap in our understanding of the influence of followers in organizational relationships. Behavioural-based questionnaires (e.g. the MLQ) are designed based on the premise of a top-down influence of a 'leader' upon a 'follower'. Such research methods are relatively incapable of questioning this underlying assumption, and fundamentally reinforce 30 years of researcher presupposition.

In the current research, I used an inductive theory building approach to study the leadership process at the board-level. By remaining open to the occurrence of surprises in the empirical material, I was able to explore behaviours and relationships. This approach allowed for an exploration of a bilateral relationship between actors across two hierarchical levels, recognizing that leadership is inherently complex (Tourish, 2014), and that a dichotomization of leadership/followership is incomplete (Collinson, 2014). Through their use of the MLQ (and other common behavioural-based questionnaires), researchers have essentially incapacitated themselves from questioning the unilateral influence of transformational leaders.



#### 5.4.2 *Seemingly top-down behaviours*

The visionary and strategic components of transformational leadership have been criticized as especially contributing to the romance of leadership perception (Kohles et al., 2013). Sosik and Dinger (2007) indicate that when “one thinks of vision in terms of leadership, more often than not, it conjures images of famous charismatics who, through their passionate orations, persuade followers to believe in and pursue radical change” (2007, p 134). In criticizing the unidirectional influence of followers, Tourish (2014) notes that managerial elites “decide on a vision and then align followers’ mindsets with goals that are consistent with that vision” (2014, p 80-81). This orientation ignores the role of the follower in the vision setting process, while assuming that leaders are best positioned to articulate an organization’s strategic path (Collinson and Tourish, in press; Kohles et al., 2013; Kohles et al., 2012).

With respect to vision setting at the board-level, board members set the organization’s vision through the strategic planning process. In the current study, I provided support for a two-way influence process whereby the ED, and commonly other members of the top management team, are regularly included in the vision setting process. Not surprisingly then, there was repetition in the data whereby EDs share the vision for the organization. Comments that demonstrated the EDs’ ownership of the vision include “it was our dream”, and “we have [an ED] who believes in it as well”. In order to be effective, a transformational leader’s vision must be claimed or owned by actors throughout the organization (Dvir et al., 2004). As with other charismatic behaviours, the level of attribution is as important as the behaviour itself. With respect to vision, “how the vision is understood and integrated by followers into work behaviours and decisions” (Kohles et al., 2012, p 746) is integral to the effectiveness of the vision in predicting desirable outcomes. Although vision integration was not examined in the current study, it is clear that EDs believe in the vision set forth and further claim it as their own.

Therefore, the vision setting process in the organizations under analysis has characteristics of both vertical leadership (agency of top-down visionary behaviours) and distributed leadership. I presented evidence of board members articulating a clear vision and displaying future-oriented behaviours. These behaviours depict an agency and top-down influence. The involvement of senior management in the vision setting process provides evidence of distributed leadership and fluid multidirectional influence. The final decision, however, still sits with the board. Therefore, hierarchical boundaries are crossed with respect to influence and input (consultative) but, given the hierarchical structure promoted by the governance structure, the final decision rests with the board (not democratic). Hence, with respect to vision setting, I provided evidence that, in the context of the board-ED relationship, the leadership process is consistent with previous empirical leadership studies (e.g. Collinson and Collinson, 2009; Jones, 2014; Kramer and Crespy, 2011; Pearce and Sims, 2002), which suggest that forms of vertical and distributed leadership should not be considered mutually exclusive. Researchers of leadership theory should thus be open to findings of top-down as well as alternative influences. Transformational leadership theory, with a top-down emphasis, has been silent on such findings, and the methods commonly employed have been relatively closed to such discoveries.

#### *5.4.3 Bottom-up individualized consideration*

In a number of instances, the EDs felt that they provided individualized and/or collective coaching and mentoring to the board. The examples that were provided included mentoring and coaching BCs on how to speak to the board about financial contributions and how to more effectively facilitate board discussions. This finding is fascinating in that it contradicts what we would have expected to find in a leader-subordinate relationship when looking through the lens of transformational leadership theory (or other top-down orientations). Although a number of authors have contended that research should be open to exploring the possibility of actors playing multiple roles, empirical research in this area is still scant.

The dynamics of followership are an important concept as it has justifiably been noted that perhaps followers may play just as large of a role in constructing leaders as leaders do in constructing follower behaviour (Kellerman, 2007; Tourish, 2008). Transformational leadership is relatively silent on the possibility of upward influence in the leadership process, and especially on the possibility that those lower down the hierarchical ladder could actively construct the leader.

After a review of the literature on followership, Baker (2007) notes a theme in the (mostly conceptual) literature that suggests that “followers and leaders are roles, not people with inherent characteristics” (2007, p 50), whereby an individual can be both a follower and a leader, assuming a different role as circumstances dictate (Agho, 2009; Baker, 2007; Crossman and Crossman, 2011). Such contentions came to light in the current study. Throughout my presentation of the literature in an earlier chapter, I highlighted the top-down assumption that is explicit in transformational leadership theory. This assertion is continually reinforced in positivist, deductive research, which continues to enter the field with presuppositions of unidirectional influence, ultimately at the expense of ignoring the role played by alternative actors in the leadership process.

#### *5.4.4 Distributed leadership*

Despite board documents fostering a hierarchical relationship, in the significant situations described by respondents, interestingly, each respondent type frequently described a collegial form of board-ED relationship. Examples of collegiality included the board members and the ED working collaboratively on fund development, political advocacy, strategic planning, solving complex staffing challenges, and when working with external partners on projects that could potentially have a significant impact on the organization. In a number of instances, boards included the ED and senior staff members in the decision making process, ultimately valuing their expertise. Examples of significant situations were presented whereby the respondents saw the inclusion of staff as contributing to positive organizational outcomes. Similarly, negative outcomes were presented whereby overlooking the input of actors internal to the organization led to negative results.

Findings of collegiality between the board and the ED are not surprising from the governance literature. Motivated by prior literature holding conflicting views on whether or not boards and EDs work as a partnership, Hoye and Cuskelly (2003) conducted interviews with board members and EDs of voluntary sporting organizations in Australia. In their study of board relationships, the authors found that a “number of interviewees from the *effective boards* described board leadership as being shared between the executive and a small number of board members” (Hoye and Cuskelly, 2003, p 67, emphasis added). Hoye (2004) similarly noted that leadership in voluntary sports organizations may come from either the BC or the ED.

Jager and Rehli (2012) presented four case studies of nonprofit organizations across Europe that had previously experienced turnover in either the BC or the ED role. In each of the four organizations, the authors interviewed the BC, the ED, and an average of eleven internal and external stakeholders. The authors found that both the BC and ED “need to have the same capabilities to work effectively and efficiently with each other” (Jager and Rehli, 2012, p 233), and therefore counter balance each other’s capabilities, while fulfilling different but complementary tasks (Jager and Rehli, 2012).

Consistency between Jager and Rehli (2012), Hoye and colleagues (Hoye, 2004; Hoye and Cuskelly, 2003), and the current study undermines the (seemingly exclusive) unidirectional assertion of transformational leadership theory in the context of board-ED relationships. Particularly, despite organizational documents prescribing a clear hierarchical ranking, whereby the ED is subordinate to the board, each respondent type in the current study commonly referred to their relationship as collegial. However, in the significant situations discussed in the current study, which were purported by respondents as being collaborative, the final decision still rested with the board. Thus, even when the board does elicit input/support, and in the instances in which the two levels work together, the final decision is still a product of hierarchical structures. Therefore, distributed leadership in the context of the board-ED relationship does not

fully translate into democratic decision making, or imply equal influence across hierarchical positions.

#### *5.4.5 Summary*

Some of the more insightful findings include repetition in the empirical material of the fact that not only does each respondent type behave in a collegial fashion, but also that many EDs see themselves as providing individualized consideration to the board through coaching and mentoring. Specifically, evidence of select top-down behaviours, collegiality, and bottom-up individualized consideration suggests that hierarchical boundaries are commonly crossed in the decision making process. Although exploratory, this finding supports recent criticisms of transformational leadership, challenging current research on transformational leadership, which assumes influence to be top-down. The results of the current study, however, suggest that ‘leader’-‘follower’ relationships are more complex than the traditional dichotomization. Therefore, individual actors can take on multiple roles, acting as both a follower and a leader (Baker, 2007; Kelley, 1988). By undertaking an inductive approach, the results of this study suggest that, in a governance context, hierarchical actors do not fit neatly into the boxes 30 years of research on transformational leadership theory would suggest.

The findings of the current research project, combined with recent theoretical criticisms of heroic leadership models (and scant empirical examinations), do not imply that there is no place in the literature for top-down perspectives, but that influence from above is just the tip of the iceberg (Bolden et al., 2009). Nor does it imply that a purely distributed perspective is the answer. Rather, future research should be open to the discovery of influences from multiple actors, across hierarchical boundaries. In the context of board-level research, the perspectives of the full-time senior management, who are closer to the operations, clearly provides benefit to the decision making process.

## 5.5 Summary

In the current study, I found evidence of board members exhibiting behaviours which respondents viewed as effective leadership behaviours for board members to exhibit. Many of these behaviours represent behaviours that are depicted in the definition of the most highly examined constructs of transformational leadership theory; idealized influence and inspirational motivation (that are commonly combined and termed charisma). This is an important finding and suggests that leadership lenses (select behaviours, unconstrained by the perils of transformational leadership) are, in general, appropriate for examining the influence process at the board-level.

With respect to transformational leadership theory, I found evidence of some behaviours being prominently displayed in the context of board leadership, while other behaviours were not repetitive in the findings. This suggests that the model is diverse, and that some behaviours are perceived by respondents to be more relevant in the context under analysis. The more prominent behaviours are not unique to transformational leadership, while other behaviours that are particularly relevant have not been included in transformational leadership theory. This begs the questions of what is unique about transformational leadership and why some behaviours are included in the model while others are not. Such a model is also impractical for practitioners, who are asked to focus on improving a set of ambiguously defined and diverse behaviours.

In the context of nonprofit board-level research, the process of providing and maintaining autonomy takes on characteristics consistent with both vertical leadership and distributed leadership, ultimately supporting a hybrid configuration (Gronn, 2011, 2009, 2002). The identification of role boundaries, providing role clarity, clear expectations, trust in the ED, and trust in governance control systems, were then found to be antecedents to delegation. Increased role ambiguity has been contended to be a negative effect of increased autonomy (Humborstad and Kuvaas, 2013). The current study outlined tactics used by not only board members, but also by EDs, to ensure the

identification of role boundaries and role clarity, but just as importantly, how to stay within those boundaries.

Embedded in the stories were behavioural themes whereby alternative explanations to top-down behaviours influenced the leadership process (e.g. senior staff influencing the organizational vision). This calls into question the top-down focus of transformational leadership, which has had a fixation on leader agency. Positivist studies of transformational leadership theory infrequently challenge its underlying assumptions, which contend influence to be top-down. Behavioural-based questionnaires (e.g. the MLQ) are designed based on the premise of a top-down influence from a 'leader' to a 'follower'. Such research methods are relatively incapable of questioning this underlying assumption, and fundamentally end up reinforcing decades of researcher presupposition. Following this contention, the current study used an inductive research approach to explore the relationship between two levels of hierarchical actors within an organizational context.

Despite organizational documents promoting a hierarchical structure, evidence of top-down behaviours, collegiality, and bottom-up individualized consideration suggests that hierarchical boundaries are commonly crossed, with the ED influencing the leader and the leadership process. Although exploratory, this finding supports recent criticisms (e.g. Carsten et al., 2010; Tourish, 2008; Uhl-Bien and Pillai, 2007) of transformational leadership, whereby current research assumes influence to be top-down. Despite each respondent type characterizing the relationship as one of collegiality, with respect to decisions making, the board still has the ultimate say. Thus, even in situations that respondents purport to be distributed, decisions are not democratic (Jones, 2014), as the board has a disproportionately larger influence.

To date, no study (to my knowledge) has examined whether or not transformational leadership theory holds relevance at the highest level (the board-ED relationship). By undertaking an inductive approach, the results of this exploratory study suggest that in a nonprofit governance context, hierarchical actors do not fit neatly into the boxes 30

years of transformational leadership research would suggest. The methodological approach adopted in the current study enabled a finding of a bilateral relationship between two levels of hierarchical actors, – the board and the ED – recognizing that leadership is inherently complex (Tourish, 2014). Furthermore, in the current study, I found evidence of alternative actors being co-producers of outcomes (Carsten et al., 2010) and of individual actors taking on multiple roles, acting as both a follower and a leader (Baker, 2007; Kelley, 1988).



## 5.6 Limitations and recommendations for future research

This research is focused on the board members of nonprofit organizations in a large city in western Canada. Given that nonprofits elsewhere, especially in other parts of Canada and in the United States, share similar board structures (as a mechanism of governance), this research has a much wider relevance. However, as with any research, caution must still be applied in generalizing the results to a larger population of nonprofit or for-profit board contexts. Considerations on the generalizability of this study should be noted in multiple facets. Nonprofit board members take on different roles and have different objectives than for-profit board members. For example, a number of significant situations respondents chose to speak about were centered on tasks such as eliciting funding from donors or lobbying government bodies for funding. These tasks are specific to the nonprofit context.

Select behaviours found in this study, such as passion for the organization and mission driven decisions, are likely to be more prominently displayed by board members in nonprofit organizations than by their counterparts in the for-profit sector (Caers et al., 2006). A discussion of self-selection theory was presented in this regard. With respect to distance, respondents commented on the voluntary nature of a board member's role. Future research should therefore seek to gain an understanding of how for-profit board members are perceived by staff beyond the top management team.

This study's scope was also limited by the fact that it was conducted in a specific geographic area. Nonprofit organizations and their board members operating in different geographic areas may experience different challenges and be subject to dissimilar regulatory and tax environments. Such differences can influence board composition, roles, and policies (Ostrower and Stone, 2010), ultimately affecting the context and situations faced by board members (and I have repeatedly contended that context matters). For example, many of the organizations in this study draw a high proportion of their revenue from municipal and provincial funding. The interviews were conducted at a time of provincial budget cuts to the nonprofit sector and a few months

before a municipal election. This limitation is further reinforced given the fact that a number of the stories that respondents chose to recall dealt with aspects of provincial funding that directly affected, or threatened to affect, a material portion of the organization's revenue.

As leadership is socially constructed (Meindl, 1985), it has been found that the perception of certain leadership behaviours can be generalized across cultures while other behaviours may be perceived differently, and displayed in different frequency, in other cultures (Leong and Fischer, 2011). More importantly, what followers perceive as effective leadership varies among cultures (Bott, in press; Javidan and Carl, 2004). In order to scrutinize the generalizability of this study, future research should thus be conducted on other samples varying in geographic areas, regulatory environments, and alternative cultures.

In the current study, board member leadership attributions were presented based on the ratings and perceptions of the three participant types - EDs, BCs, and BDs. Collinson (1992) found that the employees' views are often quite different from the views leaders hold of themselves (Collinson, 2005). Future research could include interviews with respondents at various levels of the organization to gain a further understanding of how such a heightened level of distance affects the perception of board members among the multiple levels of actors within the organization. An interesting addition to the current study would have also been the perception of board members by external actors.

Using a case study method, Jager and Rehli (2012) interviewed the BC, the ED, and an average of eleven other individuals from each participating organization. Respondents included internal and external stakeholders such as middle management, funders, board members, and beneficiaries. In the current study, I limited the scope of respondents to include the ED, BC, and one BD from multiple organizations. Although I argue in an earlier chapter that such an approach draws perceptions of the leadership process from multiple respondent types, from across hierarchical levels, I do miss out on

collecting the views from respondents lower down the hierarchical pyramid, and perceptions from external actors. However, the case study approach taken by Jager and Rehli (2012), which examines only four organizations, and organizations each having gone through a “fundamental change in their governance” (2012, p 222) by experiencing a recent turnover of both the ED and BC, is arguably less generalizable than the current study, which collected data from 18 heterogeneous organizations.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, breadth was chosen over depth. Since leadership theory is a relatively new lens for the examination of board members, an *a priori* selection of which behaviours to analyse (e.g. a deductive approach) was not the approach of the current study. Rather, an inductive approach, whereby the respondents chose which significant situations were most relevant and a subsequent discussion of the leadership process was believed to be the most appropriate approach for the current research. This allowed for surprises in the empirical material to come to the fore, ultimately allowing for the discovery not only of leadership behaviours among board members, but also the discovery of other influences. As such, this type of research is “less cumulative” towards building on current theory (Bryman, 2004; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Given the conceptual and measurement problems within current leadership theory, to which I have alluded to throughout this thesis, the current approach was deemed to be most appropriate (inductively examining the leadership process unconstrained by transformational leadership theory (van Knippenberg and Sitkin, 2013)), albeit accepting the relative inability of building cumulative knowledge.

Self-selection may also be present in the current organizations. When cold calling organizations, a number of organizations declined to participate in this study. The ED of one organization noted that the board is quite “dysfunctional right now” and that “I wouldn’t even know who to ask”. This suggests that those organizations that are either less focused on continued improvement of their governance (thus not recognizing the importance of this type of research) or have dysfunctional boards are underrepresented in the current study. In order to mitigate this bias, I contacted a provincial government department that provides training to the boards of nonprofit organizations. My intention

was to see if they would reach out to organizations with boards of which had either just gone through a transition from being dysfunctional or were currently in a state of flux. The organization did reach out by email to select organizations based on the criteria I discussed with them. However, no participating organizations were accessed through this approach. Despite this limitation, I did receive and present a number of highly contentious significant situations.

Each of the participating organizations had only one ED and one BC (except for the one organization in which I interviewed both BCs). Conversely, once an organization agreed to participate, the ED selected the BD to participate in the study. There is the potential that the EDs tended to select a BD whom they typically collaborate with, and one who is engaged and that the ED believed would speak positively of the organization, placing the board-ED relationship in a positive light.

## 5.7 Practical implications

Throughout the previous chapter, I have highlighted multiple behaviours that are perceived by respondents as being desirable for board members to display. Yet, such behaviours are rarely prescribed in organizational documents. This becomes particularly relevant for the behaviours that were repetitive in terms of desirable, but inconsistently displayed (e.g. areas in which I have highlighted a knowing-doing gap). For example, since challenging the status quo and bringing new ideas to the organization are clearly perceived by each respondent type to be a positive attribute, organizational documents (including training manuals, and job descriptions) could be adapted to include these desirable behaviours, ultimately resulting in a greater awareness of them.

After reviewing the organizational documents collected in this study, I presented a prescribed theme that promotes a hierarchical relationship, whereby the board appoints, monitors, evaluates, determines compensation for, and holds the ultimate decision for termination of the ED. Since hierarchies have always been present in organizations, their disappearance in the foreseeable future seems unlikely (Leavitt, 2005). This is particularly relevant at the board-level, as a board is set up as a legal entity, with positional authority over the resources of the organization. Therefore, it seems logical to learn to engage effectively within such structures. For example, the board has the ability to choose to either place its efforts into promoting collegiality with senior staff or to construct a framework for a top-down decision making process. Including the ED and senior staff (e.g. elements of distributed leadership) has clearly been demonstrated in the current study, and previous studies, to benefit the decision making process (e.g. increased expertise). Organizational decisions would therefore benefit from their inclusion. In order to promote collegiality, Bligh (2011) recommends that organizations consider “adopting policies and practices that encourage proactive followership” (Bligh, 2011, p 431). It is clear that the orientation manuals of the organizations have not progressed to adopting policies that “encourage proactive followership” or distributed leadership. Organizational manuals should be more geared toward inclusive practices, ultimately promoting influence (and expertise) from below.

When a leader-follower relationship is characterized as distant, the follower will have less information about the leader's actual behaviours and therefore impressions will be made up of assumptions and attributions of their traits (Antonakis and Atwater, 2002; Chun et al., 2009; Oc and Bashshur, 2013; Popper, 2013). Although some authors have suggested that distant leaders are more likely to be idealized (Cole et al., 2009), a faceless entity is unlikely to be idealized. In order to overcome the challenges of employees not knowing who is on the board, one organization has seen success in hosting joint board member–employee functions whereby board members and employees can get acquainted with each other. In addition, image building techniques (Shamir, 1995) portraying board members in a positive light may help to not only build awareness, but also increase the influence a board has on their respective organizations. For example, encouraging surrogate behaviours, and including board member biographical information on the organization's website and in its annual reports may provide information about board member attributes, ultimately disseminating positive cues.

With respect to surrogate behaviours, board members could encourage surrogate behaviours among EDs, by “intentionally [suggesting] that the leader's vision should be spread and characterized in a favorable light to distant followers” (Galvin et al., 2010, p 480). Although EDs spoke highly of board members, the perception of the board as a faceless entity by employees at lower hierarchical levels suggests that the promotion of the board is not occurring in the current environments. Encouraging such promotion would help to enforce any preexisting positive perceptions (Galvin et al., 2010), such as positive information cues provided through board member biographical information. Finding a balance between communicating a vision, encouraging surrogate behaviours, and providing positive biographical information would increase awareness of board member traits and behaviours. In addition, increased face-to-face interactions, combined with intentional surrogacy, would help to reinforce the vision of a transformational leader (Howell et al., 2005).

Thus far, I have focused on practical recommendations for board members and boards at the level of the individual organization. I now move to discussing implications at a relatively more macro level. Governance tends to privilege a structural frame, which is more conducive to policy recommendations than a human framing of leadership (Erakovic et al., 2011). Structure has been an easy target for policy makers in both the for-profit and nonprofit sector. Policy recommendations of reduced conflict of interest, duality, diversity, among others, are examples of structural elements that are relatively straightforward to implement and monitor. However, the impact of structural recommendations has resulted in limited returns (He and Huang 2011).

As it is difficult to separate a discussion of board roles and functions (governance) from a discussion of leadership, policy makers should consider the findings of this thesis where governance policies intersect with leadership. For example, it is important that policies that seek to separate the functions of governance and management do not hinder the ability for displaying desirable leadership attributes. However, given I have repeatedly argued that leadership is situational and contextual, recommending a set of universal practices be prescribed into policy would be amiss.

Providing policy with respect to human behaviour poses great challenge. For example, how do you create policy for enough, but not too much, emotion in the decision making process. Similarly, I have argued that situational and contextual factors matter to the leadership process. Therefore, it would not be wise to create universal policy based on situational and contextual leadership behaviours. However, mandating training, to ensure board members and EDs are aware of the findings of studies such as the current study would be fruitful. Current training for board positions is non-regulated and tends to be more structural in nature. If we want to improve the effectiveness of organizational actors, making them aware of these issues, and intricacies of leadership at the board level, would certainly be of benefit. By bringing awareness to such issues, these findings can start to inform board member selection, orientation, training, and evaluation.

## 5.8 Concluding remarks

The empirical material collected in this project has shone some preliminary light on a number of conceptual and empirical deficiencies of transformational leadership theory – the flagship of all leadership theories. The theoretical contribution of the current study pivots on three main themes. First, as the supposed solution to all problems, the ambition with which transformational leadership theory has been constructed is partly responsible for its downfall. Such a grand definition has led to ambiguity in specifying what transformational leadership actually is, which has led to too broadly defined components. The current research has demonstrated that in the context of the board-ED relationship, some behaviours particularly salient in transformational leadership theory are absent, while some behaviours relevant to the current context are absent from transformational leadership theory. Next, the situations and contexts in which leadership is studied are paramount to the leadership process. And lastly, attention to influences from alternative actors is necessary for future leadership studies. Each of these contributions is briefly reiterated in this closing section.

Transformational leadership prescribes a set of diverse behaviours, which are supposed to represent a universal set of good leadership practices for all situations. However, the findings of the current study led to the conclusion that leadership behaviours are contextually and situationally relevant. In the significant situations presented by EDs and board members, select behaviours from the transformational leadership model were repetitive in the empirical material, while other behaviours prescribed by transformational leadership were absent. In the current study, I have identified behaviours that are reported by respondents to be important to the leadership process at the board-level. A number of these behaviours are not explicitly included in transformational leadership theory, and are certainly not included on the primary measurement instrument. Thus, some behaviours important to the leadership process are missing from transformational leadership theory.



Conversely, a number of behaviours that are supposed to differentiate transformational leadership from other models were not found to be particularly prominent in the current research context. These findings shed light on the lack of inclusion/exclusion criteria of transformational leadership theory. As the complexity of the model has not been justified (it has not been made clear how behaviours work together), it appears to be more beneficial to examine the intricacies and situational/contextual relevance of individual behaviours, in contrast to simply measuring the frequency of such behaviours constrained by the diversity and ambiguity of a broader model.

Additionally, other behaviours were perceived by respondents to be optimal at a moderate amount (more is not always better), and/or a focus on select behaviours results in paralleled positive and negative (known and/or unintended) consequences. The latter suggesting that leadership behaviours can discriminate between winning and losing parties – a phenomenon that does not receive attention in the leadership literature. Based on these findings, it seems clear that there is little justification for examining a predefined list of behaviours (e.g. transformational leadership, or other complex leadership models) in contrast to a detailed examination of such behaviours unconstrained by a complex, ambiguous model, whereby the latter allows for a deeper exploration. Only through an inductive, interpretive focus on select behaviours can future research continue to explore such intricacies.

Next, it was repeatedly found that leadership behaviours (and intricacies of the leadership process) are contextually and situationally applicable. Throughout the analysis chapter of this thesis, an examination of the empirical material illuminated numerous areas whereby the board-level context influences the leadership process. For example, the chosen governance structure (e.g. separation of roles, level of inclusion of actors from other hierarchical levels, distance between the board and other organizational members) was demonstrated to impact the leadership process (e.g. perception of leaders, which behaviours are relevant, and the level of vertical agency verses distributed leadership). Similarly, the same actors, in a similar context, purported

to see different levels of success depending on the situation faced (e.g. quick decision repetitively viewed as a positive behaviour in a number of situations, but repetitively purported to be a poorly selected behaviour when hiring an ED).

From these findings, it is clear that in order to fully appreciate the intricacies of the leadership process, an interpretive, inductive approach is necessary. This has allowed for the discovery of behaviours that are particularly relevant to situational and contextual circumstances. Current methods have not properly addressed which select behaviours are relevant (or irrelevant) in select situations/contexts. With this respect, I have proposed further employment of the critical incident technique for behavioural studies.

The empirical material presented in this research also provides a contribution in terms of the complexity of organizational relationships and influence. Advocates of transformational leadership have been relatively silent on the role played by alternative organizational actors, ultimately contending influence to be top-down. Throughout this thesis, I have provided evidence of mutual influence (as well as the benefits of mutual influence). Even the deeply rooted behaviour of vision setting, which has taken on a particularly top-down fixation in the literature, has elements of both vertical and distributed leadership. Advocates of transformational leadership have been relatively silent on the possibility of upward influence in the leadership process.

This thesis adds empirical weight to recent critical leadership studies that suggest that a fresh approach to leadership is necessary. The main contributions are threefold; First, leadership is best studied with a focus on select behaviours, unconstrained by complex, ambiguous models, which suggest all behaviours are relevant in all situations and contexts. Next, leadership behaviours and processes are only situationally and contextually relevant, and therefore need to be studied with a more complete appreciation for situational and contextual influences. Lastly, the field requires more multi-faceted (e.g. contextual) theories that acknowledge the complex and distributed nature of agency within organizations, and that therefore take a more sophisticated view

of how influence is actually exercised. It also reinforces the view that the traditional approaches to researching these issues are not very well placed to fill the theoretical void that has been identified. In problematizing much of (transformational) leadership theory, this thesis therefore offers theoretical, methodological and empirical challenges to the status quo.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Letter of introduction

## A Research Project on Nonprofit Board Governance



Dear Executive Director,

This letter is to initiate communication for a research project, of which I am the lead researcher. Your organization has been identified as a nonprofit organization that falls within our research scope, and we would highly appreciate your time.

Nonprofit organizations are increasingly taking on greater roles in our society. The overall goal of this study, and corresponding elicitation, is to gain an in-depth understanding of current nonprofit board governance practices and psychological oversight patterns. At the end of this study we hope our findings play a key role in enhancing our knowledge base, improving nonprofit governance practices, and ultimately increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations.

Participants will receive a summary report of the research findings, which aim to outline current governance and leadership practices among nonprofit boards in your community as well as further insights toward best practices in governance. This information is intended to provide direct benefit to your organization.

I am writing to request participation from your organization. Participation includes an interview with the executive director and interviews with two (2) board members (preferably one is the chairperson). Interviews are one-on-one and take approximately sixty (60) minutes. Board members with a minimum of one-year tenure are desired. Your participation is voluntary and at any point you may withdrawal your participation. We assure you that we will treat your responses with the utmost confidentiality.

If you are willing and able to participate, please contact me by either phone or email to set up an appointment at a location and time that is best suited to your schedule. Interviews will be conducted in person between June and July 2013.

Regards,

Gregory Bott, MSc (University of Alberta)  
PhD Candidate (University of London)

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## Appendix II: Information sheet

# A Research Project on Nonprofit Board Governance



School of Management  
Royal Holloway,  
University of London

**Name of Study:** Nonprofit board governance  
**Lead Researcher:** Gregory Bott

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**Supervisor:** Dr Dennis Tourish      Email: [Dennis.Tourish@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Dennis.Tourish@rhul.ac.uk)

## Study Objectives:

- The overall goal of this study, and corresponding elicitation, is to gain an in-depth understanding of current nonprofit board governance and leadership practices and psychological oversight patterns. At the end of this study we hope our findings play a key role in enhancing our knowledge base, improving nonprofit governance practices, and ultimately increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations.

## Participation:

- Participation is anonymous and confidential.
- You can withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- Your signed consent form will be stored separately from the responses you provide.
- You may request a copy of this information sheet and contact us with any queries.
- Interviews will be recorded for the purposes of accurately capturing your response. Please advise if you do not wish for the interviews to be recorded.

## Consent: Please circle Y (yes) or N (no)

I have read the information sheet about this study	Y	N
I have had the opportunity to ask questions	Y	N
I have received satisfactory answers to my questions	Y	N
I understand that am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason	Y	N
I agree to participate in this study	Y	N

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix III: Interview guide

Date:  
Time:  
Fact sheet signed  
Recorder on

---

## SECTION I – SIGNIFICANT SITUATION (CIT)

Q1.1 Please describe a significant situation that occurred during your term as the executive director of this organization, which resulted in a POSITIVE outcome. A significant situation is a situation outside of routine events, which triggered the board's attention to discuss or make a decision, which later resulted in a positive outcome. Please think of a situation that you can easily remember.

Prompts include:

What happened next?  
Who was involved?  
What did the board do?  
What was the outcome?  
How did that make you feel?  
How would you describe his/her behaviour in handling this situation?  
How would you describe your behaviour in handling this situation?  
Who was driving this decision?  
What could have made the action more effective?

Q1.2 In this example do you think the board was exercising leadership behaviours?  
Please elaborate.

What leadership behaviours did they exhibit?

Q1.3 Why did you identify this situation as a significant situation?

Q1.4 Please describe a significant situation that occurred during your term as the executive director of this organization, which resulted in a NEGATIVE outcome. A significant situation is a situation outside of routine events, which triggered the board's attention to discuss or make a decision, which later resulted in a positive outcome. Please think of a situation that you can easily remember.

Q1.5 In this example do you think the board was exercising leadership behaviours?  
Please elaborate.

Q1.6 Why did you identify this situation as a significant situation?



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## SECTION II – BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIONS – OPEN QUESTIONS

Q2.1 Please describe the role of a board member / director as you feel it should be practiced in order to ensure the success of your organization.

Q2.2 Please describe the role of a board member / director on your board as currently practiced in your organization.

Q2.3: What, if anything, holds you or your board back from practicing what you described as the ideal role of the director in the above question?

**SECTION III – BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIONS – CLOSED QUESTIONS**

Q3.1: Please rate the following activities on the extent you feel should be practiced in your organization and the extent you feel is currently practiced in your organization. Please feel free to comment on any of the individual questions.

	The role of a board member as you feel it <u>should be practiced</u> in your organization					The role of a board member on your board <u>as currently practiced</u> in your organization				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i) The board is admired, respected, and trusted by people <i>internal</i> to the organization										
ii) The board is admired, respected, and trusted by people <i>external</i> to the organization										
iii) The board motivates and inspires those around them by providing meaning and challenge										
iv) The board stimulates those around them to be innovative and creative										
v) The board pays attention to the ED’s individual needs by acting as coach and mentor										
vi) The board monitors the decisions of the executive director										
vii) The board protects the organization’s resources										
viii) The board advises and/or acts as consultants to the executive director										
ix) The board provides a link to external stakeholders (e.g. fundraising, communicate with stakeholders, build external relationships)										
Other, Please specify										
Other, Please specify										

---

SECTION IV – DEMOGRAPHICS - PARTICIPANT

Q4.1: Please select your gender.

- a) Male
- b) Female
- c) Rather not say

Q4.2: Please select your age range.

- a) 18-30
- b) 31-40
- c) 41-50
- d) 51-60
- e) 61 or over
- f) Rather not say

Q4.3: Please list how many boards you have sat on in the past, including your current board:

- a) Nonprofit boards \_\_\_\_\_
- b) For-profit boards \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Other \_\_\_\_\_

Q4.4: How long have you sat on this board (or been the ED)? If you have had previous sittings on this board, please include your total tenure.

- a) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4.5: Please select the option which best describes your current role on the board:

- a) Board chair
- b) Executive committee (ie: past chair, vice chair)
- c) Non executive board member
- d) Executive director or CEO
- e) Other, Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

---

SECTION V – DEMOGRAPHICS - ORGANIZATION

Q5.1: Which of the following activities best describes the nature of your organization. Please choose one.

- a) Providing food and/or shelter
- b) Support for disabilities
- c) Social Services
- d) Other, Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Q5.2: Which category of gross revenue (including all sources of funding) does your organization fit into? Please specify or choose one.  
Amount \_\_\_\_\_

- a) 250,000 or under per annum
- b) 250,001 to 500,000
- c) 500,001 to 1,000,000
- d) 1,000,001 to 1,500,000
- e) 1,500,001 to 2,000,000
- f) 2,000,001 to 2,500,000
- g) 2,500,001 to 3,000,000
- h) 3,000,001 or greater
- i) Rather not say
- j) Uncertain

Q5.3: When did your organization first exist? Please specify or choose one.  
Year \_\_\_\_\_

- a) 2011 to current
- b) 2001 – 2010
- c) 1991 – 2000
- d) 1981 – 1990
- e) 1971 – 1980
- f) 1961 – 1970
- g) 1960 or prior
- f) Uncertain

---

## SECTION VI – DOCUMENTATION – ORGANIZATION

This section is for ED interviews only. To be filled in by the researcher:

Q6.1: List the relevant documentation provided by this organization. e.g. director job description.

Q6.2: Who was the primary author of the document?

- a) The board or board committee
- b) ED or other staff
- c) Externally provided
- d) Other, Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Uncertain

Q6.3: Is this document part of a training package and/or has it been shared with each board member?

- a) Yes
- b) No

---

## SECTION VII – DEBRIEFING

- Would you like to make any further comments before concluding the interview?
- Any questions or concerns?
- Provide further information about the project as necessary.
- Do you know of other nonprofit organizations that may be willing to participate?
- Thank you for your time.